

Williams Magazine

Spring
2022



Inside

Finding balance

The economics
of immigration

Toward true
affordability

True Affordability

Earlier this spring Williams became the first college in the country to move to an all-grant financial aid program. Starting in fall 2022, Williams will eliminate all loans as well as campus and summer work requirements from all of our financial aid awards and replace them with an equal amount in grants that students and their families won't have to repay.

It has been wonderful to read the happy emails and social media posts, along with positive media attention for Williams! One vivid example from an alum who received financial aid at Williams and is now a parent of a current aided student: "This news made me cry with gratitude. And I'm not a crier. ... Thank you for all you have done and continue to do to level the playing field for all students."

We want to ensure that our aid program is attentive to the financial needs of anyone committed to a Williams education. This includes middle- and low-income families who have long been and continue to be a major priority. The all-grant program also will apply to all students and families, regardless of country of origin or citizenship.

The shift is a major advance for educational opportunity. To a degree unmatched at any school in the country, Williams is looking beyond the costs of *attendance* to try and address the full cost of *participation*—participation in opportunities to think independently and take academic risks; to seek knowledge and have one's ideas productively challenged; to grow and develop as a person; and to create and connect as members of a global community of learners. It's a philosophy that we increasingly describe as "true affordability."

Williams' work toward true affordability is of a piece with our broader commitments to academic excellence, access and inclusion. There is great historical resonance in announcing the program during the 50th anniversary of Williams opening its doors to women students and at the same time as we prepare to break ground on an expanded Davis Center (formerly the Multicultural Center). This change to financial aid also comes at a time when we are welcoming a small but growing number of students who have served in the U.S. armed forces or transferred here from community colleges.

After we announced the all-grant initiative, you, our alumni and families, told me how proud you felt to know that your contributions had helped make the moment possible. I want to pause now, to reflect on how far we've come together and imagine where we can go next. And to express my gratitude for your ongoing partnership to make Williams a wellspring of extraordinary—and truly affordable—educational opportunity.



Maud S. Mandel

**Williams
College**

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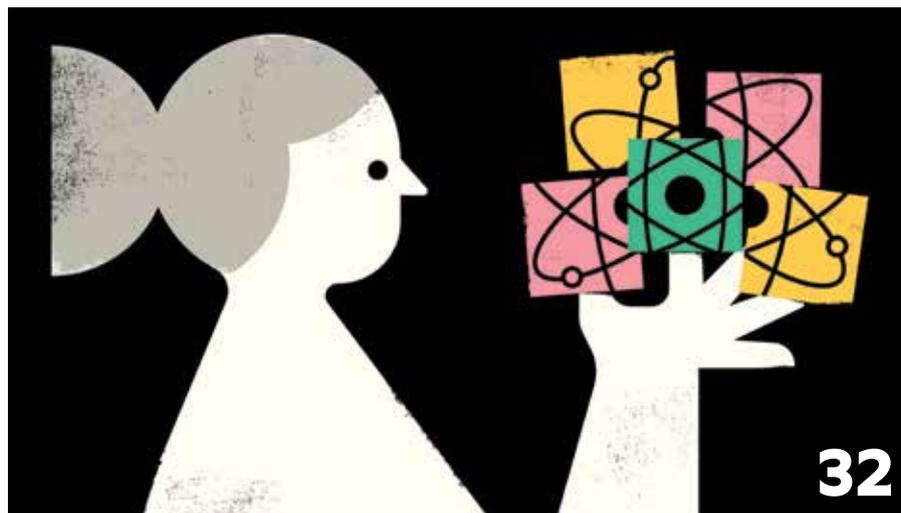
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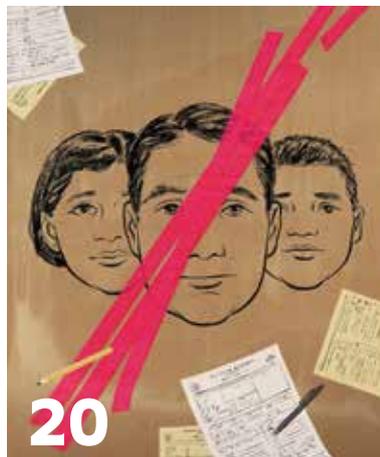
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Contributors

Catherine O'Neill Grace

is senior associate editor for *Wellesley Magazine*. She has worked at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Washington Post* and is a co-author of the book *Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children*.

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READERS RESPOND TO...

Arabic, Studied (fall 2021)

"The Williams-in-Cairo program not only enabled me to access in-depth knowledge of a critical part of the globe—it transformed my life over the course of a year."

Steve Farley '85
Tucson, Ariz.

"I submitted my senior honors thesis to the African and Middle Eastern studies program in 1989. I suspect a review of course catalogs would demonstrate that Middle Eastern studies at Williams had been active for many years prior [to Adam Barron's '10 experience]."

Elizabeth Bancroft '89
Atlanta, Ga.

Good Timing (fall 2021)

"I had a junior year abroad experience at the University of Ghana, West Ghana, that was a great joy and also had an amazing maturing effect on me and enhanced my eventual career."

Bill Reznikoff '63
Saint Paul, Minn.

Read the full letters at
today.williams.edu/magazine/2022-spring.

“Without the Davis Center I do not think that a lot of students of color would succeed. It’s ... knowing you can go somewhere that is made with you in mind and ... accessing resources that you might not get at other points on campus.”

Shiara Pyrrhus '23, Davis Center Building Project Committee member.
Read more about the project on page 14.

On Campus

Art for Healing

A newly acquired work in the Williams College Museum of Art's (WCMA) collection is the result of a student proposal from the fall 2021 course *Acquiring Art: Selecting and Purchasing Objects for WCMA*.

In the class—a collaboration between the art and economics departments—students visit galleries and auction houses to source works of art that align with the museum's collecting priorities. Students present their works to WCMA's staff, and the museum purchases those deemed most impactful for the collection at the best price.

The students describe the most recent acquisition, *Disease Thrower #10* by artist Guadalupe Maravilla, as “an exploration of and a healing mechanism for the trauma of [Maravilla's] childhood migration fleeing the civil war in El Salvador and his adult battle with colon cancer.” *Disease Thrower*, which combines found objects and materials that reflect Indigenous and pre-colonial knowledge, contemporary political commentary and personal history, is on view through Dec. 22 in the WCMA exhibition *Remixing the Hall*.

Guadalupe Maravilla
Disease Thrower #10, 2020
gong, steel, wood, cotton, glue
mixture, plastic, loofah and
objects collected from a ritual
of retracing the artist's original
migration route
96 × 57 × 63 in.
243.8 × 144.8 × 160 cm.





Gretchen Long (left), incoming dean of the college, and Eiko Maruko Siniawer, incoming provost.

College Names New Dean, Provost

Gretchen Long, the Frederick Rudolph '42-Class of 1965 Professor of American Culture, and Eiko Maruko Siniawer '97, the Class of 1955 Memorial Professor of History and chair of Asian Studies, will become Williams' next dean of the college and provost, respectively, starting July 1.

Long will succeed Marlene Sandstrom, dean of the college and Hales Professor of Psychology; Siniawer will succeed Dukes Love, provost and Class of 1969 Professor of Economics. Having served in their roles since 2016, Sandstrom and Love both plan to return to teaching and research.

As incoming dean of the college, Long says she is "eager to learn about the aspects of student life that happen outside the classroom and can be largely invisible to faculty. The work of the dean of the college cuts across a large section of professional staff, from the registrar to the chaplain and many more. I'm looking forward to learning about this work and helping wherever I can."

