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Dear Gaudino Alumni and Friends,
Due to a technical glitch, the newsletter we sent last week was not received by everyone in the Gaudino alumni list serve. If you received the newsletter last Wednesday, than feel free to ignore this email. If you didn’t, enjoy!

What is the cost of success? Click here and read website version of our summer newsletter.

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THE GAUDINO FUND OF WILLIAMS COLLEGE
Established in 1975 by alumni and faculty in memory of Prof. Robert L. Gaudino

WHAT IS THE COST OF SUCCESS?

If we played a game of Williams-themed trivia, many of us would fail to answer what exactly an Eph is, but we would all be able to recite the words that are inscribed on Hopkins gate.

Climb high, climb far

Your goal the sky, your aim the star

In memory of the contributions of brothers Mark (1824) and Albert Hopkins (1826), the gate and motto
etched in stone have been cemented in Williams tradition. Today, during freshman orientation undergraduates are encouraged to avoid walking through the gates until their graduation. And after four years of waiting, on Commencement Day, the gate is the final rite of passage, which new graduates gleefully walk through after receiving their diplomas.

Beyond the rituals surrounding Hopkins gate, its motto is symbolic of Williams’ ideology of itself. As a community of successful individuals and the top-ranked liberal arts college in the U.S., Williams is a launching pad into a future that is greater than the expectations students create for themselves. However, if we look at this narrative of success through the Gaudino lens, we are forced to ask current and former students, what has aiming for the sky and stars cost you? At the core, what might you learn if you took the time to reflect on the choices you make?

As a teacher at Williams for 15 years, Professor Lois Banta has been a mentor and confidant to many in the student body who struggle with weighing the benefits of an elite liberal arts education against the personal, financial and emotional costs of being at Williams. An accomplished biologist and educator, Banta’s professional achievements make her the epitome of success on the basis of prestige, fame and relative economic security. Yet, she has often wondered, do her accomplishments constitute a good life? What have her choices cost her? And what role does she have in enriching the communities she is a part of? It’s from the culmination of her life experiences and conversations with faculty, alumni and present students that as the 15th Gaudino scholar, Banta has turned the lens onto the Williams community at large, asking the question ‘At What Cost’?

“At the personal level, the notion of ‘effortless perfection’ has entered our college discourse, but underlying that fallacy are other questions: What are you willing to give up for success at Williams? Why do we work so hard at what we do (whether academics or athletics, teaching the perfect class or service to the college), and what might we learn if we took more time to reflect on the choices we make? Does our emphasis on individual, collective, and institutional achievement and excellence come at the cost of communal responsibility?” Prof.
Lois Banta

Starting last fall, Banta’s ‘At What Cost’ initiative has embedded itself in the Williams community. Through sponsored and organized community dialogues, artist residencies, events and student-led trips the Gaudino Fund has created spaces for Williams to reflect on itself. We share the highlights with you now.

"The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other." president James A. Garfield The Gaudino Fund is committed to continuing Mark Hopkin’s Socratic tradition of questioning as a method and philosophy of living and learning.

WHAT HAVE WE GIVEN UP? WHAT HAVE WE GAINED?

For four years, most students spend more time in Williamstown than they do in their hometowns (except for Williamstown natives). Williams’ resources and reputation provides them with opportunities that many of their peers in other institutions don’t have, yet, what do they have to give up to keep up with the academic rigorosity of the college? What is sacrificed to be successful at Williams? And are the academic achievements ultimately worth the costs?

As a sophomore, Sophia Rosenfeld’15 began exploring Gaudino’s philosophy of uncomfortable learning when she signed up for the Gaudino winter study program in Maine. Her experiences living with a family that was resettled in the U.S. from South Sudan shed light on the privileges her stable upbringing in New Jersey afforded her, and the complex ways in which people come to identify places as home. A poet, Rosenfeld was elected to write an original class poem for the 2015 commencement. Her poem, ‘New Maps’, explores how students negotiate the costs and benefits of choosing Williams as home. Click here and listen to Sophia Rosenfeld’15 read her class poem, ‘New Maps’.
Sophia Rosenfeld'15 was also a Gaudino student trustee.
New Maps

Drive north. At times, these mountains will feel like a solid wall, rising up to obscure the horizon. And sometimes, like a signpost pointing towards infinity.

When you arrive, look out your window onto this new landscape. Let this place settle into your bones. Learn the walks of almost-strangers striding across the quad.

Rosenfeld’s poem embedded on a campus map of Williams College.

Throughout the past year, Professor Banta and the student trustee members of the Fund’s Board
organized public dialogues that encouraged the Williams community to reflect and talk about personal sacrifices they’ve made on the pathway to success. A highlight was an event this February, ‘Roads (Not) Taken and Missteps Along the Way’, where twenty students joined six faculty members for an informal fireside conversation about unexpected paths, setbacks, failures, and how to deal with uncertainty and differing definitions of success.

