CAMPUS DIALOGUE EVENING

In order to improve a particular aspect of intellectual life at Williams, we propose that an all-campus lecture with a series of post-lecture discussions be held three times a year. Specifically, we suggest that a student-faculty committee, in conjunction with the Lecture Committee, decide on three topics chosen from the gamut of political, scientific, artistic, moral, and other intellectual concerns, and subsequently, invite an expert on each of the three topics to present his or her views to a Chapin Hall audience. Following the lecture, members of the audience (which would include all interested members of the Williams community) would go to one of several locations around campus for discussions of the topic. The dialogue evenings would be held once each semester and once during Winter Study. So that no competing events would be scheduled at Williams, the Calendar Committee would schedule these events when assembling the official college calendar.

The following difficulties currently exist. First, there is a general lack of discussion of controversial topics. What discussion does occur, tends to do so sporadically and among small groups of students and small groups of faculty. Second, although there are many lectures that could serve as catalysts for large scale intellectual debate, most of these suffer from problems of inadequate publicity, inadequate attendance, and disappointing follow-up discussion. Third, people tend to go to lectures given by speakers who come from their academic discipline or who share their views on the topic. This results in a lack of the sort of confrontation that leads to intellectual development as well as in a lack of insights that transcend the boundaries of academic disciplines. Fourth, lectures tend to conflict with other public events, both intellectual and otherwise, exacerbating the aforementioned problems. Overall, the effects of the intellectual climate resulting from lectures at Williams are disappointingly passive, ephemeral, and, thus, relatively insignificant.

In order to address these problems, this proposal draws on various present and past occurrences. Specifically, the Freshman Assembly demonstrates that it is possible for a large scale event to succeed. The broad, long-term discussion which followed the well attended lecture by Phyllis Schlafly (in 1983-84) Illustrates that it is
possible for a controversial speaker to inspire the sort of intellectual atmosphere which is too often absent at Williams. Further, Winter Carnival shows that it is possible to reserve calendar time on an annual basis for an event that involves a large portion of the campus. We believe that the campus dialogue combines salient features of these and other Williams events.

The overall time frame for the campus dialogue events would be as follows:

1. Calendar Committee reserves three dates on official college calendar.

2. Campus Dialogue Committee, in conjunction with the Lecture Committee, selects topics and invites speakers.

3. At the beginning of each year, all three of the year's campus dialogue events would be widely publicized.

4. A couple of weeks before each lecture, the upcoming event would again be publicized.

5. All students and faculty as well as others who indicate interest would receive some sort of reading relating to the topic of the upcoming event.

6. The lecture would take place in Chapin.

7. Immediately after the lecture, the audience would split up into small groups and go to various lounges, living rooms and classrooms for discussions and refreshments. In each designated room, there will be a facilitator whose job will be to get the discussion started. This facilitator could be anyone with an interest in the topic and the ability to lead a discussion.

We believe that this proposal could have a significant impact on the intellectual life of the campus. Its effects could extend beyond the three evenings explicitly involved. Namely, successful implementation would have the effect of encouraging attendance at other lectures, as well as encouraging intellectual debate and interaction throughout the college community.