Siniawer says that now is "an exciting time at Williams, as the initiatives forged through the strategic planning process are actualized. As incoming provost, I envision fully supporting the college's commitment to true affordability for our students, fostering the arts and guiding the creation of a new museum at Williams, and continuing to integrate sustainability into our work."

Celebrating Williams Women

Commemorating more than 50 years of coeducation at Williams, the college is hosting a series of events in person and online, culminating in the Women of Williams Conference. Held May 19–21, 2023, the special, three-day conference will offer alumnae of all ages and stages of life an opportunity to connect, share stories and inspire today's generation of Williams students.

"Women have made a profound impact on Williams and beyond," says President Maud S. Mandel. "I am delighted that, as a college community, we are shining light on our women leaders and recognizing their wide-ranging contributions, all of which make me proud to belong to the Williams family."



Convocation, 1970. Photograph by William Tague, courtesy of Williams College Archives and Special Collections.

To learn more about the Women of Williams events and programming—and view archival photos, a timeline of the history of coeducation at Williams and stories and videos from alumnae—visit alumni.williams.edu/women.



“The all-grant initiative is a major new step on our path toward true affordability. It’s all part of ensuring that the exceptional students we admit can focus on what they’ll learn—not what they and their families earn.”

Liz Creighton '01, dean of admission and student financial services

Opportunity Granted

In April, Williams unveiled the nation’s first all-grant financial aid program. Starting with the fall 2022 semester, the college will replace loans and required campus and summer jobs with grant funds, dollar for dollar, that don’t have to be repaid. The initiative is the latest step toward the college’s goal of true affordability for students receiving financial aid.

MOVING TO ALL GRANTS MEANS:

\$35,000

in additional support over four years for the average middle-income family receiving aid

\$16,000

in additional support over four years for the average low-income family receiving aid (loans were already eliminated for this group)

\$5.75

MILLION annual cost to the college, plus **\$1 million** to cover recent changes to the financial aid formula that reduce the amount many middle- and low-income families are asked to contribute

FINANCIAL AID AT A GLANCE:

\$77.5

MILLION

total budget

\$67,000

average aid package

53%

of students receive financial aid, of whom **19%** pay nothing

IN MEMORIAM

Andrea Danyluk, the Mary A. and William Wirt Warren Professor of Computer Science, Emerita, died on March 3 at the age of 59.

She joined the computer science department as its first woman faculty member in 1993. During her nearly three-decade career, she became an influential figure, helping to launch the college's cognitive science program, introducing courses focused on machine learning and artificial intelligence, serving as a department chair and acting dean of the faculty, and mentoring many women in the field. Today, half of the college's computer science faculty are women.

"One of the things that I admired most about Andrea was her dedication and commitment to everything that she did," said Jeannie Albrecht, professor of computer science, in a tribute to Danyluk. "I can only hope to have a fraction of the impact on the lives of my junior colleagues that she had on me."

Danyluk's former students recall how she built a supportive community for women, leading trips to the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, the world's largest gathering of women technologists, as well as meetings around Tunnel City tables and the computer science office common room.

In a letter to the college community about Danyluk's legacy, President Maud S. Mandel wrote, "Andrea Danyluk profoundly influenced our curriculum, our people and our college, not to mention her profession, through her scholarly gifts, her commitment to mentoring and leadership and her talent for finding joy in belonging within the Williams family."

Williams also said farewell to **Don Beaver**, who retired after more than 45 years at the college as the Professor of History of Science, Emeritus, and who died on Feb. 6 at age 85; **Bob Buckwalter**, college chaplain from 1991 to 2000, who died on Jan. 15 at age 86; and **Jim Hodgkins**, director of dining services from 1970 to 2001, who died on Dec. 27 at age 80.

ON THE BOOKSHELF

Who Decides?: States as Laboratories of Constitutional Experimentation, by Jeffrey S. Sutton (Oxford University Press)

When it comes to settling debates about rights Americans feel passionately about—whether the issue concerns abortion, guns, marriage or education, to name just a few—the tendency is to look to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"It's: Race to Washington, winner take all, top down, and state courts can maybe fill the gaps left by the Supreme Court," said Jeffrey S. Sutton '83, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, during a Town Hall Seattle interview in November 2021. "But what I prefer to see is [a model] where state courts ... become the first responders, the experimenters-in-chief. Other states can look at that trial and error, and if something really useful emerges, let the Supreme Court nationalize it."

That's the model Sutton explores in his new book, *Who Decides?: States as Laboratories of Constitutional Experimentation*, published by Oxford University Press. A close look at the structure and process of American government, the book is a sequel to *51 Imperfect Solutions: States and the Making of American Constitutional Law*, which focuses on individual rights.

A *Wall Street Journal* review of *Who Decides?* calls the book "deeply researched" with "a wealth of historical precedents and case studies."

"Judge Sutton's enriching analysis offers a thorough survey of the many ways to answer this question" of who decides constitutional issues, adds the reviewer, South Texas College of Law Professor Josh Blackman. "But in the end, that decision belongs to us all."

ALSO PUBLISHED RECENTLY

The Rise and Fall of Morris Ernst, Free Speech Renegade, by Samantha Barbas '94 (The University of Chicago Press)

Deceptive Majority: Dalits, Hinduism and Underground Religion, by Joel Lee, assistant professor of anthropology (Cambridge University Press)

The Latinist: A Novel, by Mark Prins '11 (W.W. Norton & Co.)

Sondheim in Our Time and His, edited by W. Anthony Sheppard, chair and Marilyn & Arthur Levitt Professor of Music (Oxford University Press)

See more books from our community on the Williams Bookshelf (today.williams.edu/books).



Conflict as Opportunity

Conflict is an unavoidable part of life, but Waged Jafer has made a career of helping people work through it. Earlier this year, she became Williams' first-ever ombudsperson, an impartial and confidential resource for faculty and staff.

Jafer says her work involves "helping an organization do its best to be better." That might mean assisting an individual as they navigate a new policy, helping colleagues sort out a misunderstanding or guiding a group as it moves through—or around—an impasse.

In addition to running her own consultancy, Jafer most recently served as regional ombudsperson for the Near and Middle East with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland. She held similar positions at the University of British Columbia and at Quest University Canada.

Describing herself as "a thinking partner," Jafer says, "I'm not here to judge. I have expertise in conflict management and can give people the tools to solve their own problems."

She shared with *Williams Magazine* some of her top advice, in her own words:

Don't reply to emails when angry. Pause. Take a moment. Draft a response. Pause again, and do something different, like going for a short walk or doing a separate task. Then reread your draft response. You will certainly make changes to that draft before you click "send."

Give people the benefit of the doubt. Assumptions are dangerous. Ask clarifying questions if you are unsure about something, or simply ask the person directly. If you "heard" something, don't just assume it is always a fact. Rumors and gossip are harmful and contribute to negativity and conflict.

When in a disagreement, listen to the other point of view very carefully. Active listening aims to understand the other person. It requires a sense of empathy, where the individual says, "Let me listen to the other side carefully, judgment-free, and see where they are coming from." Don't just listen to respond, listen to understand.

Conflicts don't go away if you just avoid them. Address them as they happen. No matter how uncomfortable the situation might be, try to see every conflict as an opportunity for growth, understanding and learning.



Together at Williams

Scenes from a vibrant
spring 2022 semester.



