Spring 2015 Gaudino Fund Newsletter

Jeff Thaler <jeffrey.thaler@maine.edu>  
Reply-To: Jeff Thaler <jeffrey.thaler@maine.edu>  
To: GAUDINO-ALUMNI-L@williams.edu

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The Gaudino Fund of Williams College

Reflections on...

THREE YEARS OF DANGEROUS LEARNING

On the day that the U.S. military launched Operation Iraqi Freedom, Magnus Bernhardsson signed his contract to teach Middle Eastern history at Williams. As one of four U.S. based scholars on Iraq at the time, Bernhardsson had an opportunity and responsibility rarely given to

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academics – to teach history as it unfolds on the global stage. Dangerous conversations about
the war and Iraqi people were taking place on and off campus, encouraging Bernhardsson to use
his courses as a platform to challenge students’ assumptions about the Middle East, Islam and
the ‘other’. Bernhardsson continued this work, during his three years (2011-2014) as Gaudino
Scholar, where he set out to confuse and complicate the ground upon which many of our beliefs
stand.

Last Spring, in a question-and-answer session with Gaudino Fund board members Barbara
Bradley Hagerty’ 81, Paul Lieberman’ 71 and Jeff Thaler’ 74, Bernhardsson reflected on how his
time at Williams has intertwined with the legacy of Robert Gaudino.

Watch Magnus Bernhardsson reflect on three years of dangerous learning

...DANGEROUS IDEAS

“When I was tapped to be a Gaudino Scholar it was right when the Arab
Spring was in its early days and I was very inspired and taken in awe by
the revolutionaries in Egypt and elsewhere who at great risk to
themselves, were trying to strive for a better society by overthrowing
their dictators. And they sort of put themselves at risk and in danger in
order to do so. So I thought, “To what extent can we do something
similar here, and what kind of ideas are dangerous to us?” Bernhardsson,
2014

Inspired by the civic resistance and uprisings in the Middle East, Bernhardsson used his tenure
as Gaudino Scholar to sponsor and initiate courses, learning programs and campus-wide
conversations that dared to challenge convention and the status quo in the Williams community.

What follows are some of the highlights from programs during his last year as Gaudino Scholar
(2014).

... DANGEROUS STUDENTS

Last year, two of Bernhardsson’s former students returned to campus to share with the Williams
community the dangerous work they’ve been doing in the far corners of the world.

Dangerous Games: Talk with Nick Pugliese, ’12
Nick Pugliese, graduated from Williams in 2012 with degrees in Political Science and Philosophy. He moved to Kabul, Afghanistan to work for a telecommunications company, yet found his experience as an American expat stifling. He was restricted from interacting with local Afghans because it was considered too dangerous for Americans to leave the U.S. compound. Once his work contract ended, Pugliese extended his stay in Kabul for six months, renting an apartment outside the compound and playing soccer with local Afghans. This resulted in Pugliese being signed to Afghanistan’s national soccer team.

Pugliese made a documentary, ‘Faraway Goal’, about his friendship with Afghan soccer players, which he shared with the Williams community during his campus talk.

Bernhardsson believes that Pugliese teaches us an important lesson on how we can build relationships with people different from us – ‘the other’:

“It was not risk-free for sure. While he was living there he took precautions to make sure that he would not over-expose himself to risk. So he was not that foolish. But it was also this notion that he did not want to be somebody who’s going somewhere to teach ‘the locals’ something, this kind of approach and attitude to another place or another culture or another people. He wanted to meet people sort of just as an equal and to play with them, working together on a common goal. That would be sort of the approach that he had to strive more towards, one of mutual respect. I saw this as being sort of symbolic of a more healthy attitude and approach of how we can come to ‘the other’.” Bernhardsson, 2014
Nick Pugliese’s story was also featured in the Berkshire Eagle and Willinet

Watch Pugliese’s documentary ‘Faraway Goal’

Dangerous History: Conversation with Qasem Aslam

‘The History Project’ was founded by former Williams student Ayyaz Ahmad ’11 and Qasem Aslam to question how and why we teach history to our future generations. Inspired by the contradictory ways that history is taught in India and Pakistan, often to insight patriotism and ideological interests, their organization collects and juxtaposes contrasting versions of history in textbooks from both sides of the Indian and Pakistani border, supporting them with illustrations and taking them to students in their formative years.

