ALSO: The Truth About Financial Aid at Williams | Sol LeWitt is Back on WCMA’s Wall | What You Didn’t Know About Gaius C. Bolin, Class of 1889 | The Art and Economics of (Art) Acquisition

Williams

NATURE AND NURTURE
how early experiences shape the brain
LIGHT AND HOLOGRAPHY, a Winter Study course taught by physics professor Kevin Jones and lecturer Kevin Forkey, introduced students to modern optics. The class made use of seven holography darkrooms for projects like this one, by Kerry Swartz ’19. See more photos from Winter Study at http://bit.ly/winterstudy2016.
features

12 Nature and Nurture
The science of who we are.

20 On the Wall
The Williams College Museum of Art has a new Sol LeWitt wall drawing.

22 Financial Aid at Williams
It's hard to ignore headlines about mounting college costs and soaring student debt. But the outlook here is far more positive, says College Provost Will Dudley '89.

28 Gaius C. Bolin, Class of 1889
He was Williams’ first black graduate and, of course, a great deal more.

departments

6 Report
President Adam Falk on financial aid.

7 Comment
Readers respond to our coverage of sustainability, a new course on town and gown and more…

8 Notice
A look at Claiming Williams, early decision, tenured faculty, the opera workshop and more…

32 Study
Interviewing Estonian refugees, storytelling in U.S. parks, art and economics of acquisition and more…

38 Muse
Davis Center Director Ferentz Lafargue on the real world.
The bleak and prevailing narrative about college costs is that they’re out of control, and that the best education is reserved for the wealthy elite. If you’re a parent or prospective student, it’s scary. Everywhere you turn, you hear stories of college students graduating with mountains of debt, defaulting on loans and struggling to find well-paying jobs—especially students who had the audacity to pursue an oh-so-impractical liberal arts education.

We know a different story. That’s because we’re the grateful beneficiaries of a long and extraordinary history of support for Williams—and careful stewardship of that support—that manifests in a $2 billion endowment. With that endowment, and the critical annual giving of our alumni and parents, we can level the playing field, bringing to Williams the most talented students from around the world based on who they might become, not what they can afford to pay.

Financial aid is Williams. It’s how we seek out students from every part of society and build an intentional community.

Financial aid is Williams. It’s how we seek out students from every part of society and build an intentional community. It’s how we fulfill our responsibility as an educational institution in the 21st century, and it’s how we remain relevant in that century.

Financial aid allows our students to take advantage of the full Williams experience—campus activities and events, research and study away opportunities, internships and experiential education.

And by keeping student debt low, financial aid helps open a world of possibilities for life after Williams. Students shouldn’t have to choose pay over passion to avoid defaulting on loans.

Most readers of this magazine know well the benefits of a Williams education: the short-term gains and long-term fulfillment, the practical preparation and expansive perspective, the profound effect it has on individuals and the disproportionate difference it makes in the world.

We know how valuable a Williams education is, but is it a good value? Unequivocally, yes. As Provost Will Dudley ’89 discusses in this issue (starting on p. 22), thanks to our financial aid program—which today provides about $50 million in support to 1,000 students every year—Williams is an incredible value. Families receiving financial aid this year pay an average of $17,300 against a comprehensive fee of $63,300. And our students graduate with among the lowest debt burdens in the country.

Sustaining and enhancing this powerful engine of access and affordability is the single most important thing we’ll do in the campaign we launched publicly last fall. Just 44 of the country’s 2,500 colleges and universities have the resources to be need-blind in admission decisions and to meet 100 percent of students’ demonstrated financial need. To remain in that position, so that we may enroll the best students from around the world regardless of need and ensure that a Williams education is truly affordable for both low- and middle-income families, we aim to raise $150 million for financial aid in the Teach It Forward campaign.

It’s an unprecedented endeavor for us, and it will require the commitment of our entire community. I can think of no better investment in the college and in the future than to fulfill the promise of generations of Williams students.

—Adam Falk, president
SUSTAINABLE WILLIAMS

I enjoyed reading how Williams is trying to reduce its carbon footprint (“Sustainable Williams,” fall 2015). And I am gratified, though not surprised, to hear the extent of student involvement. I have another idea that might help the college. For years my wife and I have brought solar-powered lanterns/flashlights on medical mission trips that we run, first to Nicaragua and now to Malawi. Then we started using the lanterns at all times in the house when we might otherwise flip on a light switch. What if Williams provided these flashlights, which cost approximately $15 apiece, to students, faculty and staff, with the understanding that they would use them in place of indoor lighting as much as possible? The college could start a trend that other colleges would be likely to follow, and then we might have a measurable effect on global warming.

—Brian Lisse ’77, Hudson, Mass.

Williams never looked so green, and in the fall! The commitment of one little college to carbon emissions control is impressive. The green map of change was a cool detail. Speaking of change, I had to smile reading about the new Williams course about town and gown relations, taught by an anthropology professor and a journalist (“New Course Explores Town and Gown,” fall 2015). This townie alumnus was steeped in anthropology when covering the Select Board and other town business for The North Adams Transcript in the early 1960s. Some lighthearted quotes I fondly remember from the Williamstown beat: “Why the hell is the college building so much?” “They’ve got too much money.” “How about the college paying some taxes? The town’s almost broke.” “Stop whining. Without the college we get no culture here.” “Thank God, Eph Williams made out a will in Albany before he got shot at Lake George.”

—Emie Imhoff ’59, Baltimore, Md.

The current Williams Magazine (fall 2015) is the most interesting of this century. Nevertheless, two issues come to mind. My late friend Marcus T. Reynolds ’50 loved Williams but was disturbed by two campus sites. As a member of Sigma Phi fraternity, he loved the quaint Van Rensselaer mansion that had been moved brick by brick from Albany and was remembered by a miniscule picture hanging upstairs in the old Sawyer Library. Now both are gone. Marc’s father was Kenneth Reynolds, Class of 1916, the architect who designed the Log, which had fallen into decrepitude and ill use, not to mention ecological ill repute. I hope that the do-over has soothed his posthumous sensibilities. Also, your town and gown story missed a beat and a couple of decades. There was indeed a Hotel Greylock at the corner of Main and North. A bit before WWII, the old clapboard hotel suffered a major fire and left only a wing fit for later use. I don’t know the real estate transaction by which the college acquired that stately edifice, but in the decade-plus after the war, Greylock Hall was a very desirable dorm, with private baths for each suite and inner-spring mattresses on each bed. In time, maintenance of an obsolete relic and the coming of a larger student body meant a more substantial and larger quarter was needed and so led to the demolition of that sad remnant. I miss it still.

—Dan Titter ’54, New York, N.Y.

THE ’62 CENTER’S SECOND ACT

“Act II” (fall 2015) was well played for this alum. I had wondered just what went on at the ’62 Center for Theatre and Dance. Obviously it was more than what my former roommate John Calhoun ’62 did at the Adams Memorial Theatre. At our 50th reunion it was a more or less open space, the guided tour serving notice: “No shoes on the dance floor—thank you very much.” Nor was it simply an improved site for noted summer stock productions. Now I know that, in part, but only in part, the ’62 Center is responsible for a theater company in Seattle, a lighting design career initiated during Winter Study by a freshman and an all-points summer program that sounds thorough as well as fun. For that, I thank you.


AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE

I had a special interest in Michael Curtin’s ’86 thoughtful piece on D.C. Central Kitchen (“Around the Kitchen Table,” fall 2015). Several years ago, concerned about the homeless in Charlottesville, Va., I got an earnest little movement going called Compass to establish a daytime shelter. The public library where I worked was a daily home for many without homes. Tom Shadyac, who was in the area directing the movie Evan Almighty, purchased a church a block away from the library, and we created a shelter called The Haven. Now more than five years old, the shelter provides a hearty breakfast, storage space, a shower/laundry and computer access. This year it expanded its role to finding homes for people. After two terms on the board, I went to the kitchen, volunteering on Friday mornings. It’s all been very fulfilling. Next to getting into Williams, beginning this movement that turned out so well may be my greatest achievement.

—Jim Barns ’69, Charlottesville, Va.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Recognizing Williams’ Work

Last spring Williams Magazine published the article “Standing Strong,” about the college’s community-driven approach to ending sexual assault. In January, we learned that this important story won a Gold Award for Best Article of the Year from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, District I. We are proud that the work of the magazine—and that of the college—has been honored in this way. For the most recent information about Williams’ efforts regarding sexual assault prevention and response, visit http://bit.ly/wmssexassault.

Williams Magazine welcomes letters about articles or items published in recent issues. Please send comments to magazine@williams.edu or Williams Magazine, P.O. Box 676, Williamstown, MA 01267-0676. Letters may be edited for clarity and space.
EXAMINING THE WILLIAMS WAY

On Feb. 4, the campus community took part in Claiming Williams, a day of conversations and questions around the topic “Examining the Williams Way.” The event, now in its seventh year, grew out of the student-led Stand With Us movement. This year, New Yorker staff writer Jelani Cobb (top row, third from left) delivered the keynote address, “The Half Life of Freedom: Race and Justice in America Today.” Workshops included a conversation about queer activism (bottom left) and a one-woman show by artist Kelsey Van Ert (top left) addressing the experiences of first-generation college students today. See more photos from the day, plus a link to video from Claiming Williams sessions, at http://bit.ly/ClaimingWilliams2016.

Sandstrom Named Dean of the College

Hales Professor of Psychology Marlene Sandstrom has been named dean of the college, effective July 1.

Sandstrom, who served last year as director of the Williams-Exeter Programme at Oxford, has been at Williams since 1999. She’s served on and chaired several committees, including the Honor Committee, the Committee on Academic Standing, the Committee on Undergraduate Life and the Institutional Review Board.

Her research has been supported by the National Science Foundation and focuses on issues including adjustment, aggression, bullying, bystander behavior and coping among children at school.

246 Admitted to Class of ’20 via Early Decision

Williams offered admission to 246 students under its early decision plan. The 121 women and 125 men make up 44.7 percent of the incoming Class of 2020. The class has a target size of 550.

The students come from 35 states and eight countries. U.S. students of color make up 26 percent of the cohort, which includes 20 African-Americans, 27 Asian-Americans, 16 Latina/os and one Native American. Sixteen are from families in which neither parent has a college degree, and nearly 20 percent of the students come from low-income families.

Average SAT scores for early decision students are 713 in critical reading, 716 in math and 710 in writing. The average ACT score is 33.

