

Dialogue *File-Williams*

A Newsletter Reporting on the Activities of the Robert L. Gaudino Memorial Fund

Vol. 3 Summer/Fall 1998

BACK TO THE FUTURE "WILLIAMS-IN-INDIA" AND "GAUDINO FORUMS" ARE 1997/98 HIGHLIGHTS OF ROBERT L. GAUDINO MEMORIAL FUND

In 1970, Robert Gaudino led Williams students to India to experience what he called "uncomfortable" learning. This year's Gaudino Scholar, Professor Samuel Fleischacker, launched a program that took Williams students back to India during this year's Winter Study. Closer to home, Professor Fleischacker also launched a regular series of Gaudino Forums on campus that brought students and faculty together to discuss pressing public issues. In the articles that follow, Elise Collin, Paola Gentry, Raphael Rosen and Rebecca Young look back on their time in India; and Kristina Gehrman reflects on her participation in the Gaudino Forums.

Williams-in-India: Sometimes a Bumpy Road by Elise Collin, '98

Prof. Fleischacker and I arrived at the Ahmedabad train station in the dark, searching for twenty Williams students who had preceded us in taxis and motor rickshaws. Clutching our tickets, we asked a porter, "What platform for the Shatabdi Express?"

"Shatabdi? Canceled!" he replied.

"What do you mean, canceled!" Prof. Fleischacker exclaimed, his eyes bulging slightly from their sockets. A railroad official behind a glass window slowly and politely explained the situation: "Oh yes, the Shatabdi Express is canceled. I'm sorry sir. Your tickets will be honored on the next train which may have some empty seats. Or you may wait until the next Express train tomorrow. There is nothing else I can do for you."

Shoved from the little window by an impatient crowd, Prof. Fleischacker looked at me with a touch of despair and disbelief. We



Gaudino Scholar's Report: Spring '98

My first year as Gaudino Scholar has been educational, rewarding and very busy. I have worked on three projects, and proposed two more for next year. Throughout, I have been greatly aided by the advice and encouragement of Bill Darrow and Jennifer Bloxam, as well as by the patience and hard work of my student assistant, Dan Kray, '98.

The three projects that concerned me this year were the new **Gaudino Forum**, the exploration of a long-term **Williams-in-India** program, and an attempt to continue and extend Jennifer Bloxam's wonderful initiatives to promote **Service-Learning** at Williams.

The Gaudino Forum was launched as a means by which faculty could address stu-

dents on issues of public concern, that might be close to their hearts but that they would have little opportunity to discuss in the classroom. I hoped that the Forum would help enrich the political dialogue among students, provide a place for responses to campus crises, and demonstrate to students how academics can have valuable things to say on public matters. The structure of the Forum is as follows: every Monday night, a faculty member talks for about half an hour on some controversial topic, after which he or she takes questions from the audience for an hour. Refreshments are served, and people often stand around for a while afterwards, continuing the conversation with the speaker or with

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in India...

"The basic theme of study will be transition, the movement from traditional commitments and loyalties to the institutions and incentives of an industrial society."

*—from Prof. Robert Gaudino's
Original Williams-in-India
Course Objectives*

were faced with several unsavory options: split the group among single seats in an already overbooked train, stay overnight at the train station and lose a day of our itinerary, or find alternate transportation immediately. We headed back toward the rest of the group and announced the status of our travel plans (or lack thereof), and then Prof. Fleischacker took

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1999 Robert L. Gaudino Commemorative

The fall of 1999 marks the 25th anniversary of Bob Gaudino's death. It seems fitting to use this occasion to foster lively discussions about education, especially the experiential, and the use of public space at Williams and in life. To our great delight, President Hank Payne has suggested that the Fall 1999 Convocation be themed on Professor Gaudino's work. The

Fund's trustees are in the midst of working with the College to define a formal Convocation event that will engage the interest of students and faculty. We are developing a series of events primarily for alumni to take place that same weekend. The Trustees are also planning other events for the 1999-2000 academic year. I recommend that you start organizing a trip to Williamstown so you can

be with us on September 16th, 17th & 18th, 1999 to celebrate Bob Gaudino's contribution to our education.

We welcome your input, involvement and support for the commemorative planning, and for the work of the Robert L. Gaudino Memorial Fund in general.

