



Fall 2022 Gaudino Fund Newsletter

From the Board

As students return to campus for the fall semester, we are hopeful that student life and the Gaudino Fund will reclaim their full vibrancy. As it did with so many aspects of our lives, COVID diminished the impact of the Gaudino Fund these past few years, requiring the cancellation of student fellowship winter studies and limits on in-person events. Despite these challenges, as you will read in his update below, Gaudino Scholar Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm has continued to engage colleagues and students in curricular innovation around his timely focus of *Aspiring Toward Utopia in Dystopian Times*.

Looking ahead to October, we hope you will join us for a virtual panel discussion with alumni who participated in the Williams-in-India and Williams-at-Home programs. Read on for more details and the registration link.

Lastly, as you can see from our class years, today's board of trustees includes not only alumni from the '70s who were students of Mr. Gaudino, but also recent alums, many of whom benefitted from Gaudino student fellowships. We thought you might enjoy a look at the [fellowship experiences of trustees](#) *Danielle Grier '18, Mo Lotif '11 and Veronique Hob-Hob '11*.

Wishing you a healthy fall, rich with occasions for active learning!

Lars Ojukwu '08 and Laura Winston '75



Gaudino Scholar Update from Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm

The 2021-22 academic term was my second year as Gaudino Scholar. But because my plans the previous school year were largely overwhelmed by the pandemic, it really felt like my first year working toward the initiative I envisioned. For those of you who haven't read my [earlier note](#) about my project, "Aspiring toward Utopia in a Dystopian Age," my aims are to encourage students to have difficult conversations about what a better, more utopian world might look

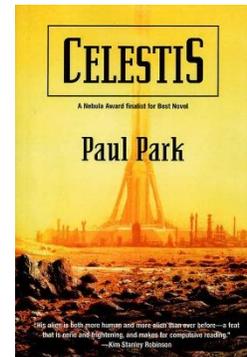
like. My main idea is that, faced with unfolding global catastrophes (from anthropogenic climate change to systematic forms of injustice and inequality and so on), it is increasingly important to imagine alternative futures that not only avoid such catastrophes but more productively turn the experience of struggle itself into a tool for positive social change.

Toward that end, the main fruits of the initiative were that some of my colleagues agreed to teach a fascinating slate of diverse courses on dystopia/utopia from different disciplinary perspectives, for which I am grateful.

Fall 2021 brought four courses sponsored by the initiative, perhaps most exciting of which was American Studies 321 “Unsettled Futures: Time, Crisis, and Science Fiction from the Margins” taught by Eli Nelson, the college’s only indigenous faculty member. The seminar examined the racial, ethnic, gendered, and sexed dimensions of science fiction and traced how marginalized people have imagined various alternative futures amidst an atemporal and unfolding apocalypse. I think you’ll get a sense of how stimulating the course was (and how well it fit the initiative I proposed) from its catalogue description:

Societies around the globe are now confronting a triple crisis that threatens not only political orders but also the very existence of certain forms of life: (1) financial collapse(s) that have increased the awareness and severity of mass inequality, (2) climate change and mass extinctions, and (3) the rise of white supremacy and ethno-nationalisms that threaten BIPOC lives and representative democracies. These material and political challenges have depleted many of the cultural resources that enable imagining non-apocalyptic futures. Yet, these crises are not novel. Many groups in the periphery—geographic, economic, and cultural—were and are already living through the uneven distribution of the apocalypse. Science fiction (SF) has emerged as a privileged symbolic field for the expression of hopes and anxieties that drive both culture and tech industries. Whether seen as a form of productive pessimism or liberatory theory, SF from the margins is deployed as a political tool for enacting change in the present. In this course, we will survey the history of SF as a variable and theoretical orientation constituted through the unfolding of uneven global encounters.

Another especially thrilling course was English 236 “Fields of Barley, Streets of Gold: Utopia in Fiction” taught by the popular science fiction author Paul Park. Given that the 2021-22 academic year was Paul’s last year teaching at Williams before his retirement, we were especially lucky that he was willing to reflect on the theme of utopia and encourage his students to take their own risks by engaging in utopian writing. Again, the catalogue copy captures something of the magic of the course:



