Gaudino Fund Goes Global

International "Winter Study" Programs are 1998/99 Highlights

September Convocation Honors Robert Gaudino

This year, Gaudino Scholar Samuel Fleischacker continued to create and direct numerous innovative programs, all of which emphasized some aspect of "uncomfortable learning." During Winter Study, Williams students traveled to such diverse, non-western locations as Nepal, South Africa and Fiji. This edition of Dialogue contains articles by three of them: Kevin Russell, who traveled to rural South Africa, and Cathy Nicholson and Megan Voeller, both of whom lived a month in Nepal. Another student article, by Jon Foreman, describes a powerful personal transformation that occurred during a retreat organized by Professor Fleischacker the week before the 1998/99 school year began.

Looking ahead, the editors of Dialogue wish to note that Robert Gaudino's life and work will be commemorated during the upcoming Convocation weekend, which takes place September 17-18. The occasion—which involves Williams alumni, students and faculty—occurs only two months short of the 25th anniversary of Professor Gaudino's death.

Life and Death in South Africa

by Kevin Russell, '00

Everything that happens in KwaZulu-Natal is an adventure. Even getting there, Jabu, my companion who worked for a program in South Africa that set up the home stay in the Zulu village of Mahlabatini, and I took a six hour bus ride to Durban, and then scrunched into one of the infamous minibus taxis. There were about ten seats. But we had at least fifteen people. It wouldn't have been that bad for a twenty minute drive on a highway between towns, but four hours, twelve almost-accidents, and 1,062 potholes later, I was feeling pretty beat. We then hitched a ride from a car that had two working gears—one of about five cars in Mahlabatini—and headed deep into the hills on some windy dirt roads.

About fifteen hours after we left Johannesburg, we arrived at the five mud-walled, thatch-roofed huts inside a wooden fence that made up the homes of three generations of the Mbatha family. They sat me down and each of the twenty-something members of the family greeted me with a slight bow and two-handed handshake. I was now truly "Encountering the Other," as the title of my Winter Study funded by the Gaudino Fund declared.

Jabu spoke English and Zulu, and served as a translator, but I could communicate very little with most of the family. This gave me a chance to think about issues of interpretation and translation that were behind my original project proposal, which emanated from Prof Fleischacker's class on conceptual relativism. The cultural differences were deep, and I tried to sort out the different factors in terms of lin-

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This year's Gaudino activities began before the school year did, with a two-day retreat for rising sophomores and juniors, to ponder how their Williams education fit in with their overall purposes in life. With the help of Wanda Lee in the Dean's Office, I put together a program of discussions surrounding 8 hours of silent meditation at a camp site in the southern Berkshires. Ten students came, and seemed very pleased with the results. Several reported afterwards that the experience helped them make specific changes in their curricular planning. The Dean's Office has taken over the event, which will be run next year by (former Gaudino Scholar) Bill Darrow, in the Religion Department. With better advertising than we had this year, and the removal of this year's registration fee, we expect a higher attendance.

The other major new initiative this year was a travel Winter Study, which also met with a small but intense response among students. The novelist Paul Park, who lives in town, helped me organize a program in which five students went off on their own to countries they had never visited before. (Three went to the same country—Nepal—but split up for most of their time there.) All five were supposed to have taken courses on cross-cultural encounters, before they left, and were asked to devise a project in which they examined how useful, if useful at all, the theories they (Continued on page 2)
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had read were to them in real life. One student spent two weeks in a Zulu village in South Africa, another tried to make a video documentary in the streets of Kathmandu, while a third tested theories of language-acquisition she had studied in a linguistics class on her own attempt to learn Nepali.

Upon returning, the five students gathered with some of the professors who had taught them, to discuss their experiences. In practically all cases, the projects did not work out as expected; this failure was itself the most educational aspect of the trip for most of the students. All of them also said that spending long periods of time on their own, without any member of their home culture to talk to, was very painful as well as extremely valuable. Paul Park and Gaudino-Scholar designate Mark Reinhardt were pleased enough with the results of the program to want to repeat it. The difficulties involved do, however, make it unlikely that it will draw a substantially larger group in the future.