“This is a multi-faceted group whose extracurricular accomplishments are as impressive as their demonstrated academic prowess,” says Richard Nesbitt ’74, director of admission. “I’m eager to see the impact they have on our stages, playing fields and the community at large, as well as in the classroom.”
Teddy Cohan '16 is among the first cohort of students to be named a Schwarzman Scholar, a scholarship program created by Blackstone Group founder Steven A. Schwarzman. The scholarship will fund a one-year master's degree program at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Cohan, a political science major, is one of 111 students from 32 countries chosen for the scholarship. There were 3,000 applicants this year.

Cohan plans to study public policy while in China. He says he was interested in the Schwarzman program because, "Looking ahead to the 21st century, it is imperative that anyone in politics or business have a deeper understanding of China."

Teddy Cohan

While at Williams, Cohan co-founded Kinetic, an action-oriented think tank focused on issues such as food security, teacher recruitment and sustainable energy. He also served as treasurer of College Council. He spent his junior year in London, where he studied British politics, the European Union, international security and political philosophy. He hopes to run for elective office in the future.

BY THE NUMBERS

Teaching It Forward

Since the Oct. 3 launch of Teach It Forward: The Campaign for Williams, alumni have participated in a variety of ways. These include attending campaign events, volunteering and making gifts to the college. Here are some of the many ways Ephs have engaged with the campaign, as of Jan. 31:

- 50 names of Ephs submitted for purple with purpose recognition
- 58.34% of the $650M goal
- 67.2% engagement rate (a combination of giving, event, volunteer and online participation)
- 150 tributes for retiring faculty
- 19 original songs written to stand beside "The Mountains" in the Williams songbook
- 70% of alumni making gifts to the campaign

$379 million dollars raised

Bolton, Dudley Appointed to Presidencies

Williams will bid farewell to two senior staff members in the next year. Dean of the College Sarah Bolton has been named president of the College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio, effective July 1. And Provost Will Dudley ’89 will begin as president of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va., on Jan. 1, 2017.

Bolton, who joined the physics faculty in 1995, has been dean of the college since 2010. Dudley joined Williams’ philosophy department in 1998 and became provost in 2011.

In letters announcing the news to the Williams community, President Adam Falk said of Bolton: “I’ve never seen anyone more devoted to students and their academic and personal growth, safety and well-being.”

Dudley, meanwhile, “brought a rare combination of analytical depth and humane commitment to his five years as provost,” Falk said.

Sarah Bolton

Will Dudley

SOURCE: OFFICE OF COLLEGE RELATIONS

COURTESY OF WASHINGTON & LEE UNIVERSITY

PHOTO BY ROMAN IWASIWKA
Four Faculty Receive Tenure

Four Williams faculty members have been promoted to associate professor with tenure, effective July 1. They are:

Jacqueline Hidalgo, Latina/o studies and religion. Hidalgo’s research focuses on Latina/o religious traditions as they shape race and gender relations in the American West. She teaches courses including Latina/o Identities: Constructions, Contestations and Expressions; Utopias and Americas; Scriptures and Race; California: Myths, Peoples, Places; Racial and Religious Mixture; and Queer Temporalities. She serves on the college’s Committee on Educational Affairs.

Sarah Jacobson, economics. Jacobson studies voluntary cooperation, reciprocity, risk preferences and punishment. Her work has been funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and the National Science Foundation. She teaches microeconomics and environmental and resource economics at both the undergraduate level and in the master’s program at the Center for Development Economics (CDE). She serves on the Campus Environmental Advisory Committee.

Luana Maroja, biology. An evolutionary biologist, Maroja studies the evolution of barriers to gene exchange. Her research seeks to understand how reproductive isolation evolves and how lineages eventually become distinct. She teaches courses on evolution and genetics, and she recently received a grant from the Hellman Family Foundation. She serves on the ad-hoc Committee on Student Course Survey Scores.

Will Olney, economics. Olney is an international and labor economist whose research examines the causes and consequences of globalization. His work focuses on how global forces such as immigration, offshoring, trade and foreign direct investment affect domestic labor markets. He teaches courses on macroeconomics and international economics at both the undergraduate level and the CDE. He has served on the Athletics Committee and the Schapiro-Hollander Users Committee, and he is the economics department’s library liaison.

In Memoriam

“The words most associated with Anne ... are ‘dignity’ and ‘grace.’ Not a bad way to be remembered.”

President Adam Falk in a letter to the campus community about the passing of Anne Sawyer on Feb. 16. She was 97.

Anne Sawyer came to Williams in 1961, when her husband, Jack Sawyer ’39, was named president of the college. Within a year, they became central figures in the process that led to the end of fraternities at the college. And, as Falk wrote, “The president’s wife found herself, shy by nature, thrust into the role of hosting countless high-stakes and potentially stormy gatherings.”

To thank her for her many contributions to Williams, the college in 1984 created the Ephraim Williams Medal, given “occasionally to a non-alumnus who has demonstrated exceptional service and loyalty.”

She is survived by four children, nine grandchildren, including Rob Sawyer ’03, and five great-grandchildren.
Derek Galvin ‘18 stands on Chapin Hall’s stage in his stocking feet, furiously conducting an arrangement of Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro. The singers’ voices fill the newly renovated space, but Galvin’s trained ear detects a gap in the vocals. He abruptly stops the performance.

Keith Kibler, co-director of the Williams Opera Workshop, who’s singing the role of Count Almaviva, quickly apologizes: “I’m always leaving a space there, and there’s no space there.” The singers flip back a few pages in their songbooks and take it from the top.

The workshop participants, all but two of them students, are preparing for a Jan. 26 performance that includes selections from Figaro, Engelbert Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel and Kurt Weill’s Street Scene. Ten singers, three pianists, two conductors and an orchestra of 20 rehearse nearly every day during January.

Now in its second year, the workshop gives students an opportunity to see how a performance is shaped and refined alongside seasoned professionals. Though it’s not a formal course, some students are music majors, and many are preparing for careers in music or theater after graduation.

“Experiences like [the workshop] have shown me this is something I really want to do,” says Daniel Potter ’16, a math and music double major who is seriously considering becoming a professional conductor. “I want to bring the joy that I feel in singing to other people, especially young people.”

Most of the students in the workshop take voice lessons with Kibler and co-director Erin Nafziger. Though the two vocal coaches are professional opera singers themselves, they enjoy the chance to expand their own repertoires. For Hansel and Gretel, Nafziger says, “We’re learning it measure by measure with the students.”

They’re also re-learning how to navigate Chapin Hall, which received a $5.5 million facelift in the fall. Renovations include an extended stage, which improves the way performers interact with each other and brings them closer to the audience.

“The difference is huge,” Nafziger says. “At times, it sounds like people are singing right next to you when they’re a few feet away.”

Additional updates, including a new acoustical canopy, are planned for this summer.

Staging for the workshop’s performance is minimal, and there will be no costumes. The emphasis is on the music. Deep into a two-hour rehearsal, the performers’ focus is unwavering. Every sound—the flutter of turning pages, the scrape of a violinist adjusting her chair—can be heard easily from the back row of the concert hall.

Kibler quips “not bad” after a successful run-through of Figaro. But there’s still work to be done. Not that anyone minds; they’ve all made a commitment to something they love. Harold Theurer ’17, a political science and theater major who intends to pursue acting after graduation, sums it up: “Any opportunities to sing, I’m very grateful for.”

—Francesca Shanks
The first thing that struck Nathan Fox ’70 was the silence. In the drab room of an orphanage in Bucharest, Romania, the developmental psychologist saw dozens of infants lying awake in their cribs. Not a single one was crying.

“They were on their backs, doing nothing except maybe looking at their hands,” he says. “These were babies who had learned that no one was going to come soothe their distress.”

Fox had gone to conduct research that could bring much-needed understanding to the effects of neglect on brain development. Seeing the orphans in person, though, he and fellow researchers Charles Nelson and Charles Zeanah realized they might have a chance to help some of the infants as well.

Starting with 136 children living in six Bucharest orphanages, the researchers conducted electroencephalogram (EEG) tests of their brains. They found the signals to be weaker than those recorded from similarly aged children living in the general population. They randomly selected half to go into foster homes, where they would be held, played with and talked to.

Fox, Nelson and Zeanah then monitored the children over several years, comparing their development, and the results were astounding. By the age of 8, children who were placed with foster families before their second birthdays were virtually indistinguishable from typical 8-year-olds in terms of EEG brain patterns. Those who remained institutionalized past age 2 continued to have weaker EEGs and lag behind their peers. “It was as if a dimmer switch had been turned down in the brains of these children,” Fox says.

The findings from the Bucharest Early Intervention Project, published over the past 10 years, changed forever the parameters of the nature vs. nurture debate. It’s a wellspring from which developmental psychologists—a surprising number of them connected to Williams—have drawn. That connection is due in part to Amie Hane, an associate professor of psychology at the college, who studies interactions between mothers and babies. Hane began as a postdoctoral student in Fox’s University of Maryland lab, and together the two are mentoring a new generation of Williams students who are beginning to contribute meaningfully to the field.
Nature versus nurture. Instinct versus experience. The argument has been a throughline of philosophy and psychology from the time of Locke and Hobbes to that of Chomsky and Skinner.

In 1997, two years before Fox visited Bucharest, Newsweek published a special issue called “Your Child,” reporting the latest findings in neuroscience that, by age 3, brain development is essentially over. The inevitable backlash came just two years later, with publication of John Bruer’s book The Myth of the First Three Years.

Since then, two decades of research, including that of Fox and Hane, has stopped the pendulum on the either/or debate in favor of a both/and explanation. The latest on epigenetics (from the Greek root “on top of”) or “in addition to”) argues for a more complex interplay between genetic code and experience, with organisms containing a DNA blueprint but the environment determining which genes are expressed and how.

“There’s no clean way to disentangle nature and nurture—they are intertwined,” Hane says. “When the environment is shaping the expression of genes, all bets are off.”

Hane studies this interplay in her lab in Brinsmade House, a two-story lavender building named for the beloved Williams music professor who once lived there. Hane’s research subjects are moms—mostly—from northern Berkshire County who come to play with their infants and perform specific care-giving tasks like bathing and diapering.

Hane guides and monitors the interactions, which take place in a living room with comfortable sofas and soft, purple carpeting. Cameras mounted discretely on the walls capture every contented coo and angry wail, and electrodes attached to both mom and baby record their heart rates on an electrocardiogram (EKG). Hane also measures the level of cortisol—the so-called “stress hormone”—in the infant’s saliva. Later, Hane and her students meticulously review the videos and EKG data, noting how connected and attentive the mom was and how the baby responded. Each pair is monitored until age 4.