OPPOSITE:

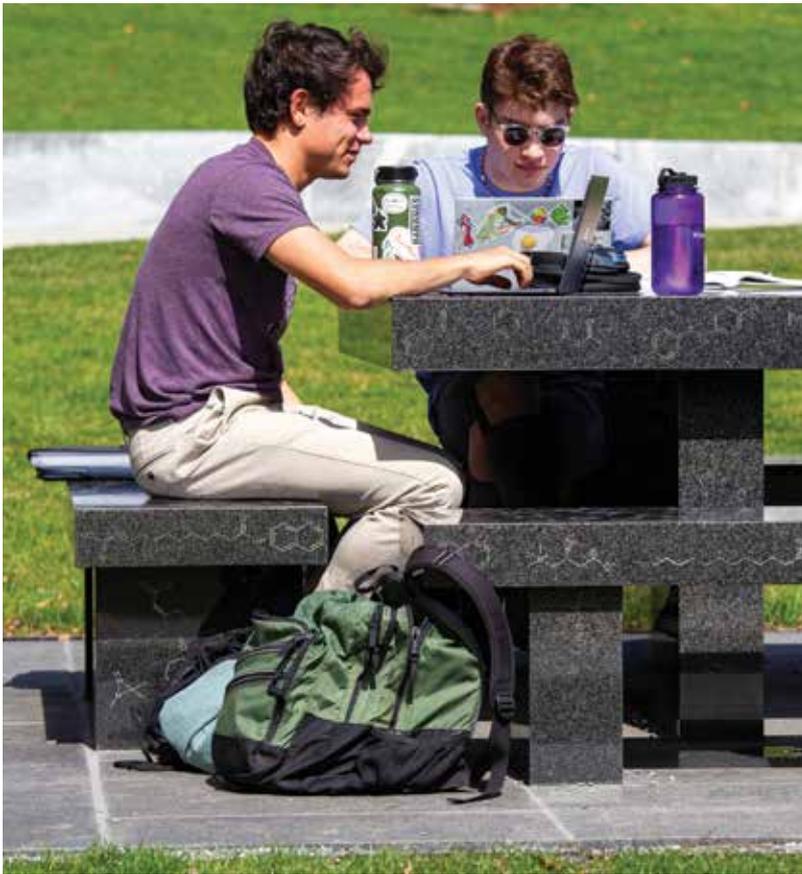
Students line up in December to view the art department's "Big Art Show," featuring work made by students in the fall semester.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP:
Students in Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies Brittany Meché's class Global Sustainable Development.

The Flying Ace Trike Race was a fan favorite among this year's Winter Carnival festivities.







OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:
Bellamy Richardson '23 records her original songs in Studio 275, the college's in-house production studio.

After a long hiatus, Lyceum Dinners, where students and faculty mingle over a three-course meal, returned to the Faculty House.



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Oliver Hall, left, and Ben Shapiro, both Class of '25, study at the "715 molecules" public art table by Jenny Holzer in the science quad.

Benet Ge, left, and Olivia Winters, both Class of '25, crocheting during the Fab Lab's open house in Sawyer Library.

Men's varsity crew claims victory at the Little Three Championships on Onota Lake in Pittsfield, Mass.



BUILDING EQUITY & INCLUSION



RICE
HOUSE +
ADDITION

2

1

3

1 A living room named in honor of Ray Whiteman '81, thanks to his generous gift to support future generations of historically underrepresented students, will provide space for students to relax, study and socialize.

2 The charred wood exterior in the Japanese tradition of "shou-sugi-ban" will use natural wood siding, an intentional connection to Williamstown's White Oaks neighborhood that was once a haven for Black residents in the community. The wood is sustainable, eco-friendly and Forest Stewardship Council certified, which means it meets the highest standards in terms of ethical production.

3 Elevator access will now be available from the building's entrances on Morley Circle and Bank Street.

4 A multipurpose room, with movable partitions, will allow flexible space to accommodate gatherings of any size for lectures, film screenings, discussions, gospel choir performances and student meetings of all kinds.

5 A spacious, well-equipped kitchen will allow students to prepare and host meals, bringing a taste of home to Williams.

THIS SUMMER the college will begin work to expand and renovate the buildings that make up the Davis Center, an inclusive hub of activity supporting historically underrepresented communities within the larger Williams family. Designed with extensive input from the nearly two dozen student groups that call Rice House, Jenness House and Hardy House home, the project will expand the complex's footprint by about 8,000 square feet, with an eye toward creating inclusive, sustainable and accessible spaces that take into account the campus and region's history. Construction is expected to be complete in early 2024.

The project is part of the larger Davis Center Initiative, which seeks to support and sustain both the physical spaces as well as expanded programming that, as the center's mission states, "advances broad campus engagement with complex issues of identity, history and cultures as they affect intellectual, creative and social life."



6 The building will be retrofitted with new siding, insulation and windows to meet Massachusetts' Stretch Code, which emphasizes energy-efficient and cost-effective construction.

7 A new north-facing entry will be oriented to face the complex's other buildings and make it more visible to visitors coming from the science quad.

To learn more and support this initiative, visit giving.williams.edu/davis-center.

Finding IN Balance UNCERTAIN TIMES

Illustrations by
Keith Negley

Interview by
Catherine O'Neill Grace



Pause for a moment to consider your allostatic load. That's the scientific term for "the sum total of all the stressors you might have on your body, within your body and your heart, mind and spirit at any one time," says Wendy Adam, Williams College's director of Integrative Wellbeing Services (IWS).

Your allostatic load can make you feel anxious or depressed. It can physiologically change your access to memory and concentration. It can affect your entire body, including your blood pressure, metabolism and immune system. Chances are, says Adam, your allostatic load right now is "probably through the roof."

That's not surprising, given that we're dealing with the ramifications of a global pandemic, war, political turbulence and social injustice. These stressors and many others add a layer of complexity to an already challenging mental health landscape at Williams and on college campuses everywhere that are working to meet the rising demand for counseling, education and support.

There are no quick fixes or easy solutions. But changes Williams has made in its approach to mental health over the last decade are helping the college to meet the moment. And while counseling remains a central aspect of IWS's work, the office's focus has expanded to include preventive care and a holistic approach to wellness, with the goal of helping students cultivate skills and practices that will last a lifetime.

Earlier this year, Adam joined outgoing Dean of the College Marlene Sandstrom and Athletic Director Lisa Melendy in a conversation with alumni about the state of mental health and well-being on campus. Excerpts of that conversation and subsequent interviews with them follow and have been edited for clarity and space.

What is the goal of integrative well-being, generally?

Wendy Adam: What we are trying to create on campus is the capacity for students to pursue well-being, even amidst an intensive, high-performance educational experience. This means paying attention to students psychologically, emotionally, physically, spiritually, socially and environmentally. What Williams can do, through a variety of things, including traditional mental health services, is help students to integrate the full range of human experiences.

The strength of integrative well-being is that it prepares students to live in the world as it is right now, with all of the hardships. When things are hard, students might feel frustrated, sad or stressed out. We want them to understand that they shouldn't shut out or ignore those emotions but instead expect them as a part of life. Students can learn how to recognize and acknowledge their emotions, integrate them, and use resilience-based strategies to manage them.

Lisa Melendy: Our athletic teams sometimes function as a microcosm of this healthy life we're talking about. Team

members have deep relationships. They have a caring adult in their life on campus. Students tend to focus on the outcome of athletics, but our coaches are trying to break that cycle and shift the focus to process—that is, focusing on shared work and relationships while doing something you're passionate about and that makes you feel good. Athletics should bring you joy through physical movement and through setting appropriate goals and meeting them.

What are some of the resilience-based coping strategies that students learn?

Adam: We teach students, literally, how to breathe through mindfulness and meditation practice in a program called Mindful Mondays. This helps with concentration, sleep, one's relationship to stress and just overall well-being. Many groups focus on creating meaningful connection with peers and integrating our myriad identities. We help students explore their relationships to food and their bodies. We partner with many offices across campus to offer workshops on journaling, doodling and other creative outlets, self-care and healing after trauma. We recently co-hosted with the chaplains' office and health education office a full-day rest, resilience and restoration retreat via Zoom videoconference. These are all skills that can be learned and reinforced.