Aside from these two projects, I have continued to run the Gaudino Forum, with the help of Mark Reinhardt, who led it every other week, and my student assistant, Kristina Gehman, who arranged topics with many of the speakers and handled all the publicity (you will note that I have learned to delegate this year!). The Forum has continued to draw a regular crowd of 30 to 40 people, and on occasion—when discussing homophobia on campus or the bombing of Kosovo—has drawn over 100. The Forum is also expected to continue next year, and one student told me recently that she and her friends are planning their schedules so as to keep Monday evenings open for the event. It has been a pleasure to share this project with Professor Reinhardt, and our working together should provide some continuity between our respective terms in the Scholar's position.

As noted in Prof. Fleischacker's Scholar's Report, one of his main activities last year was organizing a two-day retreat for Williams students. The purpose was for the students to examine the meaning of their own lives—and the role played by a Williams education. For sophomore Jon Foreman, the experience was a transforming one, as he describes below.

Living Just One Life
by Jon Foreman '01

When I left for Professor Sam Fleischacker's "Living Just One Life" retreat in September, I was already frustrated with philosophy. Questions about truth, conceptual schemes, and mereological sums were no longer interesting.

Instead of philosophical works, I turned my attention to Greek tragedy and historical Jesus research: a career in philosophy seemed unlikely, although I planned to complete the major. "Living Just One Life" changed that.

It wasn't necessarily the location, the film, or the participants: it was the questions. The retreat reminded me of the only really important question for philosophers: 'how should I live my life?' This was not about principles of charity and interpretation: this was Socrates facing the hemlock, stoic wisdom, existentialism and authenticity. "Living Just One Life" pulled me out the 'fallen-ness' of philosophy, set me to engage the more interesting questions about man, God and being.

Interestingly, "Living Just One Life" wasn't about life at all: it was about death. Professor Fleischacker reminded us that we have just one death to die, and that this very death is the condition for the possibility of a rich and profound life. In the poetic act of making a meaningful existence in the face of and through death, we learn what it is to be truly human.

Now I'm looking at graduate schools in philosophy. My debt is great.

Finally, I have put effort into a few more exploratory projects:

1) a small brochure to be sent to all professors who want to teach a travel Winter Study course (produced together with the Dean's Office).

2) an attempt—failed, I think—to stir up interest in Community Improvement.

3) an attempt to start a student-run investigative newspaper at Williams, which dwindled, by the end of the year, into a one-time workshop on investigative journalism for the editors of the Williams Record, and other interested students, led by a New York Times reporter.

4) a small experiment in service-learning in my own Fall class, "Authority and Freedom."

5) the hiring of Professor Jean Bacon in the Sociology Department, an expert on service-learning, to write a full report on what kinds of service-learning are going on across the College and how they can be better co-ordinated and encouraged.

I leave Williams at the end of this year. One of the things I will miss is the opportunity for experiment that the Gaudino Fund represents. I am afraid that I have learned, as the Scholar, that the administrative efforts required to run all these programs are not the kind of work I enjoy most. But I have also been immensely pleased with the results of many of the projects, and grateful to have had the chance to direct them. The existence of the Fund represents all that is best about Williams; the openness and helpfulness of its Trustees has been just wonderful. And I salute and thank all of them, and all those contributing to the Fund, for a most unusual, noble, and socially valuable way of commemorating a beloved teacher.

Convocation Events

During Convocation weekend, the Fund and the College are collaborating on a series of interrelated events for alumni, students and faculty to honor Robert Gaudino.

Weekend highlights, which focus on the theme of "uncomfortable learning," will include the following:

Friday (Sept. 17)—During the morning, alumni can take part in a three-part Gaudinoesque seminar that will take place at Mt. Hope Farm. The experience will focus on generating thought-provoking conversation around important issues of moral and political philosophy. During the afternoon, the traditional Convocation seminar will be held, led by Marc Edmundson, an English professor at the Univ. of Virginia. Dr. Edmundson will be joined by two other panelists, as well as by Convocation speaker, Dr. Preston Washington '76, Pres./CEO of Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement.