It’s a protocol she refined in Fox’s lab as a postdoctoral student, and the two have been working and publishing together ever since. Their most recent article, a wide-ranging review in the journal Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, draws upon studies of rats, humans and other animals that show insensitive early caregiving can lead to stress, which can cause health problems later in life. The good news, they argue, is that the human brain is more malleable than we give it credit for, and, with the proper interventions, those changes can be undone.

“Our primary goal at a basic level is to demonstrate there are components of maternal behavior and mother-baby interactions that ultimately influence a child’s physiological response,” Hane says. “And, in Nathan’s lab, neuroimaging provides a critically important window into how early care and temperament influence the developing brain.”

Fox, now a Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland, became interested in child development as a Williams student, when he volunteered at a day care center in Bennington, Vt.

There he observed children from similar working-class backgrounds who nevertheless behaved quite differently from one another. “There were sparks of motivation to learn in all of them, but how you brought that out varied from child to child,” he says.

The question of why puzzled him, and he began to look for answers at Harvard, where he studied with Jerry Kagan. A legendary figure in the field of child development, Kagan went on to pioneer the idea of temperament—that there are certain innate personality types visible at an early age that remain remarkably consistent throughout life. In particular, Kagan was interested in children with an “inhibited” temperament who withdrew from unfamiliar stimuli. These children tended to grow up to be adults who were shy or, in extreme cases, developed social anxiety disorder. The notion flew in the face of the dominant ideas of Freud and B.F. Skinner, who argued that experience, not environment, was key to changing behavior.

In Fox’s early work on stranger anxiety and memory, Kagan saw his student’s potential. “I recognized at once his talent, curiosity and motivation,” he says. “I sensed he was marked to make a major contribution to psychology.”

Kagan didn’t have to wait long to see that contribution. In the late 1970s, as Kagan was starting his research on temperament, Fox was working as a postdoc at St. Luke’s Roosevelt Hospital in New York City, studying the development of infants born prematurely. At the time, doctors used EEG to measure infants’ brain patterns during sleep. Fox decided to observe babies who were alert and awake, exposing them to different stimuli—pictures of happy faces, their mothers and strangers—to see how their brains responded.

The results were clear, and groundbreaking. Children who smiled or reacted positively to new stimuli displayed more activity in the left frontal lobe of the brain. Those who turned away or fussed showed more activation in the right frontal region. More importantly, Fox was able to show that this EEG asymmetry in the brain could actually predict whether a child would respond favorably or unfavorably to the new stimuli.

“‘There’s no clean way to disentangle nature and nurture—they are intertwined. When the environment is shaping the expression of genes, all bets are off.” —Amie Hane
In Fox’s University of Maryland lab, an EEG net records brain electrical activity. How that activity changes over time can be related to individual differences in a child’s behavior.

Fox assesses social skills and social competence by having children interact with each other while doing a challenging task.

Neuroimaging provides an important window into how early care and temperament influence the developing brain.
From the earliest days of their lives, something seemed to predispose babies to smile or fuss in response to new stimuli. Fox applied the same techniques to the temperament work Kagan was conducting and found that the children his mentor identified as having inhibited temperament showed the same pattern of right frontal asymmetry as those who fussed in Fox’s study.

It was the first time research had shown a specific pattern of brain activation associated with a specific, defined personality type that remained consistent over time. Fox’s work lent credence to the notion that certain people were “hard-wired” for certain temperaments.

Starting in 1990, Fox began replicating Kagan’s temperament experiments, recruiting a new cohort of about 100 inhibited infants, tracking them across development and subjecting them to more sophisticated tests, including EEG monitoring. In addition, he added new stimuli, having children in the lab play games with their parents or a friend, for instance, or introducing them to an unfamiliar child of the same age. He also tested them at age 4 and 7 to better understand whether temperament is fixed or can change over time.

Fox found that as the years went by and children were tested multiple times, some seemed to outgrow their shyness and become calmer in the face of unfamiliar territory. Others continued to be inhibited and, in some cases, developed signs of social anxiety and depression.

“Nathan put the flesh on the bones of the concept of temperament,” says one of his collaborators, Megan Gunnar, a psychology professor and director of the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota. “For Jerry Kagan, you start that way and end that way; what Nathan brought to the table was an understanding of why some kids change and outgrow that behavior and some kids don’t.”

By the mid-1990s, media attention and public confusion around child brain development was at a high point, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation funded a research network to get to the bottom of the issue. The chair of the group, Charles Nelson, invited Fox and Zeanah to Bucharest to see what they could learn.

It was late 1998, and orphanages throughout Romania were overflowing with 100,000 abandoned children—4,200 in Bucharest alone—the result of policies put in place decades before to boost the population.

After witnessing the silent orphans in their cribs, Fox, Nelson and Zeanah were taken to a room where 2-year-olds listlessly played with toys. Several children immediately ran to embrace the three men.

“They jumped into our arms and hung on to us for dear life,” Fox says. “We were taken aback. You would not expect 2-year-olds to see a total stranger and respond this way.”

The researchers recognized an opportunity. “We had to find a way to enhance the lives of the children we were studying,” Fox says. The Bucharest Early Intervention Project was formed.

Romania didn’t have a foster care system at the time, so Fox, Nelson and Zeanah set up one of their own, funding the care for four-and-a-half years, after which the government agreed to pick up the tab.

While Fox’s research on temperament pointed to the fact that children
In high school, Hane read Jerry Kagan’s *The Nature of the Child* for a class assignment. The book ignited her interest in studying childhood development, first at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. As a graduate student, she used a coding system created by developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth to rate parental sensitivity and intensively studied quality of mother-infant interaction across a variety of situations, including in the home and laboratory. Hane also examined associations between quality of mother-infant interaction and infant development across the first two years.

In 2002, she joined Fox’s lab at University of Maryland’s main campus in College Park. By then, she had a 2-year-old of her own; her second and third children also were born while she worked there.

“I’d done enough parenting of infants and observing of mothers and infants to know there were many differences in how mothers connect to their babies,” Hane says.

The play-based interactions often observed in labs showed only a fraction of the variation that can occur in the day-to-day routines of mothers and infants. So Hane began observing basic activities like diapering and bathing.

“Babies can become uncomfortable during these tasks, and their comfort depends on how mothers respond,” she says. “It seemed to me that basic care tasks were important and worth examining closely.”

Fox encouraged her to read the work of neuroscientist Michael Meaney, who studied maternal caregiving in rats. Within the normal variation of care—licking, feeding and grooming—rats seemed to have a big effect on their offspring. “Rat moms that did a lot of caregiving had rat pups that grew up to be less stressed out, and rat moms that did little caregiving had rat pups that were much more stressed and fearful,” Fox says. It’s one thing to code behavior in rats, which only live an average of a year or two; it’s another to code the infinite variety of interactions between adult humans and their babies—and follow it diligently enough to show effect years down the line.

Hane set to work developing her own protocol within the TOTS study, including visits to subjects’ homes starting at 9 months old. There she asked mothers to perform several tasks, including making a snack, undressing a baby and applying lotion. At every stage, she videotaped the activities, reviewing the tapes later to code how connected and attentive the mother was. “Baby is reaching for a bottle. Does mom notice? Baby is turning away. Will mom give baby space? Baby peed on mom. Is mom frustrated or tolerant?” Hane says. “We coded every nuance of these basic care tasks.”

She applied Meaney’s analysis on rat data to her human data. Meanwhile, Fox was continuing temperament tests and brain scans, exposing the children in his studies to toys that made startling sounds or pictures of unfamiliar people. When they correlated the data, writing a landmark paper together in 2006, they found the same results with humans as with rats: Mothers who were less sensitive to a baby’s needs—who were rougher in their caregiving style or paid less attention during tasks—had babies who were fussier and more reactive when presented with unfamiliar stimuli.

“It was as if a dimmer switch had been turned down in the brains of these children. … We had to find a way to enhance the lives of the children we were studying.”

Nathan Fox
Cameras mounted discretely on the walls of Hane’s lab in Brinsmade House capture every coo and wail, while electrodes attached to mom and baby record their heart rates.

Subtle variations in care, such as having a towel ready before starting the baby’s bath or taking care not to scrub too hard, can also help lower the baby’s cortisol level.

Care Matters
Parenting can have a significant impact on whether infants are calm and regulated. More responsive parenting can help lower a baby’s heart rate (as seen below).
Says Catherine Monk, an associate professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University, “It’s such a huge contribution to show how everything from cognitive development to social development is influenced by the reliability and reciprocity of care.”

In Fox and Hane’s meticulous coding and scanning, three factors stood out in identifying children who were more inhibited and at-risk for developing anxiety and depression. First, these children seemed to be more vigilant than their peers, particularly when it came to potential threats. Second, they tended to show greater cognitive self-control—usually a good thing because it helps children keep impulsive behavior in check. But in this case the children seemed to be overregulating themselves.

Finally, while some children were naturally more vigilant and self-controlled, their parents seemed to exacerbate the situation with the type of care they gave. Parents who were more sensitive in their caregiving could reverse their children’s natural inclination to be anxious, while those who were overly harsh or anxious themselves seemed to make those tendencies worse in their children. Put another way, “Behaviorally inhibited infants need a different kind of parenting than non-fearful children,” says Fox. “That parenting can have a significant impact on whether infants are calm and regulated or not.”

Hane finished her postdoc and came to Williams in 2006, drawn by the connections between the campus and surrounding community and the chance to work closely with talented undergraduates.

“At Williams I have access to the resources I need to recruit infants and children, including a laboratory that feels like a home environment and talented students as research assistants,” Hane says. “The honors theses Williams undergraduates produce are on par with the master’s theses at research institutions.”

She was particularly excited about the college’s summer science research program, which places two or more students in her lab for 40 hours per week each summer.

Hane’s assistants are engaged in the research at every step, recruiting subjects, running experiments, performing home visits, analyzing data and publishing papers. With help from Hane, Chelsey Barrios ’12 developed a coding system to gauge infant discomfort during bathing. She also measured cortisol, a common indicator of stress, that’s secreted in babies’ bloodstreams and saliva. When Barrios analyzed the data for her senior thesis, she found that extremely subtle variations in care—such as the mother having a towel ready before starting the baby’s bath or taking care not to scrub too hard—could lower cortisol levels.

Barrios is now pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Maryland, working in Fox’s lab on the TOTS study. “It was a natural transition,” she says, in part because, like Hane, Fox is extremely supportive even as he encourages independence.

In addition to Barrios, four of Hane’s students have gone on to do graduate work in Fox’s lab—and Hane keeps in touch with them all. Mike Kirwan ’08 finished his master’s degree but found a better fit in public policy. He now works at the Robin Hood Foundation, managing grants to research and fund early childhood interventions for impoverished children in New York City.

