1. The Educational Philosophy of the Course

Utilizing the concept of "experiential learning" as put forth by Robert Gaudino more than a decade ago, a new course at Williams College is being developed that will expose students to unfamiliar situations in the Berkshire County area by offering them the opportunity to work in community human service agencies for course credit. Combined with a series of lectures that will provide students with the theoretical tools necessary to critically examine their experiences, Williams in Williamstown hopes to offer a similar learning process that Gaudino students lived through in the Williams-at-Home and Williams-in-India programs.

Williams in Williamstown is designed to enrich the Williams educational environment in several ways. In a general way, the course bridges the gap between the academic or theoretical descriptions of the world and affective reality. Williams in Williamstown accomplishes this by integrating both traditional academic learning with concrete involvement in the local community. Students will be placed into community human service agencies where they will put their "theory" into day to day "practice." (See Part 2 for a general description of the agencies.) This will also help to reduce Williams' isolation from the surrounding area. Indeed, Williams' intellectual and
social isolation from the local community can be thought of as an example of the more general breach between academic pursuits and experienced realities, in this case the experience of living in the Berkshires.

Ten years ago Bob Gaudino established the Williams-at-Home program in an effort to find a way to combine academic learning and the learning that goes on in actual situations. Like his program, Williams in Williamstown will emphasize skills usually ignored by other courses. A great deal will be expected of course participants in their non-academic environments and a burden will be upon them to make their experiences rich enough to evoke a sense of the world in which they are trying to participate and understand. Participant will need to be good listeners, to ask the right questions, to be demanding of others while at the same time sensitive to their own vulnerabilities, to know how to discuss their experience while respecting the confidence of others. Doing this, especially in somewhat uncomfortable settings, will take great energy and imagination.

Participants will be trying to develop a sensitivity to the meaning in life through actual experiences rather than through literary ones. The course will place emphasis on what Bob Gaudino termed "sympathetic penetration," or empathetic understanding of the most salient features or meaningful landmarks in the geography of someone else's experience. Gaudino suggested that it is the process of exploring someone else's experience that gives us perspective on our own. The experience of respecting, confronting and explaining otherness
forces one to appreciate the context for someone else's action. The exercise of experiencing or appreciating contextual meaning of someone else's actions teaches us a perspective from which we can conceptualize our own lives and give greater clarity to our own experience.

In his programs Gaudino emphasized the importance of displacement from familiar surroundings as a first step to sensitizing individuals to people and situations. Indeed, when he reflected on the success of his program, he wondered if the displacement had not been complete enough; he suspected that the home-stays had been too harmonious, too easy for Williams participants. The students, in effect, were too comfortable in the worlds in which they found themselves to penetrate their surrounding social reality with critical thought.

In an effort to learn from this experience, Williams in Williamstown differs from the original Gaudino programs in that the participants' involvement in the community will be an active involvement. They will be expected to contribute in a constructive and creative way to the work of local organizations or institutions. The need for this kind of involvement will make successful interaction rather than passive observation the modes operandi for course participants. Without the intense involvement with members of the local communities, students will ultimately fail in their attempt to gain from these experiences.

Williams in Williamstown additionally emphasizes the exploration of self and society through the direct engagement of its participant in the day-to-day activities of the local
organizations. Unlike most courses at Williams that concentrate only on the critical explication and the close analysis of texts, this course will combine such study with an intense focus on the subjective impression and experiences of its participants. Students will "work up" from their particular experiences in order to arrive at a comprehensive portrait of the political, social and economic structure of the local area. Course discussions and assignments probe particular feelings and reactions towards developing the best conceptualizations to describe their experiences. This approach to study may produce its intellectual product in novel or unexpected forms which, of course, will be encouraged.

The course will, of necessity, place an unusual burden on its participants to explore their own selves. Participants will always be forced to ask how much of what they feel about a person or a situation reflects themselves and how much of it is a product of the social world they are trying to understand. In consonance with this burden, a second goal of the course will be for each participant to develop her own self-portrait. These portraits may again take a variety of forms.

The portrait of the local community and the self-portrait represent the two poles between which the course will move. On one extreme will be the most general structure, problems, issues and composition of the community. At the other extreme will be the individual experiences, conversations and observations. These two extremes are joined by the learning process.
Williams in Williamstown for the academic year 1984-1985 is the first step in an effort to make Gaudino-like programs a permanent part of the Williams curriculum. In future years, students, faculty and Gaudino trustees should work together to enlarge the program to an entire year and to include communities throughout the United States.

Williams in Williamstown should also be seen as an effort to encourage dialogue on the educational process at Williams. The campus interest that the course and related events generate should provide a forum for the discussion of both the value of "experiential education" and its relationship to what has been the traditional approach at Williams.

2. The Nuts and Bolts of the Course
   A. The Lecture Format

The "academic" half of the course is essentially designed to provide students with the necessary theoretical and analytical tools to complement their "observations" and "experiences." A series of nine interdisciplinary lectures along with periodic workshops and films have been set up that will allow students the opportunity to bring the "real world" into the "classroom." Furthermore, the lectures are set up in such a way as to provide the group of students a forum in which they can meet weekly in order to share their particular experiences and to offer each other valuable comments, advice
and criticism.