Each of the gates was a single pearl: And the street of the city was pure gold, As it were transparent glass. **Revelations 21:21** *It makes us happy to imagine the future in apocalyptic terms, partly because we love to say I told you so. You didn't listen, and now look. Fort Lee is on fire, and zombies are smashing down your parents' door. Catastrophe satisfies us on many levels; by contrast, the utopian vision provides a more delicate thrill. For a writer, the task is to provide a fiction that will not feel like a moral lesson or the illustration of some theory about how we should behave. This course will consider different utopian stories in a vaguely chronological sequence: Classical Era, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and then moving through the 19th and 20th centuries, and then into modern science fiction. You'd be right if you think this sounds as if I haven't yet finalized the list, but it will include familiar and unfamiliar names—Plato, More, Bacon, Campanella, Fourier, Bellamy, Skinner, LeGuin, Bisson, Kim Stanley Robinson, and various Afro-Futurists. Mostly you will be reading (or else listening to the instructor describe) excerpts and summaries rather than full texts, as utopian visions are often quite long and we want to consider large numbers of them. The emphasis in this class will be on writing rather than reading. Most assignments will consist of either sketching out or actually writing a short story set in one of these imagined worlds, a story that would serve as a critique. In addition, as a final project, students will invent a personal utopia and present it to the class.*

There were two other utopian courses taught during the fall. Christian Thorne, also in the English department, taught English 117 “Introduction to Cultural Theory” with a special focus on the emancipatory potential of culture, and I taught a variation of my Religion/Asian Studies 250 “Virtue Ethics in East Asia” with a special focus on various debates about ideal utopian communities in Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian philosophy. All of these courses were enrolled at capacity. That meant that 77 students were engaged in discussions of utopia in the fall, and that energy really grew as we concluded the semester. We were especially fortunate that Onassa Sun, one of the students who had taken my course, wanted to keep things going over Winter Study. The Gaudino fund was able to supply books for her student-led course “The Joy of Existence,” which encouraged some self-reflective exercises on questions of utopia among a further group of 38 students (some of whom had taken utopia courses in the fall).



Onassa Sun, Minh Phan, and Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm

There was if anything an even more impressive slate of seven courses approaching utopia from different angles taught that spring semester. Leading the lineup was the massively cross-listed course “Freedom Dreams, Afro-Futures & Visionary Fictions” (Africana / Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies / English / American Studies / Science and Technology Studies 380) taught by the poet, filmmaker, and interdisciplinary scholar Marshall Greene. Again, the catalogue description gives a sense of the course:

In this course we will examine the various ways Black scholars, artists, & writers use science fiction and visionary fiction to imagine freedom and new world orders. We will focus on the role of history, particularly slavery, in the Black radical imagination. “Freedom” is the keyword throughout the course. We will grapple with the various and sometimes conflicting meanings and uses of freedom as it relates to blackness, gender, sexuality, class and ability. We will explore multiple forms of scholarship and cultural productions, including film, music, novels, short-stories, art, poetry, and other academic texts. All students will be asked to discover and develop their writerly voices through various critical, creative, experimental and performative assignments.

Another stimulating course was Political Science 334 “Theorizing Global Justice” by the Kenyan political scientist Nimu Njoya. As one can see from the description below, her course asked students to focus on the ways in which global justice could be enacted:

While economic exchanges, cultural convergence, and technological innovations have brought people in different parts of the world closer together than ever before, globalization has also amplified differences in material wealth and social inequalities. Ill health, inadequate sanitation, and lack of access to safe drinking water are increasingly common. Yet, more than ever before, the means exist in affluent regions of the world to alleviate the worst forms of suffering and enhance the well-being of the poorest people. How are we to understand this contradiction as a matter of justice? What is the relationship between justice and equality, and what do we owe one another in a deeply divided world? Course readings will engage your thinking on the central debates in moral philosophy, normative approaches to international political economy, and grassroots efforts to secure justice for women and other severely disadvantaged groups.

Similarly, another political scientist, Sidney Rothstein, taught Political Science 289 “The Welfare State in Comparative Perspective,” which addressed the potentials and limitations of the welfare state in mitigating human risks and encouraging better social worlds.

We also sponsored a seminar in art history, “Timelines” Art History 472, taught by the historian of Islamic art Holly Edwards, which focused on the presentation of archeology, photography, and the museum as potentially utopian sites through which different communities aim to preserve or transcend their histories. The anthropologist Gregory Mitchell taught a seminar “The Gay Menagerie: Gay Male Subcultures” (Anthropology / Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies / American Studies / Theatre 305), which looked at ethnographic and historical works focused on how gay men have come together to produce and perform various emancipatory subcultures. Similarly, the historian of theatre Amy Holzapfel taught a combined seminar/studio course: Theatre 272 “Theatre & Environment: Site, Nature, Ecoperformance, Utopia,” which encouraged students to produce a series of mini-performances to embody human-nature relations in fresh and utopian ways. Finally, in the philosophy department Steven Gerrard took on the question of utopia head-on with the seminar Philosophy 128 “Utopias and Dystopias” which started from Plato’s *Republic* to work through a series of classical works in utopian/dystopian literature.