Alexandra Hoff ’09 is a Ph.D. student on the child/family track in clinical psychology at Temple University. Willa Marquis Shemmassian ’09 is pursuing a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at UCLA. Her research looks at differences in parenting styles between Latino and Anglo parents in California. And Emily Barrios ’10, Chelsey’s sister, became interested in children’s health and enrolled in medical school at the University of Pennsylvania.

Hane received tenure in 2012 and, in February 2015, was also appointed as faculty in developmental neuroscience and named director of behavioral coding of the Nurture Science Program at Columbia University Medical Center. Several of her students are now assisting her with a new line of research, coding the interactions between mothers and prematurely born babies in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) there.

“Often, it’s difficult for moms and preemies to establish an emotional and physical connection,” Hane says. “Babies in the NICU are attached to a host of life supports that make even a simple diaper change extremely complicated. Monitors beep and sound with alarming frequency. It’s a far cry from the safety and shelter of the womb.”

Like Fox, Hane recognized an opportunity to help the population she’s researching. After completing a two-year fellowship at UMass–Boston in Infant–Parent Mental Health, funded by Williams, she joined Columbia University researchers Martha Welch and Michael Myers, who were developing a protocol called the Family Nurture Intervention (FNI). The protocol has been implemented in the NICU at New York–Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children’s Hospital and helps moms and pre-term infants establish a “calming cycle” routine including skin-to-skin care, vocal soothing and eye contact.

Hane and her students coded the quality of maternal care during holding and feeding in the NICU and found that FNI helped moms improve the care they gave their newborns prior to discharge. “That is a monumental accomplishment given the many barriers to caregiving on the unit,” Hane says.

She and her students have continued to collaborate with Welch and Myers to track the babies through 18 months of age. They’ve found that FNI significantly improves babies’ cognitive development and lowers their risk of autism and attention problems. Their mothers, meanwhile, are at a lower risk of postpartum depression and anxiety symptoms.

With both the NICU and Bucharest interventions, Hane and Fox have put their research into action to help change outcomes for children facing extreme challenges early in life. And through their careful nurturing of students in their labs, they’re preparing the next generation to tackle the important challenges in understanding how nature and nurture combine to make us who we are.

Michael Blanding ’95 is a Boston-based freelance writer.
When the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) asked studio art majors Rachel Lee ’16 and Clover Powell ’16 to assist with the installation of a Sol LeWitt wall drawing in the museum’s atrium, it seemed a pretty straightforward task. LeWitt, who famously stated, “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art,” was known for giving precise, detailed instructions to his draftspeople, who turned the ideas into thousands of artworks that appear around the world.

But when it came to interpreting those instructions, “There’s some subjectivity,” Lee says. “The plan says you have to make a straight line, so you tape it that way. But your brush might wobble a little bit. It’s inevitable that your hand comes out.”

Lee, Powell and other local artists spent several weeks in the fall installing Wall Drawing #1089: Bars of Color under the guidance of Gabriel Hurier, who’s worked for LeWitt and his estate for 11 years. The students learned not only how to apply tape and hold a pencil or brush, but also what Lee calls “the in-between steps: Keep your brushes clean. Keep your water clean. Keep your buckets clean—wipe out the rims all the time. That’s important, too. It all adds up to what you see on the wall.”

Wall Drawing #1089: Bars of Color is the third LeWitt artwork to be installed in WCMA’s atrium. The drawings are meant to be temporary and are adjusted to fit the context of the space each time they’re drawn. Watch a time-lapse video of the installation made from still images including those above at http://bit.ly/walldrawing1089.
Sol LeWitt
American, 1928–2007
Wall Drawing #1089: Bars of Color, 2003
acrylic paint
Private Collection
AVERAGE NET PRICE FOR AIDED STUDENTS HASN'T CHANGED IN 30 YEARS

MEDIAN DEBT AT GRADUATION AMONG STUDENTS WHO BORROW $13,000

AVERAGE FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE $50,000

AND

OTHER TRUTHS ABOUT FINANCIAL AID AT WILLIAMS
What is the college’s philosophy with regard to financial aid? What are we trying to accomplish?
We're trying to ensure that every admitted student can afford to attend. We admit students based on their abilities and interests, what we think they can contribute to the community and what we think they can get out of the education we offer—not based on their families’ financial circumstances. That’s a core college principle. Parents have the primary responsibility for paying for their children’s education to the extent that they can. But talented students whose families can’t afford to pay what it costs to attend Williams ought to have this opportunity.

There aren’t very many institutions that can do this—only 44 schools in the whole country. Forty-four out of 2,500 four-year colleges and universities, fewer than 2 percent, practice need-blind admission and meet 100 percent of full demonstrated need. Most other colleges and universities don’t have the resources to do that. It’s expensive. We’re fortunate to have the resources, and we put them to work in this way.

What does a Williams education really cost?
We spend about $100,000 per year on every student. But the “sticker price”—what we charge for full tuition plus room and board—totals a little more than $63,000. So even families who are paying the full comprehensive fee are receiving significant support from the college. You could say every student receives financial aid. Only about half our families pay the sticker price. For the other 1,000 families, the amount varies based upon their ability to pay. The average aided family pays a little less than $18,000.

The sticker price of a Williams education has doubled in the last 30 years. Has the financial aid program evolved as the cost has risen?
The underlying principle hasn’t evolved. If we admit you to Williams, we want you to be able to afford to come here. And when you come here, we want you to be able to take full advantage of all the curricular and extracurricular opportunities. When cost is a barrier to that, we figure out how to overcome it.

It’s important to understand that every aided student is insulated from the effects of rising tuition. As our cost increases, what we expect families to contribute remains the same, because their cost isn’t based on our cost. Rather, their cost is based on their income and assets, the number of children they have in college and other circumstances. We simply make up the difference with a larger grant. In fact, some families paying full tuition that can’t afford to contribute more when there’s an increase might end up receiving financial aid.

We also want to make the Williams experience for aided students as much like the experience for non-aided students as possible in every respect. Over time, as we’ve identified areas in which that’s not the case, we’ve marshaled the resources to level out those differences.

For instance, aided students have the same level of support for studying abroad as they have for studying at Williams. Books are free for aided students. We also pay attention to the discretionary allowance built into financial aid packages, recognizing that there are hidden costs to being a college student: doing laundry, getting a haircut, buying some pizza. We’ve increased that allowance by about 25 percent in the last five years to reflect how those costs have increased.

Thirty years ago, 38 percent of our students came from families that couldn’t afford to pay the sticker price. Today, more than half of the first-year class receives aid. Today’s average aided family contributes a little less than $18,000 toward the $100,000 that Williams spends per student; $18,000 is about the same contribution that aided families paid 30 years ago, in inflation-adjusted dollars, when Williams spent about $40,000 per student, also adjusted for inflation. So compared to...
1986, today’s aided students are paying the same price for a Williams experience that is superior in innumerable ways.

What might people find counterintuitive about the cost to attend Williams?
The prevailing myth is that you have to be rich to be able to come here. That’s completely untrue. Of course, $60,000 is an enormous amount of money—it’s about the same as the median family income in the U.S. Most families can no more afford to pay $60,000 for an education than they could to pay $60,000 for a car. But unlike car companies, we actually discount our price based on what families can afford to pay. We’re working to overcome the myth that a Williams education is out of reach. One way is through our quick cost estimator, which we rolled out last semester. It takes about two minutes to complete. You can throw in any income—$50,000, $100,000, $200,000—along with some assets and the number of children attending college and get an accurate estimate of what it would cost that family to send a kid to Williams. I think people will be surprised.

Williams is less expensive than the University of Massachusetts for families making anything less than about $140,000 a year. And students at many public colleges, including the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, where I’m a board member, are graduating with significantly more debt than they do from Williams and other well-resourced private schools. The majority of our students are graduating without any debt at all, and the loans for those who do borrow are, by and large, modest.

How is financial aid calculated, and what does it cover, exactly?
We start with the total cost of attendance, which includes tuition, room and board, and very small student fees that fund College Council and student activities. It also includes the cost of traveling to and from Williams twice per year, the cost of books and art and lab supplies, and a discretionary allowance that covers the incidental costs of living here for a year. Then we determine what the family is capable of contributing, which means money coming from parents’ income and assets as well as the student contribution through a modest work expectation—a maximum of 8 to 10 hours a week—and, in some cases, small loans. The maximum student loan is $4,000 a year. Whatever the family can’t contribute in those ways, we then make up through an outright grant.

How do you determine what a family can afford to pay?
The primary driver is income. We also look at families’ assets. We completely exclude from consideration retirement plans. We assess other funds at a rate of around 5 percent. There’s a myth that saving for college hurts you, because we’re just going to take it all from you. But we’re not. If you have $100,000 saved in the bank, it’s reasonable to ask you to contribute about $5,000 of that savings each year. So you’re still a whole lot better off for having saved that money. We look at home equity in a similar way, although we cap that. In some areas of the country, what people’s houses are worth can become quite inflated relative to their level of income and their level of actual liquid assets and ability to contribute.

Roughly speaking, families below $75,000 in income, with typical assets, which means not very many, are not expected to borrow at all. We don’t package a loan for those families.

Are we burdening our students with debt?
The loans that we package are for aided families whose income is above $75,000, and the amount of loan that we expect a family to take starts at $1,000 per year up to a maximum of $4,000 a year, based on family income and assets. It’s important to understand that a loan package is a
recommendation. Families can and do choose to borrow more or less than we recommend. About half our families borrow what we suggest. About a quarter borrow more than we suggest, and about a quarter borrow less. So that’s some indication that our recommendations are pretty good.

There are schools out there that are “no loan,” meaning they don’t recommend that students borrow. But it doesn’t mean students at those schools aren’t borrowing. In fact, when you look at what students are actually borrowing per capita, even at the 44 best-resourced colleges in the country, they’re borrowing less at Williams than they are at a number of “no-loan” schools.

More than half our students don’t borrow anything at all. The ones who do borrow are graduating with an average of about $15,000 in total debt. The national average is close to $30,000 for those who borrow.

You mentioned “need-blind” earlier, and you and President Falk also use the term “need-seeking.” What’s the difference, and why is it important that Williams be need-seeking?

Need-blind refers to an admission policy, and meeting 100 percent of demonstrated need is a financial aid policy. Williams is committed to both of those things. Need-blind is a promise that a family’s ability to pay won’t factor into the decision of whether to admit a student. Frankly, most schools aren’t like that; they need those tuition dollars, and whom they decide to admit depends a lot on what their families can pay.

Being need-blind has been an important principle at Williams for a long time. But what I think a lot of people don’t know is that Williams and some of the other schools like us are also actively need-seeking. We are aggressively working to identify, recruit, enroll, support and graduate students who can’t pay or who can pay very little.

