



Williams College

The Robert L. Gaudino Memorial Fund

Spring 1988

The Gaudino Scholar:

"Uncomfortable learning" is the controlling idea of Robert L. Gaudino's thinking about education. Gaudino targeted unreflective complacency, rather than simple ignorance, as the major block in the development of an educated and humane sensibility. To upset complacency, he experimented with a variety of "displacement" strategies that exposed students to valid social worlds fundamentally different from their own, whether a village community in India or a neighborhood across class and ethnic lines; to upset complacency in the larger academic community, he regularly challenged the moral and intellectual basis of consensus, whether by claiming, for example, that a Center for Development Economics rested on professional values and ends that did not belong in a liberal arts community or by acting as though spouses, staff, and "unheard" others were full participants in the intellectual and moral life of the college. Learning for Gaudino was a public and not a private process. Shared reflection on experience of all kinds, whether encounters with Socratic dialogues or with working people from the rural South, was the material for public discussions as well as private thought, for community development as well as personal growth. Thus, education in Gaudino's view, required an open community of learning and teaching; he worked to make Williams such a place. In different times and with new ideas, it is the charge of the Gaudino scholar to continue this unfinished work.

Precisely because it cannot be a matter of institutionalizing rigidly and in detail the pedagogical ideas and practices of Robert L. Gaudino, the specific activities of the Gaudino Scholar cannot be prescribed. The Scholar is, however, expected to develop a program or series of activities that reflect the spirit of Gaudino's legacy. "Spirit" is, of course, a broad term, but it covers--at a minimum--efforts to enhance the intellectual vibrancy of the campus, encourage students to take more risks and greater responsibility for their own education and to challenge the quasi-instinctive assumptions of the dominant opinions and practices in all relevant domains--academic, political, social, economic or religious. Given Gaudino's pedagogical emphasis on putting oneself at risk by experiencing the "other" and on systematically reflecting on that encounter, the Gaudino Scholar seeks to facilitate the development of experiential learning situations.

On the organizational/administrative side, the Gaudino Scholar keeps in touch with the Board of Trustees through its chairperson, organizes or helps to organize the Annual Meeting of the Trustees, reports to them on his/her activities and administers the R. L. Gaudino Memorial Fund.

Williams

Gaudino Fund

Mission Statement

The Robert L. Gaudino Memorial Fund seeks renewed and contemporary expression of Professor Gaudino's educational vision. By challenging the notion that public, intellectual engagement should or could be divorced from the private realm of students' personal background and experience, Gaudino required his students to confront uncomfortable differences and learn through contrasts – for example, between their assumptions and their conclusions, between themselves and others of different social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, between modern and ancient thought, between the values of public institutions and those of the private home, and even between the different liberal arts disciplines themselves. With insight, discipline, and humor, Gaudino facilitated student confrontation of these contrasts both inside the classroom and outside Williams, in places as diverse as Iowa, India, Appalachia, and Detroit.

Gaudino put the student at the center of this experience by requiring reflection on how personal opinions, judgments, and sensibilities derive not only from the curriculum, but from sources outside the curriculum. The teacher's understanding of the subject matter serves only as a catalyst. Students must transform themselves by taking an active role in an open community of learners, assuming the risk inherent in a serious search for truth. Often an uncomfortable experience, confronting difference in rigorous dialogue can induce profound and long-lasting intellectual and affective change.

The mission of the Fund complements the primary objectives of the College's educational mission: promoting active learning, combating fragmentation of knowledge, and assembling an open community of learning characterized by integrity, mutual respect, and rigorous intellectual endeavor. The Fund's distinctive contribution to Williams resides in the insistence that experiences on as well as off campus, on curricular as well as extracurricular levels, be continually transformed into occasions for growth in which the intellectual becomes personal.

The Fund's role, therefore, like that of Gaudino during his two decades of teaching, is that of gadfly in the Socratic tradition at an extraordinarily successful institution, asking questions that help illuminate unexamined assumptions, prompted by a conviction that Williams is a place of unlimited possibilities for which no standard of excellence is too high. In keeping with this role, and with Gaudino's belief that genuine learning is often an uncomfortable process of confronting familiar expectations with immediate experiences, the work of the Fund, through the Board of Trustees and the Gaudino Scholars, is to:

1. Foster academic and pedagogical innovations within the curriculum, particularly those which require greater responsibility on the part of the students and in which there is, to use a description of Gaudino's, a "mixing of two purposes: the defining of subject matter and the penetration of premises and observations or participants;"
2. Encourage dialogue and critical reflection on curricular and extracurricular topics;
3. Support learning through the experience of confrontation with the self and others in and out of the classroom, on and off campus, promoting affective with intellectual change; and
4. Stimulate debate about the liberal arts enterprise and the Williams experience itself, from curricular reform to the meaning of citizenship.