Marlene Sandstrom: Another skill that everybody can practice and strengthen is the ability to recognize that you can feel lots of things at once. And that's OK. You can know that you have a lot of work to do, which makes you feel a little anxious, but you can also be in the moment and be grateful for the 10 minutes you have to touch base with a friend. Sometimes it feels to us like we have to be overcome by the worst feeling we have. But lots of things can be true at once, and that's a skill that you practice.

Melendy: All of our offerings in athletics—varsity teams, recreation, intramural sports and physical education classes—are about physical well-being and connection. Self-regulation helps people be physically healthy. You can't exercise in a mindless way; you really need to be paying attention to what you're doing. You're thinking about your teammates. You put your phone down for that amount of time. You are out connecting with people.

Our coaches now have students fill out daily or weekly assessments about how they're feeling. Are you sleeping? Do you have a lot of work this week? Are you stressed? So coaches know where students are and can adjust their training. The students at Williams who are athletes want to really achieve athletically, yet we're finding that pulling back on some of the training is actually helpful both in keeping them whole and in their performance. They're not as tired; they're not as burnt out.

How has the demand for counseling services changed, and what has Williams done to meet it?

Sandstrom: Like most colleges and universities across the country, we've seen an increase in the number of students seeking mental health services, particularly individual therapy. In the fall of 2018, 475 students were seeking individual psychotherapy through IWS. By the fall of 2019, that number grew to 525. This past fall of 2021, it was 610. This growth is actually a good thing. We want students who need help to feel that they're in a culture and a climate where they can say so and where they can get the help that they need.

One thing we did in response to this growth was hire more contract therapists to assist our staff therapists so that we could manage the wait list we were beginning to see and make sure we had the bandwidth to support students in need. Our student-to-therapist ratio dropped from 140 students per therapist to 117 with the recent hiring of a few contract therapists. International Accreditation of Counseling Services, an organization that sets standards for higher education, sets an "aspirational" minimum staffing ratio at one professional staff member for every 1,000 or 1,500 students. That includes both very large state universities as well as smaller colleges. Our ratio is among the best in the country.

Still, it's very concerning to us—and this is not unique to Williams—that this group of emerging adults is struggling with a lot of challenges at a time in life where we're hoping that they have the energy and competence to participate in all the incredible opportunities that we have here. We take very seriously our responsibility to help make this place accessible so that every student can take full advantage.

Adam: Every single student who's enrolled at Williams has access to live psychotherapy and psychiatry, either in person or via video, 12 months per year, at no additional cost to them. IWS offers on-campus therapists and psychiatrists, psychotherapy, psychiatry services, crisis intervention and grief support sessions. Students also can access Talkspace, a video-based teletherapy business. We contracted with Talkspace a couple of years ago, before the Covid-19 pandemic. It was fortuitous—it positioned us very well to offer a remote option for students who studied off campus when the college closed in spring 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Students can also make use of ProtoCall Services, which provides on-call, 24-hour crisis assessments and support when the office is closed.

*"It's not about teaching joy.
It's about teaching presence.
And I think that's where the
opportunity lies for us to make
changes, both in the classroom
and outside of the classroom."*

—Wendy Adam, director of Integrative Wellbeing Services



What are students seeking support for?

Adam: Issues like loneliness and grief and anxiety and depression, difficulty with concentration and attention—these are things that students are talking about openly in ways that may have been reserved historically for a few who were actively engaged in treatment. Now it's very much in the global dialogue on campus, in large part because of these traumas we're all living through. Students are experiencing what are typically seen as symptoms of mental illness and seeking to be evaluated and treated for things like attention deficit disorder. In supporting these students, we need to determine: Are they grappling with mental illness or are they grappling with the realities of “now” in the context of an allostatic load that is just extraordinary? Is it possible that almost an entire generation is mentally ill in terms of increasing rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality and other markers? A student I met with recently perhaps said it best: “Maybe we can all be broken now, since the world is.”

What do students need right now?

Adam: Students are showing us a need for an emphasis on meaning and connection, on a sense of purpose and presence and rest, and on how these things work together to support a healthy student, not only while they're in college but beyond. They might be walking outside and there's a beautiful view of the mountains everywhere you look on campus, and the sun is out. It's gorgeous. But in their mind, they're writing their economics paper. And so they have a moment where they could experience wonder, but they're not connected to that present moment. I think that our students have capacity to feel joy, to experience those moments. But that's part of what we want to teach them—that part of being a healthy human being is to be fully engaged in what you're in. That moment when you're writing your economics paper, be all in on that. When you're practicing field hockey, be all in on that. But when you're walking across campus, take the moment to allow your mind to be present to walking across the sidewalk, noticing what's there.

I think that that's where some of the skills training that we're trying to do comes in. It's not about teaching joy. It's about teaching presence. And I think that's where the opportunity lies for us to make changes, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. If we can give them the capacity, through this [integrated wellness] construct of skills and knowledge to cope with the world as it is, and continue to take care of themselves—heart, mind, body and spirit—then we will have done our job as a liberal arts institution in preparing them to be citizens of the world. 🌍

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Integrative Wellbeing Services (IWS) at Williams provides a wide range of opportunities for students to practice wellness skills and connect with their peers and professional staff. Here are just a few examples:

Alone Together is a drop-in group for students on campus who are in isolation or quarantining, or who are feeling isolated during Covid-19. The group meets remotely for lunch to talk about whatever is on students' minds or simply to be together.

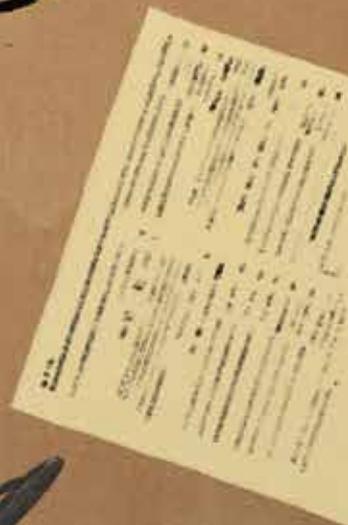
Mindful Mondays teaches students a variety of micro-mindfulness practices and meditation skills to manage stress and anxiety, get grounded and reconnect in heart, mind, body and spirit. The group focuses on simple practices to improve concentration, relationships with stress, self-care, sleep and overall well-being.

Writing Through Grief is a 12-week workshop series that addresses grief and healing through the act of writing.

EnGender offers support, information and opportunities for exploration for trans, non-binary and questioning students. The group's shared goals include facilitating connection, support, personal growth and building community.

As You Are is a space for students who find themselves struggling with their relationships with food and their bodies and who are interested in receiving support while actively working toward a different understanding of both.

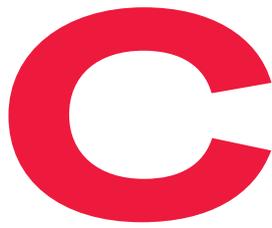
Check out more IWS programming and workshops on Instagram @resilientliving.



The **RMDROB** **Within**

Economics professor
Tara Watson's new
book examines the
financial and human
toll of undocumented
immigrants.