Families in which no one has gone to college, or families that have very or relatively low incomes, are far less likely to be aware of Williams. They’re less likely to know that coming to Williams can be a significantly better opportunity and more affordable for them than some of the opportunities closer to home.

So our admission office works very hard to identify the most talented low-income students in the U.S. and around the world to make them aware of Williams, to help them understand why Williams would be great for them and, importantly, to get them on campus.

We run a program in the fall called WOW—Windows On Williams. We’ve nearly doubled the size of this program in the last couple of years because it’s so effective. We fly in, at our expense, about 200 low-income and first-generation students to spend a couple days on campus, meet each other, meet other Williams students and attend classes.

The program is competitive; we get about 1,200 applicants. The students we select are very strong candidates for admission, and getting them here on campus dramatically increases the chances that they apply and will choose to enroll here if we admit them.

“It all comes back to the core college principle of bringing the most interesting, talented, diverse students to Williams regardless of their ability to pay.”

Provost Will Dudley ’89
We have a similar previews program in the spring for admitted students who haven't already participated in WOW and can't afford to come here on their own. We want to make sure they get a chance to experience this place in person before they decide where to go to college.

Our admission office travels to high schools where low-income and first-generation students are likely to be found. We have greatly increased the number of names of high school students we search through the College Board in order to make sure we're turning up essentially every low-income student in the U.S. who has a plausible chance of being qualified to attend. We’re reaching out to students electronically and with paper materials. We recently redid our suite of admissions publications, testing their effectiveness in focus groups with low-income and first-generation students in Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

That’s what need-seeking is: doing everything we can in a very active way to admit as many talented, low-income students as we can.

It’s obvious that financial aid is important to Williams’ lowest-income families. Can you talk about the difference it makes for families at higher income levels? How does the middle class student fare when it comes to financial aid?

In order to have the means to pay more than $60,000 a year to send your kid to college, you are probably in or approaching the top 4 or 5 percent of the American income distribution. So we provide financial support to families across 95 percent of the American income distribution. Our aided population spans families with almost no income to families making more than $200,000 a year. It’s a wide range, but the principle is the same for each family. We ask them to contribute what we think they can afford. A family making $25,000 probably can’t afford to contribute anything in terms of cash to a Williams education, and we wouldn’t expect them to. We’d offer that student a campus job. But there wouldn’t be any loan.

A family making $200,000 can afford to contribute quite a lot, but probably not the full $60,000. “Middle class” is a hopelessly mushy term. The median American family makes about $60,000 a year and will probably pay $4,000 to attend Williams, with no loan expectation. But that’s not what many people mean by middle class, so I don’t think there’s a helpful answer to how the middle class student fares. Ultimately, we’re striving to make Williams equally affordable for essentially everyone who needs some level of support, and that varies depending on their family resources.

Because it’s so individualized, the best way for a family to calculate what it would cost them to attend Williams is our new quick cost estimator tool, which we introduced last semester.

What’s the quick cost estimator, and how does it work?

Every college is required by the federal government to post a financial aid calculator on its website, and we’ve had one for some time. The most common one—the one we’ve been using—is provided by the College Board. It’s very good and accurate, but it’s also very detailed. It takes a fair amount of time to fill out, and you need to have your family’s tax return in front of you. There was a lot of evidence that many people didn’t want to use it, and many of those who did use it gave up partway through the questionnaire.

An economics professor at Wellesley recently developed a simpler calculator that almost anyone can complete—one that’s accurate and reliable. It has six questions most people can answer off the top of their head. So within just a minute or two, they can get a good estimate. We’re partnering with Wellesley and the University of Virginia in using this new quick cost estimator. If you’re an admission officer meeting with
high school students or guidance counselors, the quick calculator is a fantastic tool. When someone says, "$60,000? I can't go to Williams," you can whip out your iPad and have them punch in their family income and answer a few more questions. And they realize, "Oh, I'd only have to pay $5,000 per year? I had no idea."

Our admission officers are having those types of conversations on the road every day now. As of January, more than 3,100 people accessed the quick cost estimator; 76 percent of them completed all six questions. A good number of those who didn't complete it are international students, who are prompted after the first question to use a different tool.

How has the student body changed over time? And how has that affected, or been affected by, Williams' financial aid program?

It's changed tremendously, and in many stages. Forty years ago, the college committed to coeducation. Thirty years ago, about 85 percent of students at Williams were white Americans; 15 percent were either students of color or international students. Today, just over 50 percent of the first-year class is white and American, and the number of students of color and international students is close to 50 percent.

In the last 15 years, we've put an increasingly explicit emphasis on socioeconomic diversification. So in the Class of 2019, slightly more than 20 percent of the students are eligible for the federal government's PELL scholarship program for lower-income Americans. Fifteen years ago, that number was closer to 10 percent. We're proud of that, and we work really hard at it.

The financial aid program makes all this possible. You can't enroll students whose families can't afford to pay what it costs to come here unless you have the resources to support them. We do have those resources, and we commit them to this effort. We don't have a financial aid budget, in the sense of a fixed amount that we're willing to spend. We admit a class, and then we're committed to spending whatever it takes to enroll them.

**Williams is no longer need-blind for international students. How does the college fulfill its aims with regard to access and diversity when it comes to this demographic?**

We meet 100 percent of demonstrated need for every single student that we admit, domestic or international. We determine ability to contribute in the same way.

Our international students are coming from more countries today than ever. And the acceptance rate for international students is around 5 percent, which is much lower than it is for domestic students. The competition is really incredible, because Williams has a fantastic international reputation.

Many schools are bringing wealthy international students to their campuses in order to bring in more tuition dollars. We're not doing that. We're need-seeking internationally as well as domestically. In fact, our international population receives more aid than our domestic population. Roughly half of our domestic students receive financial aid, compared with close to 60 percent of the international population. And the average aided international student receives about $10,000 a year more in financial aid than the average aided domestic student.

**Financial aid is the single largest fundraising priority for Teach It Forward: The Campaign for Williams. How much money is the college seeking to raise for financial aid, and how will it be used and prioritized?**

One way to think about it is that we're providing $50 million in financial aid support to our students each and every year. If you wanted to endow that whole amount, you'd need $1 billion, because we can basically spend 5 percent of the endowment over time in a stable way. At the moment, $400 million of our endowment is designated by donors for financial aid. That's fantastic, but it's also well short of what we actually need to endow the whole thing. So we want to increase the dedicated endowed support for financial aid to make sure that we're able to provide 100 percent of full demonstrated need without compromising the quality of the education at Williams.

Of the $650 million total campaign goal, we have a target of raising $150 million for financial aid, which would mean more than half our financial aid budget would be covered by endowment.

Additional endowment for aid will also ensure that Williams students graduate with low—and, in most cases, no—loan burden. More than ever before, Williams is seeking to level the playing field for low-income students by covering the challenging and unexpected costs they sometimes face. Things like eyeglasses, dental emergencies, GRE testing fees, and clothing and travel for graduate school and job interviews. We're always looking at ways in which our support of aided students could be increased.

It all comes back to the core college principle of bringing the most interesting, talented, diverse students to Williams regardless of their ability to pay. And then, once they're here, doing everything we can to ensure that every one of our students has equal access to all the opportunities and benefits of a Williams education.

**Will Dudley ’89 is the provost and a professor of philosophy at Williams. In February he was named president of Washington and Lee University, effective Jan. 1, 2017.**

Brave Family Man, Pioneer Lawyer of Poughkeepsie (in the 19th and early 20th centuries) Who Loved Williams, Liked to Cook and Fish, Was a Character of Scrupulous Integrity, Who Insisted Upon Being Respected as a Human Being (and Was Not Afraid to Bring the Law to Bear When Necessary), Was an Advocate (Like His Father and Mother Before Him) for Black Education, and Had Warm Enthusiasms for Life and Shared Those In Everything He Did (And Enjoyed Many Williams alumni know that Gaius C. Bolin, Class of 1889, was Williams’ first black graduate. He was, of course, a great deal more.  

BY ABE LOOMIS

Gaius C. Bolin, from the Class of 1889 photo album
When Lauren Hobby ’10 visited Williams with her family in 1998, it was the first time she could recall setting foot on a college campus. “Afterwards,” she says, “that was how I always pictured college: the red bricks, the snow, the ivy.”

Her family had come to see artist Faith Ringgold’s story quilt celebrating the 100th anniversary of the graduation of the college’s first black student—Hobby’s great-great-grandfather, Gaius C. Bolin. Almost a decade later, Hobby was back on campus, studying art history and American studies, leading tours at the college museum, jogging around Stone Hill in the afternoons and exploring questions of race and belonging.

“There were a lot of conversations at Williams among black students about how we could be more comfortable there,” she says. “But my family had been there for over 100 years. I refused to feel like I didn’t belong in these spaces.”

Hobby’s experience owed much to the man whose image is featured on the story quilt. Bolin arrived in Williamstown in 1885 by way of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., as the first and only black student on campus. His brother Livingsworth joined him a year later.

It’s unclear what if any practices or policies the college may have had regarding admission of African-American students before that time. But a door had opened, and by the start of the 20th century, a very small but growing number of young black men were making their way to Williams. Like Bolin, many came at the recommendation of a teacher or mentor. And they went on to successful careers in fields including education, medicine and, as was the case with Bolin, law.

Over the years the college has celebrated Bolin’s legacy with reunions and a fellowship in his name, established 30 years ago to serve graduate students of color. This April 8-10, Williams will mark the 130th anniversary of his matriculation with a weekend of discussions, performances and workshops.

In that same spirit, Williams Magazine set out to learn more about Bolin, visiting the college’s archives and Poughkeepsie’s Adriance Memorial Library and Dutchess County Historical Society. Books, letters, contemporary newspaper articles and interviews with two of his living relatives—Hobby and Lionel Bolin ’48, Gaius’ grandson—also informed the research.

“I’ve heard about him my whole life,” Hobby says of her great-great-grandfather. “I’m currently in law school [at Yale], and, starting with Gaius, that will make me the fifth generation of lawyers in my family.”

Lionel, a retired lawyer who grew up in Poughkeepsie, says Gaius was “as much of a father to me as my own father was.” Lionel remembers his grandfather, fresh from the office in a wool suit and starched collar, fishing with him in a rented rowboat on nearby Lake Walton. In late summers, Gaius would take Lionel and a cousin crabbing on the grand estuary of the Hudson River, hunting for sea life in the salty waters down at Peekskill.