Dale Riehl, Gaudino Fund Chairperson

Gaudino Scholar's Report: Spring '98

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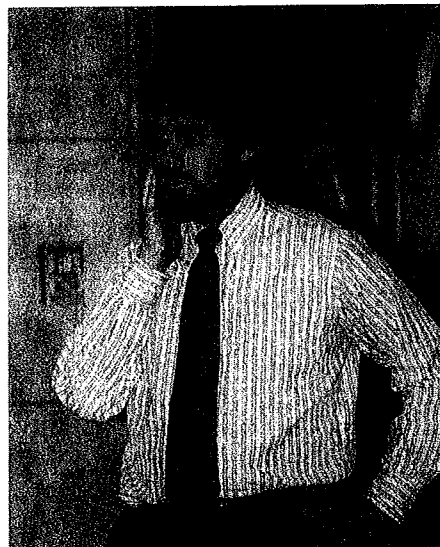
each other. Topics have included: "Morality and Higher Education," a "Critique of Identity Politics," a broad discussion of how we might improve America's public schools, a session on Williams's alcohol policy led by the Dean of the College, a session on whether the U.S. should bomb Iraq, when that seemed imminent, and three sessions that, by coincidence, have all addressed aspects of the environmental movement.

I have received a heart-warmingly positive response to this initiative, and, while it has in some ways worked out differently from what I had expected, many of those differences have brought rewards rather than disappointments. For instance: by holding the Forum every week, I thought I could enable practically every member of the faculty and student body to attend at least once. The attendance has not, in fact, brought in such a wide array of people, but it has brought in a number of the same people, both among students and among the faculty, again and again. This surprised me: I did not think people would be willing to give over many of their Monday nights to such an activity. The fact that people do come back in this way has meant that the Gaudino Forum, unexpectedly, is building a small, warm community of students and faculty interested in political discussion which, as far as I know, has not existed during my previous six years as a professor at Williams.

To take another example: because faculty members are a bit removed from the "front lines" of the political fray, I expected from the beginning that they might be able to speak more honestly and thoughtfully about public issues than can the well-known journalists and politicians who more commonly address such matters at Williams. In fact, the presentations have been rather more nuanced, more low-key than I expected. A small part of me is disappointed. I had hoped for fireworks, for flashy arguments that would reverberate across the campus. Insofar as I hoped to inspire a deeper treatment of political issues on campus, however, I am gratified: discussions at the Gaudino Forum have been consistently more open and more thought-pro-

voicing than discussions of the same issues in other public venues at Williams.

The second project I have been working on, which has occupied most of my time, is the effort to launch a Williams-in-India program. I take the Gaudino mission of promoting experience-learning to apply with particular importance to learning about the workings



Professor Samuel Fleischacker

and significance of cultures. Such learning cannot, I believe, be conducted by way of the classroom alone; yet, for all the talk about "multiculturalism," we do little at Williams to encourage students to immerse themselves in ways of life very different from their own and especially little to encourage experience of poor, non-Western, and non-Christian societies. So a regular Williams-in-India program, alongside our Williams-in-Oxford and Williams-in-Mystic programs, could fill an important need. My colleague Rachana Kamtekar and I led Winter Study trips to India this year, taking 33 students to study, respectively, "Women's Issues in Contemporary India" and "Modernist Architecture in India." The trips were preceded by a series of six lectures, entitled "The New India." The trips themselves were not ideal examples of Gaudino-esque learning — neither one made

use of homestays, for instance — but they do seem to have been of considerable educational value to the students who went on them. I was impressed by how quickly students who were originally afraid of practically everything warmed up to India; I was delighted and moved by the way in which many students developed a more respectful and much more nuanced appreciation of life in the developing world than they had when we started out.

Arranging and leading these trips taught me a great deal about the logistics of working with a group of students in India, and in addition, afforded me an opportunity to make site visits to places where Williams may consider establishing a semester-long program. Upon return, I spoke further with faculty who might participate in such a program, and have now written up my recommendations as a formal proposal to the administration. I'll let you know in the next newsletter how that proposal goes over!

Progress on the third initiative, Service-Learning, has moved rather more slowly. My role has been mostly to co-ordinate existing efforts in this area. I have met, individually and as a group, with most of the ten or so faculty members with an interest in Service-Learning, talked with the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition about how they could help Williams in this area, and, just recently, hired Deb Zucker and Kristina Gehrman, to begin putting together a computer data base about Service-Learning at Williams and in the Berkshires, so as to lower "start-up costs" for faculty who try running such a course.