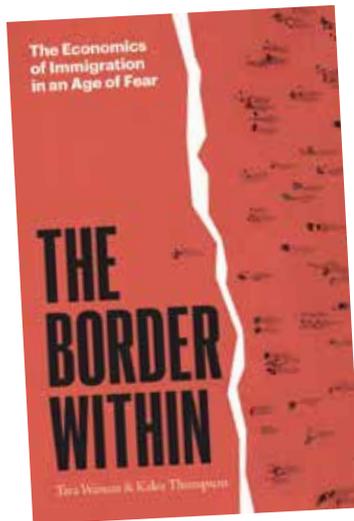
Illustrations by
Alex Nabaum



rises at the U.S. border with Mexico have gotten a tremendous amount of attention recently during what economist Tara

Watson and journalist Kalee Thompson say is a “wave of national obsession with illegal immigration.” Yet what are the costs of interior enforcement—that is, the policies, people and programs aimed at removing undocumented immigrants already living here?

It’s a question Watson and Thompson explore in great detail in their new book, *The Border Within: The Economics of Immigration in an Age of Fear*.



At Williams since 2004, Watson long has woven her research in labor and health economics and U.S. social policy into courses such as The Economics of Immigration and Your Money or Your Life: Health Disparities in the U.S. In 2013 and 2014, she published two papers examining the impacts of local enforcement on immigrants’ mobility and their willingness to enroll in health insurance. In each case, she wrote, the policies didn’t necessarily prompt undocumented people to leave an area or stop the rate of immigration. Instead, they created an environment of fear and uncertainty, deterring families from, say, enrolling their eligible citizen children in public health insurance.

The Border Within expands upon that research, interweaving history, policy and data with the stories of six families—four with one or more family members born in Mexico, one family originally from Guatemala and one from South Korea. Each family has at least one undocumented member. Watson and Thompson connected with them through immigrant groups or via friends, met with the families in person at least once and remained in touch by phone over the course of several years. The individuals’ names have been changed along with some identifying details.

“It’s easy for readers to get lost in the statistics,” Watson and Thompson write in the prologue. “Our hope is that sharing these stories will help to elucidate how sometimes-abstract policy decisions play out on the ground.”

An excerpt of their book follows.

NEVADA, 2005

When Jorge Ramirez left for the United States border in 2005, he'd never been outside his small town in the northeast part of Mexico State. When he was growing up his father worked in masonry and his mother sold food in the local street markets. He was the only one of four brothers to graduate from high school, but without money or connections, attending university was out of the question, he says. Through his early 20s, Jorge worked as a door-to-door salesman, peddling everything from books to knives to mirrors to watches. He was 24 when he decided to leave home and head north.

Jorge knew just one person in the U.S., a friend who was living and working near Las Vegas, Nevada. In Mexico, Jorge was living at home with his parents and worrying about their medical bills. "All my family, they are self-employed, everybody live day by day," he says. "My parents are getting old, and I know that they cannot support their life, so that's why I had to try to come to U.S. and try to support my family."

He paid \$1,500 to a coyote—a guide who makes an illicit business of orchestrating illegal border crossings—and came over the border with a group of five men near Sonora, Arizona. He brought nothing with him but clothes and water. "I figured out it's kind of like a chain," Jorge says of the system of coyotes and lesser "gias" (guides) that shuttle migrants across vast expanses of borderland desert, often sheltering them in a series of safe houses. "You talk to the first person, and you are blind after that. You don't know what's going on, you just have to follow." Jorge's crossing took close to two weeks. "I don't know how I can explain this," he says, sitting in the comfortable living room of his own home in Washington State nine years later. "I know it's not

good. I know I did bad, but it's just that I have to do it for my family."

Jorge made it to Las Vegas and moved in with his friend, who helped him to buy a fake social security card and then to get a job at his own workplace, a local Wendy's fast-food restaurant. They started Jorge on the fries, making \$5.75 an hour. He generally worked 40 to 50 hours a week, sometimes on 12-hour shifts that ended at 2:00 in the morning. Despite his low salary, the money was significant to Jorge's family. Every week he would go to Western Union and wire most of his paycheck back to Mexico. "That was a huge, huge difference for my family," Jorge says. "I can really support and pay for medical bills that I couldn't [pay for] in Mexico."

Within a couple of months, Jorge was moved to burger preparation, then to cashier.

The store manager told him he could easily rise to manager if he improved his English. All but a couple of the employees at the restaurant were Latino, Jorge says, and though it was never discussed openly, Jorge assumed that many of the others were undocumented as well. "To be honest, I think they know. The managers, they know, but nobody wants to take those jobs," he says. "It's hard to find people who want to work for that money."

Jorge was a standout employee. Within a couple months he got a raise—to \$6 an hour. The manager didn't tell him in advance, he just waited until Jorge opened the first paycheck reflecting the tiny bump.

"Hey! Did you see your check?" he asked Jorge.

"Yeah."

"I gave you a raise! You're a good worker."

"Right. Thank you!" Jorge said.

"I mean, it's not really a lot of money, but that made me feel good," he recalls.

IMMIGRANTS AT WORK

The labor market is central to the debate about immigration in America. Are immigrants good or bad for the U.S. economy? How do immigrants impact the job prospects of native workers? How do they affect the prices of goods and services? These questions lie at the crux of many disagreements about the ideal level of immigration and the best approach to enforcement.

Most immigrants come to the United States to work. There's a reason that migration tends to go from poor countries to rich ones. Simply put, migrants want to earn more than they can at home. Yes, some immigrants are motivated to come to the United States to take advantage of health care and social supports or to give their children the opportunity to go to better schools in America. Others come to flee violence or persecution or to live with a spouse or child. But the consensus among economists is that the primary motivator for migration is jobs. Ironically, as a 2006 review piece by Gordon Hanson at the University of California, San Diego, notes, the higher wages in the United States are such an obvious driver of migration that there are relatively few studies on the topic.

Perhaps the best evidence that jobs are a primary motivator for migration is that immigrants' actions are strongly influenced by employment opportunities. For instance, one 1999 study found that when Mexican wages decreased by 10%, apprehensions at the U.S. border—a measure of attempts at unauthorized migration—increased 6% to 8% over the next few months. It's also true that U.S. employment opportunities matter: Following the recent Great Recession, for example, the unauthorized population dropped from an estimated 12.2 million to 10.5 million.

One recent study shows that individual-level economic prospects matter as well. Matching U.S. census and administrative records, researchers Randall Akee of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Maggie R. Jones of the U.S. Census Bureau follow a cohort of immigrants who arrived in the United States between 2005 and 2007. (Because of the researchers' reliance on administrative earnings records, the sample is employed in the formal sector and skews toward documented immigrants.) When immigrants first arrive, their earnings are 30% to 40% below that of similarly aged U.S.-born workers in the state. Their wages gradually increase over time. The average earnings of immigrants who stay in the United States (or, at least, of those who stayed until the study concluded in 2015) converge to those of the native born by 2012. By contrast, those immigrants who eventually leave the country experience relative wage declines in the year or two just before they leave the United States. Though this pattern isn't definitive, especially since the researchers can't rule out that some immigrants absent from the administrative data still live in the United States, it certainly suggests that immigrants stick around for good wages and leave when opportunities dry up.

Once in the U.S., immigrants move to where the jobs are. Less-educated U.S.-born men don't move much in response to a local economic downturn, but Mexican-born men are very responsive to such downturns, leaving areas that are struggling and finding areas of growth within the United States. Internal migration within the U.S. is further support for the notion that immigrants tend to be driven by work opportunities.

We also know that low-income immigrants are less likely to qualify for



and take advantage of social services than low-income Americans. Most programs exclude undocumented immigrants, and many require five years of legal residency before documented immigrants are eligible. But even among eligible immigrants, participation rates are lower than those for comparable native-born Americans. Most immigrants arrive knowing they will need to work to support themselves, and labor-force participation rates of foreign-born men (especially undocumented men) well exceed those of the native born. Immigrants are also less likely to commit crime than the U.S. born.