Bolin roots ran deep in the Hudson Valley. Gaius’ father, Abram Bolin, grew up in a farming family in Dover Plains, 20 miles east of Poughkeepsie, and became a respected local merchant and activist in the black community. Though his own formal education was scant, Abram had deep faith in the power of schooling. That faith was shared by his wife, Alice Ann Lawrence, who was educated by family friends in New York City and later worked to support the integration of Poughkeepsie’s public schools. Neither of Gaius’ parents went to college, but he inherited their belief and passed it on. In her family, Hobby says, “We understood that education was a very deep-set priority and a privilege.”

Gaius C. Bolin was born Sept. 10, 1864, seven months before Lee surrendered at Appomattox and effectively ended the Civil War. On the same date, the Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle (motto: “Neutral in Nothing”) ran an advertisement for steamboat passage to New York City for 25 cents and an endorsement of Abraham Lincoln of Illinois for president. Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation two years earlier, and the social and legal standing of African-Americans was tenuous at best.

Still, Bolin described the Poughkeepsie of his childhood as a place of “rural friendliness and neighborliness,” and it’s easy to imagine him gazing out on the Hudson—60 feet deep and more than a half-mile wide at Poughkeepsie—a river he later
defeats as well as pleasures, happiness and successes,”
he wrote in 1909, “there is no part of it upon which I
look back with more genuine pleasure, satisfaction and
happiness than the four years spent up at dear old Williams
with my classmates
and the fellows in general there.”
Bolin vividly recalls
life at Williams in his letters to the annual alumni reports of the
Class of 1889. He
depicts a college that, to today’s students and alumni, is at once familiar yet evocative
of another time. In
one letter from 1914,
“Old Charlie Bole”
as his classmates sometimes called him) playfully laments the installation of street
lamps on Main Street since their graduation:
“They tell me that they have got a lot of electric lights
all over that town now so that at night it is as light as day,
and have trolley cars and policemen and all that kind of foolishness, and if that is so all I have got to say is that
Williamstown is ruined. Who could ever gather grapes at
night such as Carpenter Clark used to have, or innocently
carry furniture out of that store room that used to be in
East College, or even distribute among themselves a little
thing like a barrel of cider from Spalding’s room while
he was at prayer meeting, with a lot of old electric lights
burning, and trolley cars flashing along the streets, and
a lot of fool policemen sticking their noses into other
innocent people’s business. … I am glad that I lived there
when folks had a little more personal liberty without so
much danger of getting caught at it.”
Bolin’s room at No. 3 South College (now Fayerweather
Hall) was a social hub, a gathering place for whist and
camaraderie. In the same 1914 letter he expands upon the
cider incident, describing how some of the pilfered juice
was spilled in the hallway outside his door and left an
impression on “Carpenter Clark”—as handyman Robert R.
Clark was known to generations of Williams students—
who came by when Bolin’s room was “as usual filled with
a motley crowd smoking pipes and playing cards, and
… went out holding his nose and said ‘that Bolin’s room
smells like a bar room.’”
Concludes Bolin: “I have never had any confidence in
circumstantial evidence since then.”
Bolin was an athlete, playing on his class’s football
team all four years, and he took great pleasure in an 1888
baseball victory over Harvard, which he wrote in another
letter, somewhat slyly, “ought to be Williams College
history forever.” He delivered a speech about Abraham
Lincoln during the
college’s commencement program in 1887, and his
rhetorical skills won him nomination as the class
speaker or “pipe orator,” for which he received a
handsome meerschaum pipe with “89” emblazoned
on the bowl.

After graduation,
Gaius returned home,
where he worked with
his father for a year and
then signed on to read
law with lawyer Fred E.
Ackerman. On Dec. 15,
1892, he was admitted to
the bar of New York in
Brooklyn. Seven years later he married Matilda Emery, an
Irish woman with roots in Northern Ireland’s Enniskillen,
with whom he had four children. She died in 1917 from an
unspecifed illness.

As a small-city lawyer in general practice, Bolin argued
cases of all kinds. These included estate claims, an 1894
dispute about payment for a load of apples and a murder
trial that kept him from attending his 20th Williams class
reunion. He had the respect of neighbors far and wide,
earning a reputation as an honest broker and an excellent
lawyer. He was also known as a judicious advocate. A
local reporter noted Bolin’s “ready sympathy for those
who transgress the law” and registered his view that “the
wayward … are more often than not the victims of flaws
in their heredity … and justice toward them should be
tempered with mercy.”

Notably, at a time when segregation was still widely
practiced and accepted, most of Bolin’s clients were white.
“I often wonder how the hell he ever did it,” Lionel Bolin says. “My grandfather was the only black lawyer in town. And even the white lawyers were struggling! Here he had almost no support group at all. You know how you find business through your social life? He wasn’t part of that social life. He didn’t belong to any country clubs. He just had to do everything on pure grit and reputation.”

Gaius was known for being a lion in the courtroom. “People used to say when he’d be arguing a case in court you could hear him from across the street,” Lionel says. “He could cuss with the best of them. And they did a lot of that in court in those days.”

Gaius was a Republican—the party of Lincoln—and a supporter of then-New York Gov. Theodore Roosevelt, with whom he corresponded. Roosevelt appointed Bolin to the New York State Board of Managers of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo. Bolin also was a founding member of the local branch of the NAACP. Late in life, he was named the first African-American president of the Dutchess County Bar Association, which the scholar Jacqueline McLeod suggests was in part the result of a speech Bolin’s daughter Jane gave in 1944, on the occasion of “American Brotherhood Week,” that included an indictment of Poughkeepsie’s racial inequities.

Despite Jane’s critique of midcentury Poughkeepsie, the Bolins were to some extent insulated from overt racism. In an oral history interview conducted at Vassar in the 1970s, Gaius’ son, Gaius C. Bolin Jr., said of his hometown, “There was discrimination here, but I never ran into it because practically anywhere I walked into, somebody knew me.”

There were painful incidents, however. Jane Bolin was refused a haircut at a local salon on racial grounds, and the elder Gaius was assaulted by an Eastman College student for taking a seat on a crowded trolley. Gaius had the student arrested and, when he was released on bail, had him jailed again a week later. It was an unusual move, according to a local paper, accomplished “under the legal rule that permits the plaintiff in a tort action for injuries to have the defendant kept within the jail limits or give bail in lieu of such detention.” The episode exemplified both the dignified self-possession that Gaius’ grandson Lionel recalls and a matter-of-fact willingness to use legal force to push back hard against poor treatment.

Lionel Bolin recalls his father and grandfather talking about towns they’d have to avoid on their rounds in the Justice Courts of smaller villages surrounding Poughkeepsie. The Ku Klux Klan was active in the Hudson Valley, though the Bolins’ attitude toward the local organization, at least, seems to have been one of bemusement. In a 1978 interview, Gaius Jr., also a lawyer, who shared offices with his father, describes a Klan gathering behind a local church as “more or less a joke.”

Although he never sought conflict, Bolin was deeply protective of his family and addressed racism wherever he found it. When the president of Vassar quipped about a “darkie” in an assembly at Bolin’s daughter Anna’s school, Bolin sent a strongly worded letter to him and to the school’s principal. He objected to the discriminatory practices of the local YMCA and set straight a Wellesley guidance counselor who discouraged his daughter Jane from pursuing law.

Yet Bolin was a man of his era; when he learned of Jane’s intention to become a lawyer, he objected, suggesting that such a vocation was too “dirty” for a woman. He later voiced a similar protest at the idea of her becoming a judge. In both cases, however, when he saw that she was decided, he threw his moral and financial support behind her. She went on to become the country’s first black female judge. A photograph of Jane being sworn in as a Domestic Relations Court judge by New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia in 1939 hung on Bolin’s office wall near a portrait of the Williams Class of 1889.

In a 1939 letter to his class, Bolin wrote: “As for myself, I have been a small-town practitioner of the law here in Poughkeepsie and have enjoyed it. We have a fine bar and fine judges and for me the practice of the law in this county and adjoining counties has been a pleasure, and barring the deep sorrows which come to us all, I have had a pleasant life.” As he seems to have understood it, his life was unremarkable. For those who followed in his footsteps, however, it had profound significance.

“It was always a pillar of strength for me to know that my family had been at Williams and knocked down walls,” Hobby says. “There is a narrative about African-Americans in the U.S. that doesn’t talk about five generations of a college-educated family, but it’s important. It changes the tool kit and the voices at the table.”

As a child, Lionel Bolin recalls spending weekend afternoons at his grandfather’s house on Grand Avenue in Poughkeepsie. They listened to the radio together—operas, Gaius’ favorite, on Saturdays and symphonies on Sundays.

Lionel remembers his grandfather sinking into his chair in a kind of reverie, ash glowing at the tip of a White Owl cigar—thinking, perhaps, of revels at No. 3 South College or other cherished episodes from a life that defied expectations.

Abe Loomis is a freelance writer living in Western Massachusetts.

Jacqueline McLeod’s book Daughter of the Empire State: The Life of Judge Jane Bolin (University of Illinois Press, 2011) and Dennis C. Dickerson’s article “Success Story…With a Difference,” (Williams Alumni Review, fall 1978) were invaluable resources in researching this article.
The Cost of Remembering

Some of the students in Documenting Stories of Escape and Survival took the Winter Study course to hone their filmmaking skills. Others wanted to learn more about conducting oral histories. Still others wanted to better understand the World War II era. They got all that and something they weren’t expecting: a deep connection to the small Baltic nation of Estonia.

Biology professor Lois Banta, who studies microbiology and public health, has a long personal interest in Estonia. Her father-in-law, now deceased, was born there and fled in 1939, the year before the Soviet Union invaded. During the occupation, 10,000 Estonians were executed or deported to Siberia in a single night.

In 2014, Banta visited Estonia and connected with the Unitas Foundation, a nonprofit whose stated mission is “to build reconciliation between and within societies divided by totalitarianism.” One way Unitas does this is by conducting oral histories with those affected by World War II and its aftermath. Banta learned from a tour guide that the foundation hoped to make a trip to the U.S. to interview Estonian refugees. The seed for her course was planted.

Banta joined forces with documentary filmmakers James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty, who in 2007 produced The Singing Revolution, a film about Estonia. She also asked Annie Valk, Williams’ associate director for public humanities, who teaches a course on the theory, methods and practice of oral history, to speak with the class.

Banta’s seven students—whose majors included biology, English, history and political science—read about and watched documentaries on Estonia. With Valk and the Tustys, they explored the difference between oral history and documentary. They learned how to edit film with Williams instructional technology specialist Tamra Hjermstad. Then they set out for New York City and Washington, D.C., where they spent four days interviewing Estonians whose families fled in 1944 to avoid the brutality of a second Soviet occupation, which lasted half a century.