Saturday (Sept. 18)—Convocation will be held in the morning. It will feature a speech by Dr. Washington on the subject of "uncomfortable learning." On Saturday afternoon, all returning alumni are invited to participate in our Fall trustee meeting.
Capturing Nepal on Video
by Megan Voeller

When I read the course description for "Encountering the Cultural Other," a Gaudino-sponsored Winter Study course, it immediately struck me that I wanted to examine the overall idea of 'otherness'; not necessarily the differences and similarities of any one aspect of a foreign culture.

Now the opportunity presented itself to collect some first-hand images of another culture—Nepal—and compare them to the images I had seen before arriving. I thought a videocamera would be the most objective way to present these images. I also thought that video was the most insidious way of presenting a certain image of a culture because it seems so unsatisfactorily objective. Video, when properly treated, would be the most accurate presentation of images of another culture.

As I dodged unkempt children, Rickshaw drivers, and sacred cows in the narrow streets of Kathmandu, I thought what a gross oversimplification this had turned out to be. Not only was I overcome by the impossibility of making anything in the busting city stand still, but even more by the inadequacy of a single medium to communicate the sensory overload I was experiencing. I did, however, discover many things that I had not expected, perhaps an indication of my inexperience with travel in the third-world, but nonetheless indicative of the expectations fostered by images of remote places and peoples.

In Kathmandu, there were plenty of tourists, which I had not anticipated. It seemed the residents were thoroughly accustomed to these foreigners, who would often pass through the city in a mere two or three days on their way to a trek in the Himalayas or coming from a tour of India. Everyone I met was surprised to discover that I was staying for a month. After a couple of weeks, I, too, tolerated the other tourists with a kind of wry exasperation. Often on forays with my video camera, I would stumble into several other foreigners doing the same thing.

When I returned to Williamstown and reviewed my video footage, I understood why objectivity was not the only priority (if one at all) of most documentaries. In attempting to avoid the kind of romanticizing and sometimes blatantly racist or imperialist views that color representations of other cultures, I had completely avoided telling any kind of story about Nepal. The images I had gathered were often confusing, having been shot in moving crowds or from any place I could stop. One of the lessons that was hardest for me to learn was that the moments that I would like to have captured never happened when I was pointing the video camera, which instantly made me the center of attention. In spite of bringing a very small (8mm) camera and (obviously) having no crew, as a documentary team would, I attracted attention wherever I went. More important, feelings of guilt that I had about invading another person's privacy were very difficult to overcome.

My encounters often confirmed something I had not thought would be so widespread: almost anyone on the street seemed to be conscious of the great difference in standards of living between Nepal and Europe or North America and of the profit of tourism. I felt that street urchins could probably write better papers about the importance of the exportation of images than I could. Perhaps the most profound revelation of my entire time in Nepal was that the topic I was researching was already excruciatingly obvious to the rest of the population of Kathmandu.

Political Science Professor Mark Reinhardt will be taking over where Professor Fleischacker left off as Gaudino Scholar. The following is a profile of Professor Reinhardt prepared by Charleyne Hildebrandt, a Gaudino Fund trustee.

I Met with Mark Reinhardt
by Charleyne Hildebrandt

I met with Mark Reinhardt on that type of grim February day which brands itself upon the memories of all of us who have chosen to spend part of our lives in Williamstown. Wending my way through slety, mushy grayness and into the bewildering labyrinth of Stetson Hall, I pondered what it is that draws me to this peculiar corner of the wilderness.

However, my thoughts scattered as I became pleasantly engaged in eavesdropping on a type of conversation that I have encountered all too rarely since graduating. Eager, articulate voices offered a compelling debate on topics such as the nature of good, and the meaning of justice and freedom. Shameless sleuthing revealed that the sounds of this debate were emanating from the office of our new Gaudino Scholar, and that the group consisted not only of current students, but also of students long-graduated who found a discussion with Reinhardt to be a necessary part of their visit to Williams. I had often heard, while attending Williams, that Mark Reinhardt was notable for his open, engaging manner, and knew that he was a very popular and respected professor. It was a pleasure, therefore, to finally witness his rapport with students first hand. My mind finally ceased bemoaning the lunacy that would lure one to western Massachusetts in the dead of winter. Instead, I found myself remembering the excitement of learning and the thrill of a heated debate which characterizes Williams at its best, and which exemplifies Gaudino's style of education.