All of these facts point to the same conclusion: The primary motivator for migration to the United States is the work opportunities. While there are some immigrants who move mainly to flee violence, to join loved ones or to take advantage of the safety net, they are in the minority. This means that policy efforts to reduce access to public programs or to raise the fear of deportation are unlikely to have a major impact on the number of immigrants living in the United States. Immigrants, including unauthorized immigrants, will continue to live and work in the United States as long as there are good work opportunities available.

WASHINGTON STATE, 2006

Jorge Ramirez had been working at the Nevada Wendy's for seven months when he heard about a construction job in Washington State. A contractor who had been hired to do the stucco work on a new outdoor shopping mall was looking for laborers. Jorge had been doing some stuccoing work on the side in Nevada, and soon several Mexican guys he knew from the area decided to head north together.

The company arranged the lodging, which by Jorge's standards was incredibly expensive: \$300 a week for a hotel room. The first month the work went smoothly, but then the contractor ran out of money. "When he realize he doesn't have enough money to finish the job he just left," Jorge says. The workers were stiffed out of their second month's pay. Lena Graber, an immigration attorney in California who has volunteered at workers' rights clinics, says this scenario is shockingly common: "It will blow your mind how much people work and don't get paid." Under-the-table work, particularly, she notes, leaves undocumented workers with "total vulnerability to discrimination and poor treatment by employers—as well as just insecurity and lower wages."

Despite the way the job ended, Jorge had realized he liked the plastering work. He started just walking around to construction sites, going up to the man who seemed to be in charge, and asking for work. "I met a very good guy," Jorge says. "He gave me an opportunity for one week and after one week he say that I should stay with him." Jorge ended up working for the man, a small-business owner who was himself an immigrant from Eastern Europe, for almost four years and learning every side of the stucco business. He enjoyed the work, but eventually the businessman, too, encountered financial problems. Once again, Jorge wasn't paid for his last

couple months of work. Since he was working illegally, going to the authorities didn't occur to him as an option. But he doesn't hold a grudge against his old boss. "I got experience from him, and I am very grateful because he was a great boss," Jorge says. "I learned a lot from him. I know he didn't pay me but he wasn't a bad person."

Jorge had been able to get a driver's license soon after he arrived in Washington. The state was one of the first to allow undocumented immigrants to get licenses, a policy that gained public support in part because of the argument that it would be impossible to harvest the state's large apple crop if undocumented immigrants were unable to drive to and in the orchards. Jorge had been driving in Nevada, too—there was no other way to get to and from his fast-food job. But he did so illegally. The practice was common, he says, and the cops weren't that strict. During the time he lived in Nevada in 2005 and 2006, he never heard of a person being arrested after a traffic stop simply for not having a license. The one time he got pulled over it was for making an illegal turn. "They ask me for my license and insurance," he says. "And so I have insurance. I didn't have a license." The cop handed him a ticket for \$250. "That kind of hit me hard. But I don't want to get in any trouble so I paid right away." 🗨

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Among the U.S. immigrant population, there are:

20.7
MILLION
naturalized citizens

12.3
MILLION
lawful permanent residents

2.2
MILLION
lawful temporary residents

10.5
MILLION
undocumented immigrants, half of whom crossed a border illegally and half who stayed in the U.S. after a temporary visa expired

66%
or more of the undocumented population in 2017 lived in the U.S. for a decade or longer

7%
of all children in the U.S. live with at least one undocumented parent

75%
of undocumented immigrants work in jobs labeled as "essential" during the pandemic

50%
of all farmworkers in the U.S. are undocumented immigrants

Source: *The Border Within*



How personal experiences with cancer propelled three alumnae to share their knowledge and support with others.



PASSION & PURPOSE

Ask Louisa Gloger what year she graduated from Williams, and she toggles between 2000 and 2001. She says that's where her breast cancer story begins.

As a 19-year-old, she took a year off from college when her mother was diagnosed with the disease for a second time. She passed away before Gloger graduated.

Then, at the age of 31, after her second daughter was born, Gloger found a lump in her own breast. She was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer, a disease that disproportionately affects Black and Latina women. Gloger recalls telling her doctor, "I'm super scared that

I'm not going to make it," to which her doctor replied, "Louisa, the thing is, you will make it. But a large part of this is a socioeconomic difference."

"That was a catalyst moment for me," Gloger told some 60 Williams alumnae during a panel discussion about passion philanthropy—the practice of committing time, money and other resources to causes that align with one's most important beliefs and values. In Gloger's case, and that of fellow participants Rebekah Timin Mannix '90 and Wendy Brown '82, that cause was cancer.

Gloger went on to co-found Triple Step Toward the Cure, an organization that provides financial

and emotional support to women going through treatment. Brown, whose mother died from breast cancer and who survived it twice herself, established the Twinkle Foundation, which works closely with the Silent Spring Institute and Breast Cancer Prevention Partners, supporting and sharing research on the links between breast cancer and the environment. And Mannix, with her husband, Jim Mannix '89, who was diagnosed with metastatic pancreatic cancer 12 years ago, launched the Treat Train, a colorful, cheerful cart that delivers crafts and treats to pediatric cancer patients at Boston Children's Hospital.

“There are many ways that our family for the last 12 years has been swallowed up by grief and fear,” said Mannix, who led the online discussion, an excerpt of which follows. “But slowly we’ve crawled out bit by bit. That involved reaching out to others and asking how we can support other people.”

Rebekah Timin Mannix '90: Passion philanthropy is not just a generous gift. It's a selfish gift to think about how to transform these horrible experiences into something more meaningful. I have two amazing women who are going to join me in this conversation. I thought we could start by hearing a little bit about your stories.

Wendy Brown '82: My mom and I didn't fit the profile of people who should be at high risk for breast cancer. And not just the two of us—friends and mothers of friends of mine were also being diagnosed. That's what really irritated me at the time. I wanted to know why. Why me? I was zoning in on the environmental link, did a lot of research. And then my mother's funeral came around, and I decided to start a family foundation called the Twinkle Foundation, because people really wanted to give money to something. What we found at the time was that almost all the money going into breast cancer was going into diagnosis and research. Hardly anybody was focused on prevention of a disease that one out of every seven women is going to have at some point in their life. So that's what we've been maniacally focused on, specifically with respect to environmental links. I call what I do “philanthropy light.” It's never been my full life. It's been an outlet, a way of being positive and educating myself as well as feeling as though I can move this ball forward, somehow, just one little person in the world. And so my foundation was never big. It was always just me, my family cheering me on. Here I am, 15 years into it. It helped me during my diagnosis tremendously. I had new

contacts, I had a lot more information. I felt much more empowered. And I think for anyone who's been through cancer, that's half the battle—feeling positive and like you are in control of something. Because when something else takes control of your body, it's very easy to believe that you have no control.

Louisa Gloger '00: As I was going through treatment, it struck me that I would often find myself in waiting rooms with other young, Black women who were trying to parent and raise children, struggling with getting there on the bus—struggling with just surviving in the world—in addition to having cancer. I had the resources to get to my appointments, to hire a full-time nanny to take care of my two young children. I had the educational background to advocate for myself. I had this moment of realization that this was unacceptable to me. I teamed up with my doctor at Stanford, and she connected me with a woman who lost her sister to triple negative breast cancer the year before. And this woman, Lori Flowers, and I founded a nonprofit, Triple Step Toward the Cure, in 2010, while I was still in active treatment. We hit the ground running. We set up a 501(c)(3). I would go from my chemotherapy appointments to lawyer appointments to do the paperwork and get it going. It was pretty epic. And I think, selfishly, in a way, helping other women helped me. We fundraised extensively, raised \$250,000 through friends and family and grassroots \$5 donations—everything from selling little pins to taking checks from big donors. I ran that organization with my co-founder for about five years. Then my story shifts. I was an art history major at Williams, and art is my first love. I realized that for myself, for my survival, I was not trained as a therapist or a social worker. Taking calls from women who were going through treatment started to be too much for me. So I stepped away from Triple Step, but I joined the board of

the Cancer Prevention Institute of California. I'll tie in here that art is a massive philanthropic aspect, because I believe art is very healing. I've just started a new job as executive director of the Bolinas Museum, and I continue to support women with breast cancer.