Alexandra Mendez ’17, an English and sociology double major who grew up in Puerto Rico, interviewed an 86-year-old refugee named Ago Ambre for 90 minutes. She says she felt a personal connection with him, in part because they both come from small, sometimes misunderstood places. “He had never formally told anyone his story before,” she says.

In all, the students filmed 10 interviews that were given to the Unitas Foundation. For their final project, they worked with Hjermstad and the Tustys to create 15-minute documentaries based on their interviews with the refugees. The clips will appear on Unitas’ website (http://unitas.ee/unitas-home) and serve as educational resources throughout the Baltic region.

Mendez says she was surprised by how much control she had over the story in the editing process. “It is him talking,” she says. “But in editing, I molded the story.”

Banta says the course dovetailed perfectly with the theme she established as the college’s Gaudino Scholar: exploring the question “At What Cost?”

“By bearing witness to both the unimaginable losses and the resilience of our interviewees, recording oral histories of these traumatic events forces us to ask hard questions,” says Banta, who concludes her three-year term as Gaudino Scholar next year. “What would I have done in those circumstances? How does the unthinkable become commonplace? What is the cost of remembering and documenting these traumas? What is the cost of letting these memories go?”

—Julia Munemo
Language Learning: Renovated

With recent events in both Germany and Russia fueling student interest in those countries, and with the retirement of two longtime professors prompting two new hires, the Department of German and Russian is undergoing what its chair calls "a renovation."

Julie Cassiday, professor of Russian, says language education has expanded beyond memorization to include skills students can use in the real world. Meanwhile, her department’s curricular offerings have become more interdisciplinary, with literature, food and culture now staples for a growing number of English speakers and language learners alike.

Cassiday’s Elementary Russian class has a higher enrollment than ever before, and her course on gender in Putin’s Russia has nearly twice as many students this year as it did last. “Student curiosity is piqued by geopolitical events,” she says. “It’s our job to give them the tools with which to understand those events.”

So when longtime professors Bruce Kieffer and Darra Goldstein, two of the department’s six faculty members, announced their retirements—Kieffer at the end of this academic year, Goldstein at the end of next—the time was right to explore curricular possibilities, Cassiday says.

The department welcomed two tenure-track professors in the fall: Christophe Koné in German and Baktygul Aliev in Russian. Koné, who was a visiting professor at Williams for two years prior to his appointment, focuses on gender and fashion. In addition to teaching elementary and intermediate German, he taught Dolls, Puppets and Automatons in the fall. He’s also developing a class on the African diaspora in Europe.

Aliev focuses on contemporary Russian culture and politics. In addition to language and classic literature courses, he taught Depiction of Politically Radical Youth in Contemporary Russian Literature in the fall. Next year he plans to teach a course on Russia’s memorialization of World War II.

Other faculty in the department are developing courses as well. Gail Newman is currently teaching Turbodeutsch, an intensive elementary German language class that meets every weekday. And there are more tutorials—in which pairs of students take turns developing independent work and critiquing it under the guidance of a professor. Some pairs of students speak and write exclusively in German, and others work in English.

Says Cassiday, “I’m truly excited by the work that we’ve done to renovate the curricula so that our department supports students’ interests more effectively in a rapidly changing global context.”

—Julia Munemo

Culture and Climate in National Parks

You might expect to learn about climate change or Native American history and culture during a visit to a national park. In researching her senior thesis, sociology major Elena Zifkin ’16 found that these topics present challenges for interpretive rangers who lead educational programs at parks across the U.S.

With a research grant from Williams’ Center for Environmental Studies, Zifkin traveled 8,000 miles in seven weeks. She interviewed parks workers at the north and south rims of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, Yosemite in California, Grand Teton in Wyoming, Mesa Verde in Colorado and Glacier National Park in Montana.

“I’ve always been interested in human history and how people and institutions choose to tell the stories they tell,” Zifkin says. What she found was complicated—parks workers seemed to wrestle with how to address these topics and, in some cases, whether to address them at all.

In some Native American traditions, oral history is earned; members of a tribe are trained to tell specific stories. Rangers and interpreters, who often work part time for the summer tour season, are well aware of this, Zifkin found. “They don’t want to be telling stories they aren’t trained to tell,” she says. “But then it gets difficult, because those stories aren’t being told at all.”

In general, she found that most parks mention the tribes as “supporting actors” in stories with strong, American male founders. Some specific programs have been created that relate to Native Americans, she says, “but it still seems to be a peripheral topic.”

Climate change is formally recognized by the National Parks Service, but in many cases it’s referred to as “human impact on the environment,” says Zifkin. She found that mentions of climate change in interpreter dialogue shifted around 2008. The final chapter of her thesis will examine how rangers are just beginning to educate the public about the effects of climate change in the parks and beyond.

Zifkin is working closely with Natalie Vena ’04, the Gaius Charles Bolin Fellow in Anthropology and Environmental Studies, and anthropology professor Antonia Foias as she completes her thesis. Both Vena, whose research addresses the history of natural resource preservation in the Chicago region, and Foias, an archeologist studying cultural evolution in South America, helped Zifkin narrow the focus of her research query and recommended texts for Zifkin to read before hitting the road.

Much research has been done around national parks, but Zifkin’s ethnographic approach offers fresh perspective, Vena says. “Elena is building on the social history of the parks by analyzing how rangers make sense of that legacy,” she says.

—Francesca Shanks

PHOTO BY ELENA ZIFKIN ’16
New Heights

Professor of English Alison Case has made a career of analyzing Victorian literature, but it wasn’t until recently that she started writing in the genre herself.

Her first work of fiction, Nelly Dean (Pegasus, 2015), retells Wuthering Heights in the voice of one of Emily Brontë’s minor characters, Nelly Dean, the Earnshaw family’s servant and a lifelong resident of the heights. Case conceived the book as a letter from Dean to Mr. Lockwood, Wuthering Heights’ narrator. The letter creates connections among Brontë’s better-known characters. Dean also offers readers motives for her own actions in ways that Lockwood never did.

Case says Lockwood’s voice in Wuthering Heights lends itself to an academic reading style; he’s removed from the story, and he analyzes its parts as an outsider. Dean, meanwhile, sees herself as a part of the story, and she chooses sides as she tells it. “It’s a model for the kind of reading we did as kids,” Case says.

Case came to Williams in 1991 and has taught courses on and written literary criticism about Wuthering Heights for years. While writing Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel (University Press of Virginia, 1999), she became fascinated with Dean. “The things I wanted to say about her were not suitable for literary criticism,” she says. “I realized what I had was a novel.”

Writing Nelly Dean took eight years, including a yearlong sabbatical in 2014 and several trips to Haworth Village in England, where the Brontës grew up. Case spent a lot of time walking along the moors, tracking down local history books and visiting house museums, getting a sense of the tools Dean would have used in her work as a servant and of the flora and fauna of the area.

To Case, the book is a natural extension of her teaching and research. “What we do often in teaching a novel is continually reframe it to bring different things to life,” she says. “What I wanted was to make you think again about Wuthering Heights.”

—Francesca Shanks

EXCERPT ▼

As for Frances … she was a friendly enough little thing, really, and wanted to be loved by all, so it was always “don’t take the trouble” or “I like it just as it is, thank you” in her mouth.

But she soon saw where the wind lay; Hindley would frown and look dark at any friendly words from her to me, but he petted and kissed her for complaining of me and ordering me about. She would have liked to make a confidante out of me, I could see, and small wonder: she had no one else to talk to, with Cathy, wild and scornful, and no visiting in the neighborhood. But I was having none of it … though I could see it hurt her to be put off so. You see, Mr. Lockwood, when Hindley brought her back, and flaunted her in front of me as his fine lady bride, I vowed to myself that from then on I’d work for my wages, and no more. … And as far as she went, I kept my word. Now, though, looking back, I think how lonely she must have been, for I think, silly as she was, she saw through all of Hindley’s petting and praise, that his heart was elsewhere, though she little guessed who had the keeping of it.

Yes, Mr. Lockwood, if you’d come to Wuthering Heights then, you’d have seen Hindley a doting husband, and me, a bustling and solicitous servant, and Frances, fluttering and laughing as if all the world loved her. And you’d have thought the only thing amiss in the family was a brooding, dark-faced boy and a wild mischievous girl, and their endless skirmishing with Hindley and Joseph. But all the time, Hindley was using her to strike at me, and I was using her to strike at him, and she, poor thing, was battered between us, and died of it. Of all the ghosts at Wuthering Heights, hers is the one I fear, for I wronged her, and God knows she meant me no harm.

Other books

- Benford’s Law: Theory and Applications. Edited by Steven Miller, associate professor of mathematics. Princeton University Press, 2015. An examination of Benford’s Law, which can be used to expose fraud in financial reports, tax filings and more.


Visit ephbooks.williams.edu to see more works by members of the Williams community and to submit new publications.
Ivona’s Second Act

After successfully staging Princess Ivona at Williams last March, associate professor of theater Omar Sangare created a Winter Study course that took the student cast and crew to New York City to remount the play at Theatre Row on 42nd Street.

The play, by Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, is a tragi-comedy that challenges societal expectations. “It’s a story about a simple human being who is trying to fit in,” says Sangare. “The play is timeless and universal because it asks questions about identity and how we value individuals in a society.”

When Sangare announced his off-Broadway plans, which were funded by the Consulate General of Poland in New York City, students from the original cast jumped at the chance to sign up. “It’s so rare to revisit a character, and I knew this was an opportunity not to miss,” says Carina Zox ’16, a theater major who played Queen Margaret. “Margaret was much more real to me the second time, and my work became about bringing more of myself into her character.”

The group spent the first week of Winter Study rehearsing at Williams. As in March, the sessions included choreography work with performers from the world-renowned German dance company Tanztheater Wuppertal-Pina Bausch. They also spent long hours reimagining the characters they’d come to know last spring. They then traveled to New York and reconnected with sound designer Stephen Simalchik ’13, whose work on the Theatre Row production reviewers called “haunting.”

The 18 student members of the cast and crew spent the next week at the Clurman Theatre, with which Sangare has enjoyed a close relationship since founding the United Solo Festival there in 2010. The biggest adjustment the cast faced was the size of the house. “In Theatre Row, there is only about a foot between the edge of the stage and the first row in the audience, so it feels very intimate,” says David Carter ’16, a political economy major who’s taken theater classes since his freshman year, when he auditioned for a play on a whim and found he loved the experience.

Petra Mijanović ’16, a French major who played the title role, found feedback from the Theatre Row audience to be useful. “While I revised Ivona by relying on a thorough knowledge of the previous performance,” she says, “I found that in the laughter and sometimes the confusion and silence of the audience, I was able to refine my work even more.”