Qasem Aslam met with Williams students over pizza, to talk about the dangerous task their organization performs, and how history can be used and abused for political purposes, but also how it can function as a tool for reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Bernhardsson, who partook in the conversation, remarks that:

“This History Project was a way to get Indians and Pakistanis together to try to have a common history, and try to encourage them to rethink their past in order to envision a better future. And many people were threatened as Indian nationals or Pakistani nationalists to do so, so we brought them as an example of people who were doing academic things that actually could be seen as a threat to national security.” Bernhardsson, 2014

Want to learn more about the History Project?

… A DANGEROUS LEGACY

Over the years, Gaudino Scholars like Bill Darrow (1989) and Ed Burger (2008 – 2010) started programs (the freshman residential seminar and the Gaudino course option respectively) that resonated with the Williams community and lasted past their tenure. Continuing in this tradition,
Bernahardsson initiated programs that will live past his tenure, because they address a need at Williams to reflect on its ideologies and connect with those that appear ‘unconventional’ and ‘different’.

**The Human Library**

Founded in Denmark 13 years ago, the Human Library project transforms people into books that readers can check out and have intimate conversations with. Bernhardsson brought the project to Williams after a conversation with a neighbor:

“I had a conversation with one of my neighbors a few years ago, who has lived here in Williamstown for 40 years, and he’s a pretty active person here in town. He told me that he had never ever spoken to a Williams student. And I just thought that was bizarre. How could he be living here and never spoken to a Williams student?

“I was so surprised because I feel that this is a very open place. There are no gates on the campus. There’s nobody checking your ID to come in. All our games, anybody can come, or lectures, or artistic performances. You can audit my classes and any class here at the college. But for him, he perceived the college to be up on a hill – an Ivy Tower. So I was thinking how we could enable him and people in the town to access Williams and students here? Also students here, they have no reason to access Williamstown or the Berkshires. They might go on hikes. The people here are completely irrelevant to them.” *Bernhardsson, 2014*

Since the first Human Library Williams in 2012, the event has continued to grow each year with a tremendous turnout from all over the Berkshires. Last year, the library had over 60 book titles including “Home-Schooled,” “Iraq War Veteran,” a “Navy Seal,” a “Draft Dodger,” a “Recovering Alcoholic,” “Fat Woman,” “Queer Student,” “Queer Rabbi,” “Convict,” “Evangelical Christian”, and over 300 readers.

After organizing the project for three years, one of Magnus’s greatest memories was:

“One of the more proud moments for me was that a blind man came to the library and checked out three books. And he said that this was the first time I’ve been able to access the library on the same terms as other people.” *Bernhardsson, 2014*
It has become an annual staple in the Williams community, and was held for the fourth time this year with the direction of the current Gaudino Scholar, Lois Banta.

The 2014 Human Library at Williams made the front page of the Williams Record and IBerkshires.

**Prison Course**

When does a course over enroll by 120 students?

Since its inception in the summer of 2013, the Prison Course has become a part of every Williams’ students bucket list. In collaboration with other faculty and the Center for Learning in Action, Bernhardsson initiated the prison course as part of his ‘Dangerous Learning’ theme.

“I was sitting at my son’s high school soccer game and a colleague’s daughter who studies at Amherst College was there, and she had this big reading packet sitting with her while watching the game, and at halftime I asked her, “What are you reading?” She showed me this course packet about crime and punishment and she told me about this course in Amherst at the Hampshire Jail, and her mother said “Oh that sounds dangerous.” And I thought, yes, that’s pretty dangerous.

So my danger theme in terms of, “How can I rein students into an environment that would be considered dangerous, and there were dangerous people that they would not normally access and hear from or take seriously?” But Amherst has it, why in the world can’t we have it? And then I thought, well, there’s no prison in town but there’s a jail only about 10 minutes away.” Bernhardsson, 2014

*Watch Williams students, Melissa Soule’15, Chelli Riddiough’14 and Anna Garzon’15 talk about their experiences in the Prison Course*

The English Department’s Prof. Christian Thorne was first to teach the course in the Berkshire County Jail. His students comprised of nine Williams College undergraduates and nine inmates. The course was titled ‘Happiness’ and they discussed a variety of readings, ranging from ancient Greek philosophers, medieval theologians, early 20th century intellectuals and current pop-culture articles. Through intense class and group discussions, the students grappled with the human condition and the pursuit of happiness.