The India initiative now needs to be taken over by the administration, if it is to continue at all. The Gaudino Forum, on the other hand, will continue next year, and I plan to increase my work on Service-Learning. I plan in addition two new initiatives — an "uncomfortable-learning" retreat before classes start for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and another way of encouraging cultural immersion during Winter Study — on which I will report next time. I'd be delighted to receive feedback (positive and negative) from all of you on anything I've done, omitted, or planned for the future.

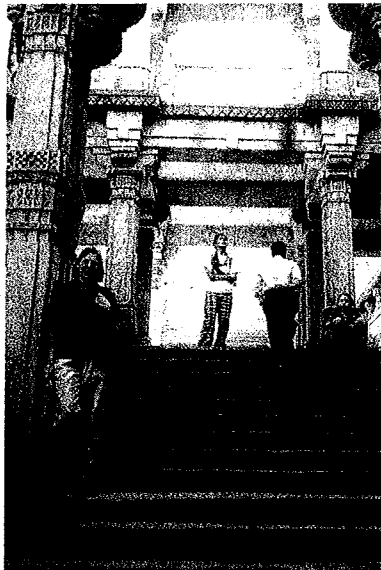
During Winter Study, thirty-three Williams students took part in a resurrected Williams-in-India program. They spent a month touring the country, in keeping with the Gaudino Fund's stated aim to "learn through contrasts — between their assumptions and their conclusions, between themselves and others of different social, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and between ancient and modern thought."

Women in India

by Paola Gentry, '98

During my junior year at Williams, I took an anthropology course which looked at a cross-cultural study of the social construction of gender. We read about gender rituals in Papua New Guinea, the supposed gender egalitarianism in Java, and the role of women in Sudan. Other courses, such as Labor Economics, Women of Color, and Anthropology 101, have all touched on the role of women in developing countries. None of the courses, however, have been able to offer me an in-depth immersion into the environment where these women live. Going through college you spend most of your time learning through discussions and reading, rarely through actually experiencing and witnessing what you are supposed to be learning.

Winter Study 1998, led by Professor Kamtekar, offered me the opportunity to learn about the Contemporary Women's Movement in India through first-hand experience. We went to India in order to immerse ourselves in issues that women deal with day-to-day.



Before we left for India, we read about the lack of medical facilities, the distances that had to be walked in order to get water each day, the barriers the caste system created, dowry deaths, domestic abuse, sexual abuse

and violence, lack of education, etc. While in India, we were able to witness first-hand each of these issues and the ways that women responded to them. In the Banda District of Uttar Pradesh, we visited a village and saw a young child who had severe burns covering her right leg. There was neither medicine nor a doctor on hand to treat her.

While sitting and discussing village issues with a group of women, we observed another group of women sitting outside of our circle, refusing to sit with us or eat food and drink water from the dishes that lower caste women had touched. While in Delhi, we read the paper and saw reports of rape and other violence, and met with people who were trying to address these issues. We were forced to confront what was occurring around us. We could not dismiss what was surrounding us, unlike what can be done so many times when you are simply reading and discussing a topic. Our trip to India allowed us to experience the events we read about so many times as they unfolded before our eyes.



A Different Point of View

by Raphael Rosen, '00

Towards the end of our first week in India, we drove two hours across dry scrub land in hired jeeps to a village in the Banda region of Uttar Pradesh, an extremely rural and impoverished state in India's upper north-east shoulder. There were no roads in the area where we went; instead, we followed the worn tracks of previous excursions by government officials and mechanics, and possibly other people like us. We went to the village to talk with women who had formed a union that gave out loans at relatively low interest rates to other village women who wanted to start their own businesses. We sat on mats on the ground of a courtyard, which had been decorated with lines of colored chalk, between a man's house and a school, and talked with the women about their union.

When we had finished, our group met with two women handpump mechanics who had come to the village on a maintenance call. They explained what they were doing, and generously allowed us to help them lower a pipe into the ground. Their training and operations are independent from the Indian government, meaning that broken handpumps can be repaired much faster than before. It used to be that government mechanics were the only people trained in the necessary skills, and they normally arrived at the scene and finished the job in a matter of months, compared to the few weeks it took these women.

Later that same week, we visited a women's school where the students learn basic facts about the Earth (that its rotation produces seasons, for instance) and about

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Williams-in-India: Sometimes A Bumpy Road

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off into the crowd. He reappeared briefly, took three of the group with him, and then disappeared again. It seemed that he was hot on the trail of a bus.