Mannix: What are you most proud of?

Brown: For me, the idea of going out and fundraising was never part of it. I was working full time, moved to Germany in the middle of it all. So I was really proud of the fact that by being focused and finding my long-term soulmates in the Silent Spring Institute in Boston and what's now called Breast Cancer Prevention Partners in San Francisco, I've been able to compound my role so much further than if I were trying to do it on my own. They're the groups that have driven the push to eliminate fire retardants out of all our products. They're the ones who got the liners out of water bottles. That all came from research from them. I can use my education and push them to try to be a little more business focused. It's just me, but it's incredibly leverageable when you find the right people to work with. I'm also proud of the fact that my daughter has little cards [about unsafe chemicals in health and beauty products] that she gives to all her friends. That's one of the things Breast Cancer Prevention Partners did. It's magic when you can turn that generation on so that they're aware, because we weren't.

Gloger: Being a mother of young girls, when I was going through this, I'm proud to be a survivor at the most basic level. I'm also proud thinking about my girls and the next generation and the example that I've set for them—that when a hardship comes along, how do you take that challenge and turn it into positivity and help others? I credit my mother for having me think that way. She wasn't there with me when I was going through my battle. But just her

way of being in her lifetime is what allowed me to have that strength during a really hard time. I'm proud of the women we helped during those years at Triple Step—I had big, massive dreams of how far this thing was going to go. But I'm proud that I saw that for my own well-being I needed to step away and continue giving back and doing philanthropic work differently.

Mannix: How do you feel your personal and giving philosophies changed after your cancer journeys?

Gloger: Because I was 31, and a young mom, I honestly hadn't been giving very much [philanthropically] at that point. Subsequently, I joined my family foundation, which has allowed me to give really meaningful gifts to cancer organizations. Having the experience of breast cancer is core to how I function as a giver—giving financially to enact change.

Brown: I became more focused. Prior to [founding Twinkle], I was spreading \$25, \$100 here, there, trying to make everyone happy. Then I became much pickier, being very specific about understanding who I was giving to and where it was going to go and what it was going to accomplish.

Mannix: Joy is anti-inflammatory. What I mean by that is, we know the more anxious and depressed and unsatisfied you are, the more your whole body becomes inflamed, which itself is a trigger. So finding these things that give you joy and sustain you is one of the best things you can do for your health.

Brown: There was a woman on my street who was going through breast cancer at the same time I was. She started a garden. So when she was going through her treatment, she said, "I want to be here next year when all of this comes back to bloom." It's that idea of taking control of something. I took control of the food I ate. It's a small thing, but

“I want to be here next year when all of this comes back to bloom. It's that idea of taking control of something.”

WENDY BROWN '82,
quoting a neighbor who started a garden
while undergoing breast cancer treatment



it's taking back something. So what the neighborhood started doing, when we knew our neighbor was coming up for difficult treatments—we piled her mailbox full with cuttings or seeds that would help her forward her garden. Five years after she went through all this, it was just the most amazing thing.

Mannix: At any given time, I think, what can I leverage to help? There's personal time, financial time, emotional time. And on any given day, I have less and more of each of those resources. Sometimes I have none of any of those resources. How do you decide what you're going to leverage as you go forward?

Brown: I say, "OK, you wish you could clone yourself, Wendy. Why can't there be 100 of you? Then you'd be able to accomplish a lot more." I see my giving to Williams as that. Yes, I give directly to foundations and people who are doing the work. But I want to fuel that. I need to keep pushing other people to get engaged and to go on that search as well—to find their passion and push it forward and to make this world a better place. That's where I see the Williams connection. It's a long-term

play. But I think it's a really critical one. I couldn't have done what I did if I hadn't been there.

Gloger: I will echo that. I love Williams for so many reasons. A large part is how they supported me when my mother was ill. But then also the fact that I had the tools when I was going through my illness to advocate for myself. I credit the school and then the network of people—that leveraging relationships, the friends that I was able to be in touch with. So giving back to the school does feel like an opportunity to continue that passion in the next generation of people. ♻️



Africa and the Anthropocene

By
Abe Loomis

Brittany Meché, assistant professor of environmental studies, and her students delve into historical injustices that continue to shape the landscape of the African continent.

Brittany Meché, assistant professor of environmental studies.

“What does it mean to act ethically in a world that is so unequal?”

It’s a question environmental studies professor Brittany Meché examines with her students in the spring-semester course *Africa and the Anthropocene*.

The class explores what Meché calls a “frustrating paradox”: The African continent accounts for the smallest share of global greenhouse gases, yet it is predicted to experience some of the worst effects of climate change. Untangling the roots of this imbalance, she says, requires recognizing the “living history” of centuries-old injustices.

“You can’t understand the contemporary environmental landscape of the African continent without understanding colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade,” Meché says.

Her multidisciplinary course—which is cross-listed with programs in Africana studies, environmental studies, and science and technology studies—engages with a broad swath of material, including theoretical texts, reports from international organizations, films and novels. So it’s not surprising that *Africa and the Anthropocene* draws students from a wide range of interests and majors.

Meché recalls a recent discussion of the book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* by Kathryn Yusoff, professor of inhuman geography at Queen Mary University of London. The book, published in 2018 by the University of Minnesota Press, unpacks Yusoff’s statement that “no geology is neutral” by weaving together Black feminist theory, geography and the earth sciences.

“We had one student who was very interested in geosciences and had always thought of geology as value neutral,” Meché says. “After reading the book, he was thinking about it in a new way.”

Another student, Liv Chambers ’25, was interested in analyzing the poetry included in Yusoff’s book written by Amié Césaire of Martinique, whose work explores Black identity under French colonial rule.

“Césaire’s poetry provided grounding in the current moment of global environmental precarity and reaffirmed our hopeful work toward creating a new, environmentally just world,” says Chambers, who plans to major in history and geosciences.

Adds art major Calen Geiser-Cseh ’23, “Our discussion of [Césaire’s] poetry opened an imaginative avenue to think about possibilities for the future beyond words on a page.”

Meché says these kinds of discussions and discoveries are “the best of what a liberal arts conversation can offer—to have all these people in the same room reading the same text and drawing very different things from it. That’s when the magic is happening.”