The questions posed included:

- What’s one of your roads not taken?
- When you were twenty years old, what was your definition of success? Or failure? Have those definitions changed?
- How has your journey deviated from what people might deem a standard career path?
- How have you balanced your work ambitions with your personal life?
- What was your biggest worry about life after graduation? Now, what would you tell yourself?
- What’s the biggest sacrifice you’ve had to make?
- Have you ever experienced something that seemed like a setback, but was perhaps secretly a blessing? Vice versa?

One of the students in attendance writes:

“The expectation that we have coming into Williams is that the way that classes are run and the academic year is set up is the best way of educating ourselves. That prestige that we were sold on initially becomes a way of rationalizing this avenue of education as the right one and the only one. But at what cost? The cost of sleep, relationships, and mental and physical wellbeing. And at the cost of narrowing our definitions of success in a way that is dangerous. Dangerous to a holistically fulfilling life. The cost of a straightforward and universal definition of success is at the root of many of the problems that face me and my peers. For me, involvement with Gaudino Fund initiatives has propelled me to rethink a straightforward definition of success that can be tallied in transcripts and resumes and has made me much happier with the successes I have achieved.” Caroline Bruno’15 (Gaudino Maine winter study and fellow)

Join in on the conversation: What have you gained? What have you given up? Share your reflections with us for the next newsletter!

WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES DO WE HAVE TO OUR COMMUNITIES?

https://mail.google.com/mail/b/1?ui=2&ik=7ad4cd276f&view=pt&q=%22gaudino-alumni%22&qs=true&search=query&th=14eb150fa722648a&siml=14eb1...
graduated from Williams, we’ve all had a moment when we were torn between fulfilling our academic, athletic or extracurricular obligations and dealing with moments of personal, national and global crisis. Over the years, the student body has responded in different ways to social justice issues affecting the Williams campus and the world beyond it. Williams students have boycotted classes, occupied college buildings, held marches and protests.

However, many on campus still feel sheltered by the “Purple Bubble” and can discuss and critique global events and societal challenges in the abstract, with little idea of the experiences of the individuals who live those realities. The Gaudino Fund has attempted to bridge the distance that intellectual inquiry sometimes fosters when talking about real life issues by sponsoring community dialogues that blend analysis and storytelling from different perspectives.

**Cultural Appropriation: A Discussion with Faculty (April 2015)**

In response to a series of racist incidents on campus that raised substantial debate across the Williams community, the Gaudino Fund, along with College Council, organized a dinner conversation amongst faculty and students about cultural appropriation. Our goal was to provide an opportunity for dialogue that took place in person, rather than in anonymous social media posts, and to create a space for students to digest their feelings with the support of faculty.

In a moving narrative, Prof. Charles Dew (History) talked about his experiences coming to Williams as a student from the Deep South during the pre-civil rights era. He disclosed that as a first-year student, he occasionally told racist jokes and defended segregation, actions that he still regrets and that have influenced his work as a Historian of the American South. Prof. Leslie Brown (History) helped explain cultural appropriation by sharing images and film clips of racial stereotyping, many of which are still common in American media and film. Prof. Satyan Devadoss (Math) shared his perspective having grown up in southern India, where identity is much more closely linked to who your family is, rather than something that a 20-year old is asked to define for him/herself.
Their thoughtful comments were followed by smaller group discussions, facilitated by other members of the faculty.

**Food for thought from the event:** Some students admitted that they were afraid to apologize for past mistakes for fear of how these public apologies may become part of their online identities and hurt future successes. Nowadays, students have to be concerned with not only what their peers think of them, but also what the digital world thinks of them. The decisions we make have the ability to be forever immortalized online, adding further costs to the process of self-reflection For instance, how might have Prof. Charles Dew’s career been different if he went to Williams at a time when his comments were publicly exposed and shared online?

**Conversation about Sexual Assault (May 2015)**

“That was the most helpful conversation I’ve ever had about consent and the hookup culture. It was so surprisingly refreshing to hear others’ perspective on these issues that we never talk openly about. These are the conversations I wanted to have but didn’t know how to start it.” *Anonymous Williams student*

In the past two years, sexual assault on college campuses has been brought to national attention, and has raised a lot of heated debate. The Gaudino Board hosted a student-led conversation that focused on a type of sexual assault that occupies more of a gray area in terms of intention, and is therefore not often recognized, at least initially or sometimes not at all, by those involved. In telling their stories, the students who spoke hoped to foster more nuanced ways to think about consent, or lack thereof, and to inspire healthy, empowering discourse about our campus culture. To this end, the organizers had prepared questions for each group to use as jumping off points, and then let the conversation be as organic as possible.