An hour later, we were loading ourselves and our luggage on what, for all intents and purposes, was a perfectly normal looking bus. Everything was coming up roses. We could sleep on the bus; we wouldn't lose any time; and there was a stand selling masala omelets and toast for a quick snack before the ride. We piled as much luggage as possible on the top of the bus, smashed the rest between empty seats in the back and settled into our luxury coach with a collective sigh of relief.

It wasn't until we got out of Ahmedabad and onto the open road that those of us in the rear of the bus began to feel as if we were in a wind tunnel. One of the back windows was missing, and as the vehicle accelerated, the cold night air was forced inside at high speed. When one of our group who speaks Gujarati inquired about possibly patching the hole, lest we all freeze solid, he was informed that the previous evening, as the bus was going through the mountains on its way to Ahmedabad, it had been attacked by bandits lying in ambush on either side of the narrow road. The bus had escaped, but the bandits had

managed to shatter the back window. Tonight, they reassured us, we would be accompanied by a police escort, in case the criminals were lying in wait again. Oh, and there was nothing they could do about the window.

Amish, our Gujarati-speaker, listened to



this account with numerous exclamations and facial expressions of disbelief. He recounted it to us in pretty much the same way, and a wave of panic spread through the group. But after several minutes of loud talking and a lot of people saying things like, "Oh my God! Bandits?!", and "We're all going to die, aren't we?", a few of our more avid cinema fans

decided to calm our nerves by playing a little relaxing music. The soundtrack for *Dil ta Pagil Hai*, the latest Bollywood smash, was soon blaring relentlessly from the speakers directly above my head.

After several hours of being frozen, bounced, and afraid of road-side marauders, the bus pulled off the road, into what appeared to be a small, run down truck-stop. Our driver disembarked and was seen standing with several other men around an open fire, smoking bidis (Indian cigarettes) and drinking chat (a popular Indian beverage). We waited for what seemed forever. It was around one or two in the morning. We were cold, exhausted, and disoriented, and none of us knew why the bus wasn't moving.

Finally, the engine roared to life and we pulled back onto the road. We were entering bandit country, and had been waiting for a convoy of vehicles and a police escort. I looked behind us as we slowly ascended the



Prof. Fleischacker with students

India . . .



mountains, black against a moonless sky. The descending switchbacks were illuminated by the headlights of our convoy — a white snake undulating toward us. We were well protected in this line of vehicles, but I could not stop myself from periodically scanning the horizon.

I stayed awake until the sun rose, then I must have nodded off. When I opened my eyes next, it was 5 am and we were disembarking. The bandits were behind us, our convoy was gone, and the cool morning was warmer than the inside of the bus had been. We were in a small town whose shops were closed, its empty streets interrupted only by the movement of a rooster scratching at the dirt and an occasional stray goat. I thought to myself that in several hours we would all be eating breakfast or sleeping in the rooms of the hostel we had reserved. But hadn't we also reserved our tickets on the Shatabdi Express?...

In this piece, Kristina Gehrman writes about her participation in the weekly Gaudino Forums, created by Professor Fleischacker, which brought together students and faculty to discuss important public issues.

Gaudino Forum: A Reflection

by Kristina Gehrman, '00

The Gaudino Forum has been the most intellectually satisfying aspect of my life this year. It offers a reliable way to meet with people who are certain to be ready for argument and critical discussion. Before I started college, I thought that campus life would be defined by the type of interaction that so uniquely characterizes the Gaudino Forum. I imagined people constantly engaged in lively conversation, living in a perpetual state of heightened intellectual activity, and ceaselessly measuring their own opinions against other people's convictions in a tireless search for truth. Although, of course, this type of mental combat goes on in many ways at Williams, that sort of vital debate is a more sporadic and elusive experience than I imagined.

The Forum regularly hosts that kind of discussion because it provides an opportunity to interact with people who hold consistently diverse opinions and who share a common love of intellectual exchange. This combination brings together the best intellectual aspects of classroom and dormitory interaction. With the wide range of ages, moral beliefs, and levels of education represented by those who attend, the Forum combines the intensity of voluntary social discussion with a breadth of perspective and experience that doesn't occur as frequently among friends. It combines the informality of a social situation

and the absence of a syllabus with the expertise and enthusiasm of a faculty speaker.