Bernhardsson talks about one of the most poignant realizations that arose for the Williams students in the course:

“As they sort of went through the prison system they started thinking
about the confines and the limits that are put in here actually, what extent is the college a prison and how can they break free of the prison walls that are set up. So that was another observation and sort of learning experience, to think of the barriers that we may have artificially set up here, that they felt prison-like.” Bernhardsson, 2014

The New Gaudino Fellowship

“When I first became scholar we had something called the Gaudino Fellows Program, where students proposed an independent Winter Study in which they would go all over the world or domestic study on a research topic, and usually these were fantastic topics and very interesting. But we felt after some years of seeing this over and over again that the Gaudino Board was funding these projects and had very little supervision or opportunities to maybe help guide the students and help them process this experience. So this year, for the first time, we tweaked the system. Instead of having students going wherever, we had more research, academic-oriented topics. We encouraged students to fly as a group, a maximum of four, to study a topic – go somewhere together but yet be separate. Home-stays were a criteria. And while they were away that they would have regular contact with the Gaudino Scholar.

So this year we had a project of four students who went to China and who studied different minority groups in China in terms of their identities. And I think this was a much more successful program than the individual ones, partly because we had built in regular contact and moments of reflection. This I think fits more the Gaudino model of not just sort of cruising through, but kind of deliberate moments of reflection. And so we’re hopeful that this will be the model for years to come, to provide students with this kind of opportunity.” Bernhardsson, 2014

… The Gaudino Fellows

Sumaya Awad’16 originally set out to explore Muslim identity in China, but was restricted entry to the country and was stranded in Hong Kong. Watch Sumaya Awad’16 talk about being ‘stranded in Hong Kong as ‘the other’

Mpaza Kapembwa’ 15, a Chinese major born in Zimbabwe, lived with African immigrants and learned through his experiences the complexities of being black in China. Kapembwa was also recently awarded the Pickering Fellowship for college graduates interested in pursuing careers in Foreign Service.
Ralston Louie’14 went to the Nanjing region in China, to investigate how Chinese perceptions of the Japanese (their other) have been influenced by their history of war. Watch Ralston Louie’14 talk about ‘pondering a massacre’

Chaewon Kim’ 16, also a Gaudino student trustee, explored the intersections of Korean and Chinese culture and identity in everyday life. Watch Chaewon Kim’16 talk about ‘becoming part of the family’

The most important tweak to the original program was the requirement of home stays:

“I think because when you are in a different location, really staying at somebody’s home, negotiating access to the bathroom, or the kitchen, or just how you spend your leisure time, the couch and so on and so forth, is a lesson in and of itself rather than if you just stay by yourself in a hotel or a hostel. That is when you’re taking yourself away from society and then you have the privilege of your own comfort, whereas in the home-stay…because we all come from some home, we always have that as a basis for comparison. Then we start reflecting on your home and how you might welcome a stranger into your home and then you as a stranger in somebody else’s home. I think that just sort of emphasizes that learning is not just something that happens between 10 a.m. and 11 p.m., but it’s something that happens around the clock. And I think that, as we have seen, is a much more invigorating and provocative experience than a hostel.” Bernhardsson, 2014

...FINAL DANGEROUS REMARKS
Magnus (right) unveils gift from Gaudino Fund, with Gaudino chair, Jeff Thaler (left) and student trustee, Iman Lipumba’14 (center)

“What is remarkable about Gaudino and the Gaudino Fund is that it is not a building on campus, this is not a prize given to the best chemistry student or something, but I felt it was just sort of this encouragement -- this push or this encouragement to think differently and to go beyond what you’re already doing. So it’s a very ambitious, bold plan, and for me it has been very inspiring to really think about where we are, and what we’re doing, and why are we doing it, and whether or not we could do it differently.” Bernhardsson, 2014

Want More?

Check out the full Spring 2015 newsletter, and read and watch videos about Gaudino student initiatives and the exciting start of Lois Banta's tenure as Gaudino Scholar.
... AND WE LEAVE YOU WITH

“A good education reduces our confidence, limits the certainty of self, pulls us out of the family, questions primary loyalties. Not arbitrarily, though. Something worth having is offered; not a substitute but something very different. Other ways of thinking, special means of seeing, other personal values, unfamiliar content, new persons. All this is really not acceptable at first or rarely later on the whole.” Professor Gaudino

Feeling Charitable?

If you want to help support these wonderful scholars and students (in addition to your annual donation to the college) the Development Office requests that checks be made payable to Williams College, with a memo stating that the contribution is for the Gaudino Fund. Send to: Williams College, Development Office, 75 Park Street, Williamstown, MA 01267.

Share your thoughts, ideas and inquiries with the current Gaudino Board

Credits: Iman Lipumba’ 14 (writing and editing)

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