Mark Reinhardt assumes the position of Gaudino scholar with a unique understanding of Gaudino's legacy. He has long been involved with the Gaudino Forums, the weekly political debates created by Sam Fleischacker to address a wide range of political concerns. Reinhardt noted that their frequency has been limited not by a lack of attendees, but rather by a shortage of speakers to fill the demand that has been created for thoughtful, relevant political debate. Reinhardt plans to continue facilitating the Gaudino Forums, and remarked that one duty the Gaudino Scholar should embrace is that of pushing political involvement and awareness. He hopes to address the lack of a willingness to become involved that often seems to characterize Williams students. One of the challenges he anticipates is continuing the work that Fleischacker began without replicating what has already been done, but also without rejecting extant ideas and programs in the sole interest of trying something new.

When we met, Reinhardt was still reflecting upon specific paths he wished to pursue in his tenure as Gaudino Scholar. Overall, he is intent upon exploring Gaudino's hallmark philosophy—eliminating the gap between the life of the intellect and experience of the individual through exposing students to uncomfortable learning situations. While he anticipates that much of the learning he envisions will be located abroad, he plans to keep part of his focus on campus life through exploring issues such as class and the culture of carecrism at Williams.
A Diary from Nepal
by Cathy Nicholson

Dec. 26, 1998:
Less than a week now until I get on a plane bound for Kathmandu, Nepal. Aside from skimming my brand-new copy of Nepal: The Rough Guide and investing in several layers of fleece clothing, I am completely unprepared—I haven't even thought about what to pack, much less actually begun packing. Part of my procrastination is probably due to nervousness. Some of it is definitely due to my usual compulsion to make my parents nervous. But most of it is due to the fact that, Rough Guide notwithstanding, I literally cannot imagine what to expect from the month ahead. Many people have told me that this is the sort of experience you can't prepare for; you just have to do it. I know they advice a little too literally.

Dec. 31, 1998:
I'm sitting in the lobby of National Airport in Washington, D.C. A number of questions have suddenly occurred to me: Will my plane crash? Will I be cold? Does Anju, who will be my companion for the month, speak any English? Did I pack too much? Too little? I wish everyone whom I tell about my plans for the next month would stop saying, "You're so brave!" It's making me nervous.

Jan. 2, 1999:
The Kathmandu airport. Nepali customs consists of a metal detector and a large sign. The metal detector beeps loudly every time someone gets near it; the guard just shrugs and waves people through. The sign warns all incoming travelers that visitors to Nepal may bring in only "One binocular. One camera. One tricycle. One perambulator." Fortunately, I have left my tricycles and perambulators at home.

Jan. 4, 1999:
Yesterday was unbelievable—our first day in Kathmandu. Somehow, and I know this is silly, I didn't expect it all to be so different, so startling and completely foreign. The streets are overwhelming, absolutely crammed with vendors, people, dogs, cars, rickshaws, bicycles, motorcycles, mopeds, buses and the occasional cow. I'm shocked to see so many things that seem to my mind almost too stereotypically "foreign" to be true: an elephant being led through the intersection outside of our hotel; the small shrines coated in rice, blood, flower petals, and chicken feathers that stand outside of most doorways; the bundles of incense burning on fences and signposts; the temples rising in the morning mist in Durbar Square. I think that the ideas of global unity that have been so carefully bred in me from my childhood—the whole "global village," "it's a small world after all" mentality—have somehow kept me from realizing that much of the world is extremely unlike the world I know.