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The Robert L. Gaudino Memorial Fund

Program:

Somewhere close to the center of Gaudino's educational vision the following set of interlocking propositions occurs: there is no education without intellectual and emotional change; one vital kind of change occurs when a student openly encounters what is at first foreign, another kind occurs when the familiar is made "foreign" by seeing it in a new light; this encounter can often be a painful or unsettling experience; the College should therefore actively promote a range of experiences that have the creative potential to unsettle and disturb.

Such experiences might range from a single discussion on campus to a structured program of experience and study arranged for a semester or a year off-campus. The experiences should not only unsettle and disturb but also serve as material for self-reflection that at the same time enhances one's ability to see other people more clearly. Whether on or off campus, short or long, academic or experiential, the programs supported by the Gaudino Fund should challenge both academic and life assumptions, values, perceptions. Students should, for example, not only learn about public authority or public institutions or such inarticulate values and forces as race, class, occupation, age, geographic location, education, and religion; they should also begin to learn about their own education and learning. The process of learning becomes an experience that is a subject for disciplined reflection.

By encouraging Williams students and faculty to explore new paths of understanding not already available in the existing curricular offerings, the Fund will be used primarily to foster curricular innovation. Certain aspects of the Gaudino legacy will be looked for in any such programs, e.g., an element of personal confrontation elicited by an intrusive pedagogical style; active involvement of students as partners in any learning experience; direct engagement of students with other individuals, institutions and complexities; careful preparation in advance of the unsettling experience so as to make it fully accessible to the student; intellectual rigor in the constant attempt to articulate perceived differences and complexities; follow-up discussions to integrate the new learning with the old.

The Trustees of the Fund are particularly interested in encouraging more ventures of the type organized by Professor Charles Baer in 1976-77, entitled "Williams Urban Studies Program in New York City," which involved a preparatory course in the fall term and a full semester's work in New York City during the spring term. On the other hand, the Trustees also hope that the Fund can be used in various ways to encourage faculty members to incorporate into their courses and pedagogies, where appropriate, some of the elements which were combined in Gaudino's work as a teacher.

To that end, the Fund will be used to secure released time for a Gaudino Scholar whose principal function will be to invent and support ways of keeping the Gaudino legacy alive on campus. The Scholar's role is to be a facilitator, to bring to bear on the curriculum and the extra-curriculum the Gaudino pedagogy. The Scholar will discuss with other faculty members any related projects they may wish to undertake. He or she will organize a lively program of panels, lectures, discussions and perhaps a retreat centered on "unsettling experiences" and possibly

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involving Gaudino alumni. In the spirit of Gaudino's holistic view of education, the Scholar will take a special interest in the problem of integrating curricular and extra-curricular activities and in the transformation of current campus issues (e.g., sexism, racism, housing and dining questions, military service) into occasions for genuine learning. Although supported and encouraged by the Administration, the Gaudino Scholar is expected to be an independent and critical voice, working for the good of the whole community in the mode of a Socratic gadfly.

Administration:

The Fund is administered by a group of 12 alumni who function as Trustees. A Gaudino Fund Program Committee has been set up with the following members: Professor Booth, Professor Friedrichs, and (ex officio) the Dean of the Faculty, the Dean of the College, the Chairman of the Committee on Educational Policy, the Gaudino Scholar, and the Kenan Professor. Each year the faculty members will choose several students to sit with the Committee, normally drawing on past or present members of the CEP. This Committee will recommend to the President of the College and the Trustees of the Fund a member of the faculty to serve as Gaudino Scholar. The appointment will be made for one year but with possibility of renewal. Once a Scholar has been appointed, the Committee's main function is to assist him or her in all possible ways.

At the annual meeting of the Trustees in November the Program Committee will report on activities which have taken place since the previous year. At the same meeting the Trustees will act on any proposals requiring funding.

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