In the Spring semester, I chose my classes because of the professors who participate in the Gaudino Forum. There is no comparable extracurricular opportunity for students to get to know different faculty members and their individual areas of expertise and interest. My father, who graduated from Williams in 1967, speaks lovingly of Professor Gaudino as a wise, skillful teacher who, in addition to conveying an understanding of the subject matter, led his students subtly and unflinchingly

to a better understanding of their own prejudices and unexamined judgements. The Gaudino Forum, which invariably brings together such different and earnest beliefs on a wide variety of issues, accomplishes something very similar for me.

The scholars who speak are clearly passionate about their topics and have invested extensive time and thought in them. The speeches and discussions inevitably reveal perspectives contrary to my own as rational possibilities, which forces me to question the basis of my prejudices and assumptions.



Gaudino Forum on Experiential Education, April '98

"The Gaudino Forum is a valuable public service that provides an opportunity to engage issues of relevance to the Williams community as members of the international community, the nation, the town and the college."

—The Williams Record

Letter from India

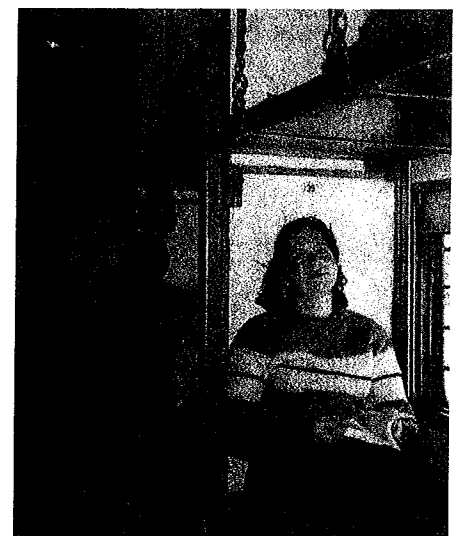
by Rebecca Young, '00

How can a trip such as this Winter Study visit to India add or detract from a Williams experience? To begin with, it seems Winter Study trips that are off-campus can, without failure, add to a Williams education in this respect: one really sees the discrepancies, distances, gaps, and at times the marriage between theory and practice; between ideas and how those ideas manifest themselves in reality. Mainly what this issue speaks to is how truly difficult and wonderful — and sometimes painful — it is to see theories and ideas which we study emerge in a real world situation, a world which is very foreign from the one which we are accustomed to and comfortable with.

It is possible to fill this need for "real world" examples to complement our academic experience at Williams during Winter Study, and especially through classes which are conducted outside our country. The type of valuable lesson that I have been describing emerged during my Modern Architecture in India class, especially at moments when the social situations in which we were placed derailed our planned schedule.

Events and occurrences that were out of our control proved themselves more powerful than my preconceived notions about what I would experience. That our very ability to plan (train trips, schedules, discussions, etc.)

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A Different Point of View

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women's health issues. After class, they sang songs about school for us, after demonstrating swing dancing.

Many times during the trip we were asked about the conditions in the United States. This was an important difference between going to India and reading about going to India; it put us (at least me, for certain) in our place. It forced us to look at the country we had come from and examine it from the perspective of a person living in the Third World who literally had never heard of the United States before meeting us. Being questioned as if we were the ones being studied helped us get past a National Geographic "Look, there goes a native!" mentality.



Dialogue On-Line

COMING SOON: Visit our new website at www.williams.edu/admin-depts/Gaudino-fund for more information on all activities concerning the Gaudino Memorial Fund.

Letter from India

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was made more difficult, and experienced in a whole new way, provided humility which allowed for greater understanding on how societies can operate — and operate well. These moments when basic things could no longer be understood in this new context, forced me to realize again how there exists no single, absolute way of governing. Conversely, at the moments when I expected things to be so different — particularly regarding simple conversations with Indian people — my original notions were destroyed, and I could only see how familiar some social conventions were.

These central and priceless feelings that I experienced in India force me today to challenge assumptions and beliefs that are easy for me to hold. How can I better treat the use of theory so it does not hinder or exist outside of the way the world lives, but instead provides a closer relationship between ideas and their practice? The vast discrepancy between reality and academics is both frightening and eye-opening, yet it is a crucial step which cannot be forgotten.

Letters to the Editor

Dialogue welcomes input from our readers. If you have any comments, questions, or something you would like us to report on, please send us a letter at the address noted below.



Gaudino trustees participating in the Nov. 1997 Gaudino Memorial Fund meeting

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Dialogue

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