Jan. 7, 1999:
We located Krishna, despite the fact that the directions were unreliable and a number of landmark businesses had changed location or gone out of business. Becky and I are now staying with Krishna, his wife, Sita, and their five children. Already I have learned some Nepali—how to say "I am not hungry, thank you." This sentence is my sole defense against the threat posed by Sita, who seems determined to feed Becky and me until we explode. I had planned to be in the village by now, but Krishna thinks I'm crazy to want to spend time there. They are refusing to let me travel until the end of the week. They are convinced that I will hate the food, that I will be bored silly because no one will speak English, and that their grandmother will be drunk the entire time I am there. It is hard for me to explain that I want to spend time in a place where no one speaks my language so that I can test philosophical notions about the failure of language—philosophy doesn't translate very well. I'm trying to be flexible.

Jan. 8, 1999:
It has been over a week since I have heard the name "Monica Lewinsky." I like Nepal.

Jan. 10, 1999:
I have entered another world— I feel like I'm in a museum exhibit. Yesterday Krishna's seventeen-year-old daughter, Anju, and I hiked out to spend ten days with Anju's grandmother in Chitlang village. Ten days was the longest period of time I could convince Krishna to let me stay with his mother. Chitlang is beautiful but shockingly primitive. We live in a mud-walled house with clay floors and a thatched roof, cook over open fires, pump water from a communal well, and sleep on quilts laid over wooden planks. Tomorrow, we bathe! I have never looked so forward to a bath in my life.

Jan. 12, 1999:
I am becoming accustomed to my new role as an "object of curiosity." With my pale skin, my short hair, and my pants and sneakers, I am the strangest-looking girl this village has ever seen. As I write this two children are standing two feet from me, staring silently at my face. I attracted an audience of (Continued on page 6)
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guistic, conceptual, economic and other differences. From this I could examine which type of relativist arguments made sense, if any. Although I do think it is very valuable for philosophers to do this type of research, and I'm sure my experience will continue to inform my thinking in philosophy, I was affected and rewarded much more deeply in non-academic ways. I was not thinking about Donald Davidson's essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" during most of the more exciting events that I experienced. It is simply hard to see philosophy as important in such an environment.

What I experienced ranged from walking into the outhouse only to be greeted by a spider that was the size of my hand, to being the only white man ever to play soccer for the town of Mahlabatini, to standing outside of a political meeting of the Inkatha Freedom Party and having someone accuse me of being a spy for the white people. There is no way I could recount half of what I experienced, but I will give you an example of the worst and then the best of KwaZulu-Natal.

MKulu, who was the grandfather, was also the community leader, the Induna. One morning a woman came running to the house in a hysterical state, to talk to him. Apparently someone had burned down her house. That was terrible, I thought, but it turned out to be only part of one of the most unfortunate examples of what is way too common in violent parts of the world. The reason the house was burned down was because a man who was being chased by a mob as part of an ongoing dispute, had tried to hide in the house. 'Ongoing dispute' in this case refers to a series of murders and paybacks that is probably related to the vengeful mentality that fuels much of the gang violence here in the US. Throughout the time I was in South Africa, I got the sense that having a gun and turning to violence seemed to give people who had very few economic and educational options a sense of control. In this case, the mob was armed with AK 47s and handguns, and so was the man being chased, who was the third of a group of three; all eventually would be gunned down. We saw the police arrive at the scene about 6 hours after it occurred, a clear indication of the way disputes out in the country are treated by the public officials, who prefer to stay in the more modern town of Ulundi, 50 km away. There is no police station in Mahlabatini, but there are a lot of guns. This does not mean that it is a completely lawless town. In fact MKulu had a very good reputation for settling differences in the town. But it does mean that if a situation gets out of hand, the consequences are going to be far graver than what we might expect here in Williamstown.

On the positive side was an event that would be the basis for why I want to someday return to Mahlabatini. On the last night I was there, I gave the family presents—cookies and sweets for the youngest ones, a soccer ball for the slightly older, and money and beer for the oldest. And, spontaneously, there was an outpouring of dancing, drumming and singing that was one of the most beautiful displays of traditional culture that I had ever seen. The people gave me a traditional Zulu warrior dress, and made me make a fool of myself by dancing with them. I learned "gida", the traditional dance that exudes a pride that makes it easy to understand how "Zulu" could mean people of Heaven. It was obvious that in those moments of shared celebration, the villagers were very happy to be where they were with all of their family. This should not be cited as a way to deny that there are problems in Mahlabatini, in terms of infrastructure and education, which need to be addressed. But it is the lasting impression of the people that I will have and that I want to give to you. If you go to KwaZulu-Natal, be careful. But you will be sure to find many welcoming people.
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five villagers and two cows when I washed my hair in the front yard. Worst of all, yesterday, the little girl next door was staring at me so hard that she toppled over the stone wall dividing our yards and fell head-first into our woodpile.