The lectures and workshops have been split up into two broad categories, one which will cover the historical, political and economic aspects of Berkshire County and the other which is more theoretical in nature.

The lectures will open up, of course, with an introductory talk on the social and educational contributions of Gaudino. Readings taken from his collection of papers will be used in order to give students a more complete picture of the Gaudino legacy.

The first few weeks of the course will be devoted to giving students a general background to Berkshire County. A noted local historian will offer a lecture on the history of Northern Berkshire County, and for students requiring more specific information on the area, 3 historians from Pittsfield, North Adams and Williamstown will hold individual workshops on their respective localities. A North Adams State College sociologist will offer a lecture on the class and ethnic stratification of the area, and a Williams professor will lecture on the position of Berkshire County in the regional economic structures.

The purpose of the more theoretical lectures that will follow is to "drive a wedge," so to speak, into the "appearance of things" in order to more fully comprehend the "inner essence" that the human eye all too often neglects to see.

A philosophy professor has outlined a lecture on the "Ethics of Social Observation" which will attempt to come to terms with what it actually means to be a social observer. It
will also try to answer the question, "What does it mean to make human beings the object of our studies?"

"The Shaping of Contemporary Consciousness," especially among the working class, will be the subject of another lecture. This lecture will be especially relevant to all those involved since the organization with which they will be working are predominantly concerned with so-called "working class problems."

A lecture entitled "Regulating the Poor," which was the subject of two earlier Winter Study courses, will attempt to analyze the Public Welfare System in light of both the radical and conservative criticisms that have come out over the years. Have welfare organizations successfully worked to meet basic human needs, or have they effectively created an apathetic and highly dependent class of people?

Given that most social service organization have had to cut their budgets over the past three years due to the wave of "supply-side" thinking that has taken place, a lecture on supply-side and other conservative economic theories will be given. This will give students the opportunity to critically examine the way in which their respective organizations have dealt with the current political and economic situation.

Finally, two lectures will deal with the psychological and political dimensions of small town living. As to the former, a great deal of literature has been written by novelists as well as social scientists and the lecture will utilize both in an attempt to understand the "small town in mass society." The latter will incorporate theories of pluralism and the way
democracy works on a local level. Professors with local political experience will also give workshops on local politics for students who will be in need of them.

Each lecture will be about 75 minutes long, and for another hour the seminar's faculty coordinator will facilitate discussion among the participants in order to allow for a sharing of experiences. In this way students can come to appreciate their own situations by learning how their peers have worked in theirs. Also, this added dimension to the course will show the students that many of the problems they encounter in their experiences are not at all unique; that, for instance, the frustrations student A felt as she attempted to work out a problem in the local welfare organization were also felt by student B in his work with the elderly.

In addition to lectures and workshops given by Williams Faculty members, a number of small workshops led by local community organizers will be set up over the course of the semester.

B. The Experiences

Over the next month we will be making contact with a number of Berkshire County human service agencies in order to make room for students to work with them. As the list below details, the organizations range from the Christian Center in Pittsfield, which primarily serves low-income, mostly black youth to the Harper Center in Williamstown, which primarily house white,
elderly citizens.

It must be emphasized that the students will not simply become "extra hands" for the organization to use, rather, as we make contact with each group, we will spend a great deal of time outlining specific projects on which the students themselves will work. Each project will require that the students use a great deal of self-motivation, creative thought and an ability to meet community members in order to gain access to local resources that will be needed to complete the project. So, for instance, The Christian Center may want to organize a community newspaper, and if that were to be the student's project, s/he would have to solicit the support of local residents to brainstorm and write articles, lay out and distribute the paper. Of course there will be more to it than that, but the point should be clear: each student, in order to be successful, must have the ability to enter into unfamiliar social situations in order to both contribute to the organization and to the course.

Most of the organizations serve low income residents, so the students will have ample opportunity to enter into relatively uncomfortably social settings. Also, most of the organizations are understaffed, so there will never be a lack of work to do.

At this point we envision each student spending 10-15 hours a week, or the equivalent of one class, working with their group. This will give them a chance to really understand the day to day dynamics of their workplace and it will also provide them with enough time to complete their projects.
By the end of the month of June, after we have met with all the organizations and have set up the required projects, a more detailed report on this aspect of the course will be ready. Suffice it here to say that we consider the experiential part of the program to potentially be its most rewarding and important part. However, unless organized properly, the course could fail miserably. Therefore, the next 4 weeks will be the course's most crucial for it is in that time that the outline of the course will be completed.

The Organizations

Williamstown - The Harper Center and Sweetbrook Nursing Home (two elderly homes), The Williamstown Youth Center, The ABC House (an inner city tutorial house), General Cable Union (a local firm).

Orrth Adama - Sprague Electric Union, area Welfare Offices, North Adams Youth Center.