**Witnessing the Costs that Others Have Borne**

In addition to conversations within the Williams community, throughout the year, we’ve sponsored short residencies by writers and artists whose professional work provide opportunities for students, faculty and staff, to bear witness to stories of those whose experiences reflect costs borne. These events were meant to encourage the Williams community to engage with social experiences that are different from their own, and reflect on how we are all implicated in each other’s narratives.

**The Book Unbound: Telling Our Stories**

In January, Abenaki storyteller, poet and prolific author Joe Bruchac joined us for a workshop and evening performance. His afternoon workshop focused on the question “What is the story I tell myself of who I am and how I became that person?” The goal was to help students articulate for
themselves some piece of their own developing internal narrative.

Lacks Family Visit

This year’s Williams Reads book was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, the story of a poor black tobacco farmer whose cells were taken without her knowledge in 1951 and became vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, in vitro fertilization, and more. Henrietta’s cells have been bought and sold for billions, yet she remains virtually unknown, and her family can’t afford health insurance. The fund co-sponsored much of the programming around the book, including a campus visit by two Lacks family members in February, where they met with students and held a public conversation with over 450 people in attendance. A short video clip with excerpts from the conversation can be found here.

The 4th Annual Human Library

Held in February, we had another successful Human Library with over 210 readers, 39 books, and 263 checkouts, which vastly underestimates the number of conversations, as many readers chose to read in groups (some as many as 6 people). The complete list of this year’s titles is available here.

RAWdance

Formed in 2004, RAWdance aims to perform works that expose the essence of our relationships and identities. Envisioned by co-founders Ryan T. Smith and Wendy Rein, RAWdance strives to craft pieces balancing dance with theatrical elements and athletic movement with intellectual themes. In the fall the artists came to campus over several days and made a new work for the members of the student contemporary dance company, CoDa. Smith and Rein also performed their duet, “After 5:00” on the role of alcohol abuse in intimate relationships. Watch a live performance here.

Emilie: la Marquise du Chatelet Defends Her Life Tonight

In February, we hosted a professional staged reading of Emilie. Emilie was Voltaire’s lover and scientific partner. She translated Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* into French, and her version is considered the definitive edition. She also contributed to the development of the idea of kinetic energy. Needless to say, her path was unusual for a woman in the 18th century. In the play, Emilie examines her life, her decisions, and the effects of those decisions on herself and those close to her. After the staged reading, we had a short panel discussion where the panelists and audience members reflected on the ways in which Emilie’s choices resonate with us as we examine the costs of our life choices. The reading was part of a month-long series of events centered on career choices and work-life balance.
LESSONS FROM EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The Gaudino Fund selected three groups of students as recipients of the recently-instituted Gaudino Fellowship. The proposed projects were geographically diverse, but each centered on exploring the costs of identity. This January, three black students travelled to Johannesburg to explore the divide between people born in South Africa and people from the African diaspora; two first-generation American students examined the experiences of Arab immigrant communities in Rio de Janeiro, and two white students looked at the interwoven issues of poor nutrition, diabetes and sustainable agriculture in the Navajo Nation of Arizona.

Spotlight on Caroline Bruno’15 and Sam Lewis’15 in ‘Navajo Nation’ (January 2015)

During their sophomore year, Caroline Bruno’15 and Sam Lewis’15 both took part in the Gaudino winter study, Resettling Refugees and Immigrants in Portland, Maine. Their experiences living with host families, and the active self-reflection the program demanded, influenced their continued pursuit for self-directed experiential learning. As seniors, and environmental activists, Bruno and Lewis set out to explore how environmental injustice, specifically, poverty, hunger, racism and other forms of prejudice, make the Navajo people living in the dry Southwest the most vulnerable to climate change.

In her reflection essay, Bruno writes,

“We were given a rare opportunity to visit a place with a purpose, but without a defined end goal. We were challenged to determine that end goal and craft it from what lay before us. My first realization was that once on the ground in Arizona, the parameters set by the Gaudino fund and my commitment to them would not be the determinant of our everyday experiences. At a time when I am finishing up my college education and perhaps my time in institutions of higher education, it was about time for me to take a much more active role in directing my learning. Sam and I talked often about

Caroline Bruno’15 is heavily involved with the Williams
the real purpose of us being there. Was it for a purely personal desire for novelty, excitement, and the intellectual pursuit of unpacking complexity and beginning to understand components of how things work not just in theory, but also in practice? Those were all definite motivators, but I also felt that this exercise in piecing together stories we heard about personal experiences and overlaying what we learned about Navajo policies and problems on a broader scale would help me with future multifaceted issues.” Caroline Bruno’15

In his reflection, Lewis writes,

“Caroline and I were mostly on our own, responsible for not only determining what to do with our time but also our minds, with less day- to-day guidance on what questions and issues to explore. I was struggling to get at the personal and academic questions I entered with, and I blamed myself. I regretted all that I was missing out on by not having a host family or work placement, from the personal anecdotes to the nuanced patterns that only emerge after several weeks in a constant setting. Often, I felt lost. I questioned whether I was doing enough and sufficiently challenging myself, and doubted my motivations and reasons for being there. Through much of the month, I could not shake an underlying sense of unease.