Jan. 16, 1999:
I am learning to cook Nepali-style. I made dinner last night. Unfortunately, the dal was crunchy and the cauli-aloo was mushy, when it should have been the other way around. Anju and her grandmother were ridiculously complimentary of my efforts.

Jan. 18, 1999:
Back to Kathmandu, where I am relieved to have the company of fellow native English-speakers once more. I had begun to talk to myself with alarming frequency.

Jan. 21, 1999:
I have been wearing the same two pairs of pants day and night since I arrived in Nepal. I don't know how I will explain to people at home how one of the best, most exhilarating, most wonderful experiences of my life could have also been so completely unbearable at times. It's not that I haven't loved every minute of my stay in Nepal. It's just that I really want a hot shower and a turkey sandwich.

Jan. 24, 1999:
Becky, Megan, and I are devoting our last days in Nepal to thoroughly touristy activities: shopping, a bus trip to Pokhara, sightseeing. It is a huge relief to be on my own and not to be a houseguest for a change. I am incredibly glad and grateful to have had the opportunity to live with Krishna's family in Kathmandu and in the village, though. I especially loved getting to know Anju. It is amazing how different and similar our experiences as teenage girls have been. Her views on life, on her status as a woman in Nepalese society, on her own possible marriage, and on her place in the world as a Nepali citizen fascinated me. I am ashamed to realize how much she knows of American culture, whereas I and most Americans are almost completely ignorant of her culture. We are the ones who are losing out.

Jan. 28, 1999:
It's over—it has been the longest and the shortest month of my life. There have been weeks that felt like a single day and hours that seemed to stretch out over years. But now we are going home. We had a final dinner with Krishna and his family last night and said our good-byes. Right now I'm too overwhelmed and exhausted to feel anything but relief, and I don't yet have a sense of what exactly I "got out of" this month in Nepal. I do know that I've learned that much of what I take for granted about my world—flush toilets, traffic lights, ovens and refrigerators, pajamas, hot showers—is not part of the experiences of the rest of the world. Despite all of the advances in telecommunications, despite the globalization of the economy, despite Coca-Cola commercials attesting to the sameness of people everywhere, the world is still a very big place, and my experience of it tells only a tiny part of the full story. It is so strange to think that while I am back at Williams, attending classes and going to the dining halls, taking hot showers and sleeping in my bed, life also goes on halfway around the world in Chitlang village, where the school is one room housing over a hundred children, rice and lentils are prepared over open fires twice a day, every day, and showers and mattresses are unknown quantities. I don't know quite yet what to do with my newly unsettled perception of the world.

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, or e-mail TheRiehlCompany@com­puserve.com.

The Trustees

Ara Asadourian (asad@slc.com);
Navjot Bul (nbul@min.z.com);
Amy Baughcum (abaughcum@chmcc.org);
Ollie Beaver (olgie_r_beaver@williams.edu);
Jennifer Bloxam (mary_jennifer.bloxam@williams.edu);
David Booth (booth08@ibm.net);
William Darrow (william.r.darrow@williams.edu);
Gordon Earle (gordon.earle@worldnet.att.net);
Devonya Havis (havis@bc.edu);
Robert Herzog (73161.457@compuserve.com);
Charleyne Hildebrandt (chuck_5@hotmail.com);
Marty Linsky (marty@pipeline.com);
Richard Metzger (rmetzger@aol.com);
Paul Peterson (ppeterson@iso-ne.com);
Robin Powell (rpowell@bbk.com);
Dale Riehl (TheRiehlCompany@com­puserve.com).

Dialogue
The Gaudino Fund
PO Box 677
Williamstown, MA
01267-0677