The show was slated for two performances that quickly sold out. So a third show was added. The experience was both exhausting and exhilarating, according to the students, who say they gained important understanding about acting. “I learned to take physical and emotional risks,” says Zox. “That’s something I’ll take with me wherever I go next.”

—Julia Munemo

Environmental Planning

As it runs through North Adams, the Hoosic River flows through a concrete chute built decades ago for flood control. The chute obscures the view of the river, it is inhospitable to river organisms, and parts of it are starting to crumble. So for their Environmental Planning class last fall, four students designed a revitalized river recreation area.

For the projects undertaken in the course, including the Hoosic River revitalization, students “are functioning as a consulting team,” says Sarah Gardner, lecturer and associate director of Williams’ Center for Environmental Studies. “There’s no better way to learn to do professional-level work than this.”

For their project, Katie Aguila ’16, Caroline Beckman ’17, Miguel Méndez ’16 and Allison Rowe ’16 read case studies and researched the history of North Adams’ floodwalls and factories. They interviewed community stakeholders, including Hoosic River Revival Director Judith Grinnell, North Adams Mayor Richard Alcombright and MASS MoCA Director Joe Thompson ’81.

Their final, 61-page report imagines a mixed-use public space called “The Duck” at the river’s north branch as it curves around the Mohawk Trail. It includes terraced steps around the river to retain flood water, beneficial plants for brook trout and other aquatic life, and a bike trail, orchard and playground. The students presented their plan at Hoosic River Revival’s annual board meeting. Though the organization is currently focused on a similar plan for the south branch of the river, Gardner says the students’ proposal provided the group with “inspiration for the next phase of their project.”

For their part, the students say they loved learning more about neighboring North Adams and working on a plan that incorporated what the community sees for its future. “There’s so much groundwork laid to establish where the city is going—so we could go there, too,” says Rowe.

—Francesca Shanks
“The students who proposed this painting found a spectacular work of museum quality by a lesser-known artist.”

Kevin Murphy, WCMA’s Eugénie Prendergast Curator of American Art

The 19th-century landscape Keene Valley, Adirondacks, on view in the Williams College Museum of Art’s (WCMA) Prendergast Gallery, is notable for many reasons. It’s a classic example of a high-quality painting by a Hudson River School artist who’s not widely known. Its subject matter, an expansive valley, evokes the promise of America in the Reconstruction era. And it’s one of the museum’s most recent acquisitions—purchased by students enrolled in a new, interdisciplinary course.

Acquiring Art: Selecting and Purchasing Objects for WCMA is the brainchild of Kevin Murphy, the museum’s Eugénie Prendergast Curator of American Art, and Stephen Sheppard, the college’s Class of 2012 Professor of Economics. A blend of art history and economics, the fall-semester seminar enrolled 15 seniors and three students from Williams’ Graduate Program in the History of Art.

For the first half of the semester, the professors took turns teaching class sessions. Murphy discussed WCMA’s collection and goals as well as what to look for in terms of an object’s condition. “We gave students tools to look at provenance and the history of objects, and to consider questions of authenticity,” he says.

Sheppard, meanwhile, provided an understanding of economic modeling and how the art market works. “We taught them to use data-based analytic models, talked about how...”
auctions function and provided bargaining strategies,” he says.

Then the students assembled into five teams to research art works. They were given three guidelines—the object had to align with WCMA’s collecting priorities; the students had to view the work in person; and it had to fit within a budget of $25,000, provided by the Fulkerson Fund for Leadership in the Arts.

After some Internet sleuthing, the class traveled to New York City to see up close the objects they were considering. While there, one group discovered the painting they’d been researching wasn’t museum quality.

“When we looked at it under a black light, we could see it had been touched up quite a lot,” says economics and statistics double major Miles McCarthy ’16, who’d never taken an art history class before. “While many paintings have cracks on the surface, this one just had too many.” The team regrouped and found another painting to study.

The group that selected Keene Valley worked closely with an established gallery handling 18th and 19th century American art. The students received a list of Hudson River School paintings within their price range, discussed them with the dealer and zeroed in on the work by Hermann Fuechsel after determining the painting’s true cost and value.

Back on campus, each team drafted a written proposal and made an oral presentation to WCMA’s curatorial and academic engagement staff, who considered all five objects before making the final decision.

Keene Valley was originally priced at $27,500, but the Williams students, using economic modeling, were able to negotiate a discount with the dealer. The painting is now part of the ongoing exhibition “The Anxiety of Influence: European and American Art, 1689-1913.”

“The students who proposed this painting found a spectacular work of museum quality by a lesser-known artist,” Murphy says. “They were smart to find a knockout work by an artist who doesn’t quite have the name recognition of Bierstadt but who was doing similar quality painting.”

—Julia Munemo

Why Keene Valley belongs in WCMA’s collection, according to curator Kevin Murphy:

1. It’s a Hudson River School painting from the 1870s, when artists like Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church painted grand, epic vistas of famous places in American nature. WCMA has wonderful Hudson River paintings, but none in this grand mode.

2. Artist Hermann Fuechsel was a German immigrant and studied in Düsseldorf, where Bierstadt trained. The level of detail, rendering of dramatic light effects and craggy mountain is representative of a Düsseldorf-trained artist. The use of light carries the viewer back into almost infinite space.

3. Hudson River painters often used nature as a symbol for the state of the nation. The piece was painted in 1876, the final year of Reconstruction. The expansive, sun-bathed valley floor might represent the promise of America as it emerged from the Civil War. However, the foreground is littered with rocks and tree branches, perhaps signifying that the path forward would be difficult.

4. The work seems to have had just a few owners and is unlined and on its original stretcher bars. What’s more, most of the frame is likely original. It’s as close to how it looked when it came out of Fuechsel’s studio as a 140-year-old painting can be.

5. As the students demonstrated in their economic analysis, high quality pieces from lesser-known Hudson River School artists are becoming more expensive. This trend will only continue as the works become scarcer.

Hermann Fuechsel (American, 1833-1915), Keene Valley, Adirondacks, 1876, oil on canvas, 14 × 20 in. (35.6 × 50.8 cm); frame: 26 ¼ × 32 ¼ in. (66.7 × 81.9 cm), museum purchase. Fulkerson Fund for Leadership in the Arts (M.2015.20).
Welcome to the “Real World”  

By Ferentz Lafargue

“The imaginary college student is a character born of someone else’s pessimism. It is an easy target, a perverse distillation of all the self-regard and self-absorption ascribed to what’s often called the millennial generation. But perhaps it goes both ways, and the reason that college stories have garnered so much attention this year is our general suspicion, within the real world, that the system no longer works.”


In the work I do as a diversity advocate in higher education, I often hear a concern that some of our efforts in pursuit of equity may be doing students a disservice—that we’re not preparing them for the “real world.” The implied logic is that if students feel empowered to voice their discontent with micro-aggressions experienced on campus, then they’re not developing the thick skin necessary to deal with the slights they’ll see in the workplace, out in the “real world.” Students should “toughen up,” and we should stop “coddling” them, we’re told.

I’ve heard these sentiments expressed about Williams’ efforts to counsel students against donning offensive Halloween costumes, the distribution of a “Pronouns Matter” pamphlet last fall and in more general discussions about what constitutes a “safe space” on campus.

To be sure, the real world is full of anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism and racism. The question is: Do we prepare students to accept the world as it is, or do we prepare them to change it?

The purpose of a college experience isn’t to make students feel as if they’re in a well-insulated bubble. Just as the image of the “imaginary college student” as a video game-addicted humanities major who uses the pronoun “they” and abides by a strict gluten-free diet disregards the lived experiences of countless students, so, too, do any allusions that colleges are idyllic enclaves. It’s worth remembering that being at Williams doesn’t immediately reshape all students’ lives into concentric circles with Frosh Quad at their center.

Instead, each student has a Venn diagram-like series of circles of their families, previous neighborhoods, schools and friend groups, all bartering for space among 2,200 other students. Over the last five years, to help mitigate some of the tensions that are bound to arise from this complex configuration, staff members at the Davis Center have been leading workshops on social identity formation and facilitation as part of the spring and fall training sessions for junior advisors. These trainings are complemented by an array of events during First Days that seek to provide the entering class an introduction to the identities and perspectives they’re likely to encounter here at Williams.

Hua Hsu’s “imaginary college student” is, for a casual observer of the various controversies that have affected campuses across the country this past year, an easy explanation. It’s a caricature that allowed vast swaths of the reading public to cast college students as “absurdly thin-skinned, unduly obsessed with ‘safe spaces’ and political correctness,” as Hsu writes in The New Yorker.

Part of the reason that college students are such fraught discursive subjects is because colleges themselves are undergoing their own existential dilemmas. Is college a place for intellectual exploration? Or is it a glorified worker-training program?

We’re not immune to this debate here at Williams, and some of our students and families bear its weight more than others. Students whose families are facing financial distress often feel guilty about engaging in any pursuit that’s not alleviating their family’s hardships. The decisions these students are forced to make range from deciding whether to take time off from school to find jobs...
Progress Through Struggle

On April 4, 1969, 34 students from Williams' Afro-American Society took over Hopkins Hall. They sought action from the college on 15 demands, including adding African-American studies to the curriculum, diversifying the faculty and creating a cultural center.

The campus community, black and white, rallied in support. Discussions between the administration and society members took place by telephone and via notes passed through windows. Classes were canceled that Monday and Tuesday for a campus-wide teach-in.

The occupation ended that Tuesday with then-Provost Steve Lewis ’60 and the Afro-American Society’s Preston Washington ’70 presenting an action plan addressing the students’ concerns. At a time when turmoil over the Vietnam War and racial justice was creating bitterness and resentment on college campuses around the country, the protest at Williams was respectful—and effective.

The occupation of Hopkins Hall is just one of the student protests documented in the college archives’ exhibition “Progress Through Struggle: Student Activism at Williams,” on view in Sawyer Library’s Schow Connector Gallery through the summer.

“Over the past year, we’ve seen increased interest from students regarding activism on campus,” says college archivist Katie Nash. “We wanted to highlight a few events from Williams’ history to show that struggles today have been experienced by former students.”

The meticulously catalogued materials are used widely by students for independent research and classwork. Professors like Leslie Brown in history, David Edwards in anthropology and Dorothy Wang in American studies have used collections pertaining to activism around Civil Rights, the abolition of fraternities and South African apartheid.

“By having these collections,” Nash says, “you truly become aware of all the voices and stories associated with a part of our past—which is crucial to helping others understand and appreciate the impact a group of individuals can have on the course of history and how it’s recorded.”