Eventually, it became clear that these doubts and frustrations were not impediments to a meaningful experience, but in fact one of the most important dimensions of my Winter Study. In five months, I will be gone from Williams. I will no longer have assigned readings, course discussions, or essays. Yet learning does not stop there, nor will it become easier once I have a diploma in my hands. Over the course of the month, I began to realize that as I get further away from the structure of courses and support of professors, both the process and content of learning will get only messier and more difficult. Rather than a syllabus, I will have to determine on my own what is important to learn, and how to do so. There will be no tests to tell me that I have sufficient knowledge of a topic, nor essays in which I can contain all of my reflections and thoughts on an issue.

One of the challenges, and perhaps charms, of a place like Williams is that you are never finished. There is always more reading, more studying, more things to do. A small part of me has always looked forward to the post-graduation life, eager to be “done” for the day once the closing bells ring. This siloed life is certainly possible. The Gaudino perspective that living and learning are one and the same does its best to complicate that clean solution. As I learned from this
past month, removing the invisible boundary between class and all else, embracing the fact that all in life is a learning opportunity, is a simultaneously relieving and oppressive realization. As I leave Williams, I will confront the new challenge of having to decide for myself what is important to explore and investigate, to what extent I want to challenge myself and look into difficult issues, and when and where to go out of my comfort zone to come to a better understanding of myself, others, and the world. I will have to make very real decisions, both big and small, that will determine what, how much, and how I learn.” Sam Lewis ‘15

Alternative Spring Breaks (April 2015)

We also co-sponsored two experiential learning trips during spring break. One was a student-organized trip to the Dominican Republic that focused on the discrimination, mass expulsions, racism, and denial of documentation of Dominicans of Haitian descent – which is an ongoing humanitarian crisis. The other was an interfaith rebuilding project in hurricane-ravaged Tuscaloosa. The trip has been organized by the Chaplain’s office for the past three years, and involves students building homes, staying with host families and visiting different religious communities.

WHAT IS THE COST OF UNCOMFORTABLE LEARNING?

Robert L. Gaudino’s philosophy of uncomfortable and experiential learning is at the center of everything the Gaudino Fund does. And, while we work hard to create programming that encourages self-reflection and questioning within the Williams community, we (the Gaudino Fund) are also always growing and learning.

The ‘At What Cost’ initiative would be incomplete if we did not reflect on the costs that our pedagogy of uncomfortable learning has on a changing student body. The logic behind uncomfortable learning is that through immersive engagement with otherness, we confront and reflect on our perspectives and biases, and learn to know ourselves more deeply and differently. However, in focusing on the experiences of Williams’ students, we sometimes fail to think critically about the implications the programs we sponsor may have on the communities we are learning from.
Watch Lauren Nevin’15, a student trustee of the Gaudino Board and past participant of the Gaudino Winter Study in Maine, reflect on the implications of ‘uncomfortable learning’ in an increasingly diverse Williams campus. Click here to watch on YouTube.

Nevin is also a member of the Phi Beta Kappa, and was selected to be their speaker at graduation: Watch Lauren’s Phi Beta Kappa speech at the 2015 commencement.

Jeff Thaler’74 has been the chair of the Gaudino Fund a total of three times (a record no one is trying to break). He participated in Prof. Gaudino’s ‘Williams at Home’ program and Gaudino was his thesis advisor. As one of the alumni who conceptualized the Fund in the early 70s and helped to grow it since, Thaler has unique insights on how the Fund has evolved over the years, and how it can continue to improve so that it remains a lasting legacy in the Williams community. Watch Thaler reflect on his 40 years of involvement with the Gaudino Fund. Click here to watch on YouTube.

... AND WE LEAVE YOU WITH

“The aim is education, and education which uses experience for its own ends…It is to use experience for reflection, reflection on persons, on the family situation, on their work, on their existence in the real world…

Reflection requires, both as an approach to learning and as a method of living, not just a distance from self but some reduction in the sense of self…The student reduces his own sense of self in the interest of understanding and responding to the
particular person and situation before him.”
– Professor Gaudino

Prof. Gaudino at Mt. Katahdin.

How do you want to see the Gaudino Fund evolve in the future? What is your Gaudino connection? And, how have you reflected on the choices you’ve made during and after Williams? Please share your thoughts with us, we want to get to know you!

Support the legacy

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.

Learn more about Prof. Gaudino here.

Credit: Iman Lipumba’ 14 (writing, editing and video)

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