Although not all of the spring courses were full, their combined enrollment total was 101 students (although some students could have been taking multiple Gaudino courses). Still, combined with the fall and winter study enrollment, that means that roughly 216 students or about 10% of the Williams student body were involved in this initiative in the 2021-22 year alone! I was thrilled not only with the enrollment but also the diversity of courses and their respective engagements with the notion of utopia.



Jared Diamond and Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm at Australian Leadership Summit

Rounding off the academic year, I had the unusual opportunity of being invited to present my own Gaudino-related thoughts at the Australian Leadership Summit, hosted by the Australian Davos Connection Forum in Brisbane. I was honored to be on a virtual plenary panel with the eminent Yale environmental historian Jared Diamond during which I discussed

the importance of overcoming cynicism with a politics of radical hope and my Gaudino initiative project, among other topics. Given the important political and private sector leaders in the audience, it was a great way to showcase some of the valuable work we have been doing here at Williams.

As far as the Gaudino work was concerned, the only downside of the 2021-22 academic term was the resurgence of the Omicron variant at the tail end of 2021. A number of students had expressed an interest in doing various Gaudino travel Winter Studies, but the renewed pandemic conditions meant that the college reversed its study abroad recommendations and enforced other safety precautions. Although this decision totally made sense in context, it meant that these students were unable to pursue their projects.

This year we've extended the utopia course initiative to a couple of faculty members who had wanted to teach utopian course in 2021-22 but had been unable to. But equally important, I'm finally able to teach a totally new, one-time course of my own, "Realizing Utopias" (Religion/ Science and Technology Studies 219), that aims to draw together the utopian thinking and function as a kind of capstone to this Gaudino initiative. Here is the course description:

Our world can be better. We are faced with unfolding global catastrophes, such as the pandemic, anthropogenic climate change, economic crises, racialized injustice, and political polarization, and many people seem to have lost their capacity to imagine better futures. Perhaps that is why we as a society have no problem

picturing the end of the world—fictional dystopias and apocalypses are abundant while (e)utopias are scarce. This a problem because, as numerous political theorists have observed, it is hard to organize meaningful change around cynicism and nihilism. But our dystopian present makes it even more important to imagine and even realize utopias. This course will help us do so. Our core collective goal will be to explore pragmatic realizations of radical hope.

Complementing urgent efforts to resist or mitigate intense injustice in the present, we will aspire to articulate bold visions for emancipatory communities of the future. Rather than primarily focusing on the limitations of existing institutions, this seminar will treat these as problems to be solved rather than as reasons to accept the status quo, and we will embrace affirmative projects of designing the frameworks for better worlds. But we also don't want to blind ourselves to the challenges of being visionary. In brief, we will engage in serious explorations of the underlying principles and rationales for various emancipatory political communities while also pragmatically assessing their potential difficulties. We will spend the first part of the course reading political theory (on issues such as resource allocation, collective decision making, and social justice) alongside various artistic and political manifestos. We will spend one week reading utopian novels (including as possibilities socialist, anarchist, techno-futurist, ecotopias, Afrofuturist, queer utopias, and many more).

But the majority of the course will be project-based. Students will form small teams to engage in radical thought experiments and then construct and refine their ideas of better possible societies/political communities. These teams will produce 1) policy papers to address how their utopian societies would deal with real world issues, and 2) artifacts (such as art, manifestos, pamphlets, short stories, videos, or the like) that might appear in the futures they envision, exploring both their ideals and their limits. The semester will culminate in a public exhibition of these works.

I hope to be able to share some of these great student projects with you all soon. I look forward to concluding with a great year of utopia initiatives and I'm grateful to the Gaudino board for their support of this project.

Register Now for a Virtual Panel Discussion Sponsored by the
Gaudino Fund



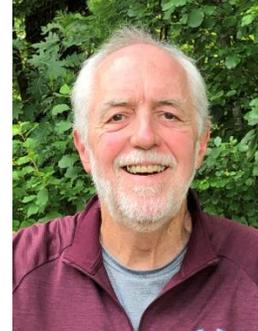
*Katie Guthorn '73
Vassar exchange student*



Jon Kravetz '74



James Mathieu '72



Paul Peterson '73

LOOKING IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR: REFLECTIONS ON WILLIAMS-AT-HOME AND WILLIAMS-IN-INDIA

50+ Years of Uncomfortable Learning

Tuesday, October 18, 2022

7:00 – 8:30 PM EST

It has been roughly 50 years since Professor Robert Gaudino sought to shake up the education of Williams students with the “uncomfortable” experiences of Williams-in-India and Williams-at-Home. Join us for a panel discussion and Q&A with four participants as they reflect on how these unique programs influenced their lives.

[REGISTER HERE](#)