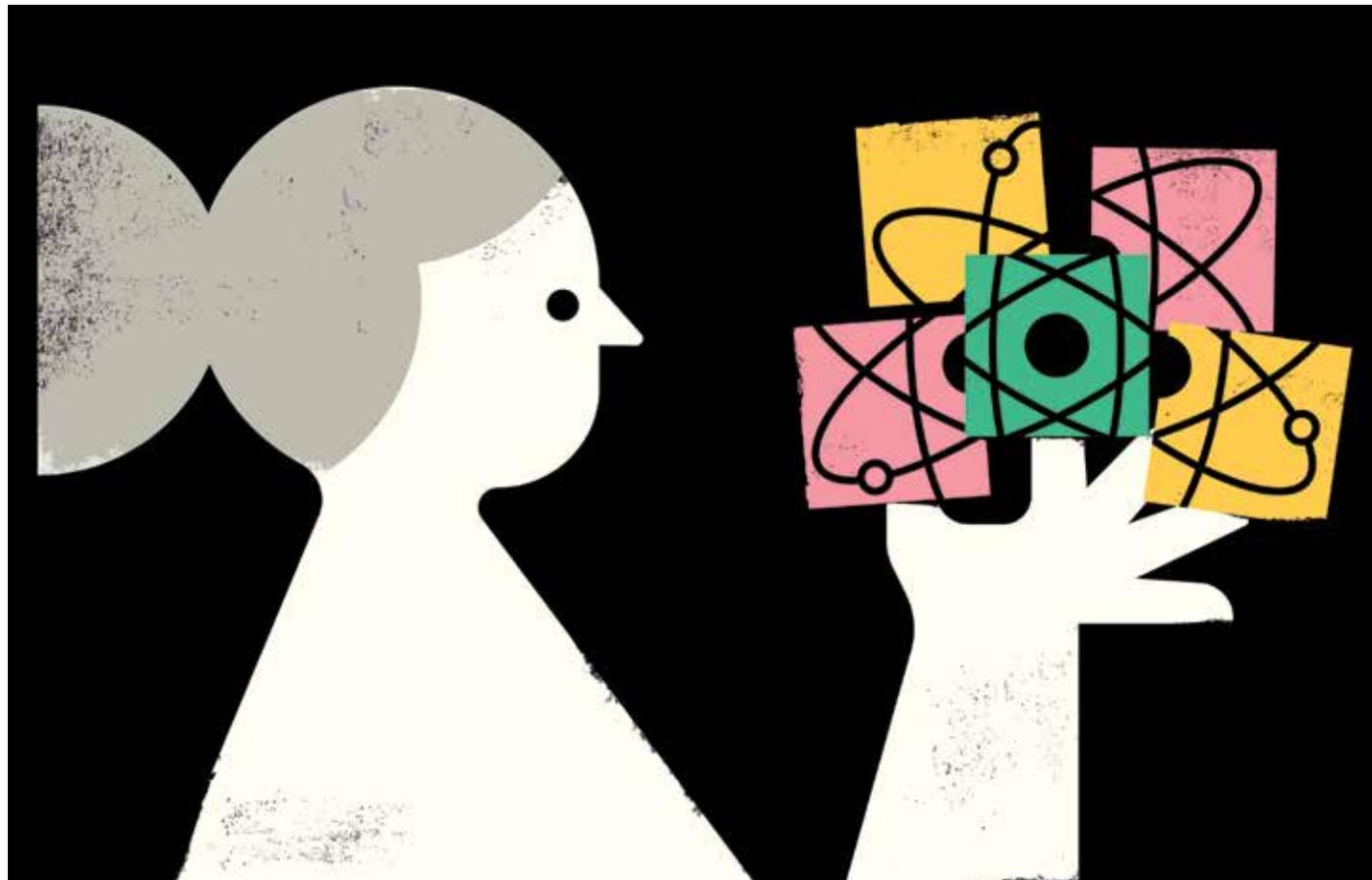
Meché came to Williams in the fall of 2019 as a Gaius Charles Bolin Fellow. The two-year residential fellowship, named for Williams’ first Black graduate, provides resources for scholars from underrepresented groups to finish their dissertations and teach a course. That’s when Meché introduced *Africa and the Anthropocene*. She joined the environmental studies faculty last fall and also teaches *Science and Militarism in the Modern World*, *Global Sustainable Development* and the senior seminar *Environmental Ethnography*.

At the root of all her research and teaching is a focus on ethics.

Says Meché, “Fundamentally, I want students to leave this course with a sense that people are attempting to act in the world in ethical ways—that people are still attempting to effect change, even amid some of the most dire circumstances.”

Sticky Science

By
Chau Tu



A new grant supports professor Kate Jensen's research with students on the physics of soft adhesives.

Emily Kuwaye '23 has been working in physics professor Kate Jensen's lab ever since she was a first-year student. The art major, who says she is deeply interested in physics, helped collect and analyze data about how soft gel microspheres—which are sticky particles barely visible to the naked eye—adhere to surfaces.

The findings in part led to a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), announced last fall, that furthers the research and connects Jensen's lab and students to those of Chelsea Davis, a professor at Purdue University's School of Materials Engineering. Of the \$800,000 grant to both institutions, Williams' share is about \$413,000.

Jensen has been studying soft adhesives for about 10 years, for the most part examining them under "fairly static contexts," she says. The grant allows her to extend her research to "try to tackle some questions that no one's ever looked at fundamentally, like what happens when you start to change the shape of an adhesive material?"

The answers could eventually lead to practical uses such as making adhesives whose stickiness could be increased or decreased on demand. Think of soft robots that, like Spider-Man, could climb up walls or walk upside down, or a biomedical or industrial process that involves gently picking up, carrying and releasing delicate components.

At Williams since 2017, Jensen teaches Introduction to Materials Science as well as the course Statistical Mechanics and Thermodynamics. As many as nine students work in her lab year-round.

Though she often crafts her own silicones and gels to analyze under high-powered microscopes, Jensen and her students frequently use the adhesive on the backs of sticky notes as test subjects.

“I’m very fond of sticky notes,” Jensen says. “I mean, they’re so cool.”

Examining them under an electron microscope, she says, “You can actually see there are these little bumps of adhesive material that are around 50 micrometers across”—about the length of a human cell. The students use what they learn to make their own sticky notes.

The NSF grant includes funding for two to three undergraduate research assistants in Jensen’s lab during the academic year, stipends for two summer students and a postdoctoral researcher who can serve as a mentor. The collaboration with Davis also establishes an Adhesion Engineering Summer Camp at Purdue, where Williams students can spend a week each of the next three summers conducting research.

The camp, Jensen says, provides an opportunity for students to “see something that looks very different from Williams—a big engineering school with large-scale engineering facilities—and learn what is engineering, what is a Ph.D. program like, what is engineering research?”

“At Williams, undergraduate students like Emily, with diverse backgrounds and academic interests, are engaging in impactful scientific discovery at a level comparable to that of a major research university,” Jensen adds. “It’s a truly unique research and educational environment, and I’m thrilled to be a part of it.”

Kuwaye, too, recognizes the value of this kind of opportunity: “Doing work in the lab teaches you a lot about problem-solving and critical thinking that can be applied to any discipline.”

STICKY SCIENCE @ HOME

As part of physics professor Kate Jensen’s research, she and her students make soft adhesives to create their own sticky notes. You can try it at home with this recipe:

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tsp. gelatin powder (unflavored)
- 1 Tbsp. water
- 1 Tbsp. glycerin (also sold as glycerol, available at most pharmacies)
- 1 piece of paper (cut up into note-sized pieces)

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Using a fork or small whisk, mix together the gelatin and water in a small, microwave-safe bowl or mug.
- Add the glycerin, and mix thoroughly. The mixture should be very thick and paste-like, with no large lumps.
- Wait at least 5 minutes for the gelatin to fully hydrate, stirring occasionally.
- Next, microwave the mixture on high for 20–30 seconds, watching that it doesn’t boil over.
- Whisk the hot mixture into a thick, frothy foam and continue mixing.
- As the foam starts to cool, the gelatin will begin to set, and the mixture will start to get noticeably thicker and more viscous. As soon as this happens, use a knife to spread a thin, smooth layer of the foam onto the pieces of paper where you want them to be sticky. If it’s gotten too thick to spread smoothly, just reheat for 10–15 seconds in the microwave and remix.
- Lay the pieces of paper out to finish cooling with the sticky side up.

Enjoy your sticky notes!

Note: This recipe sticks best to smooth surfaces like wood, glass, plastic and metal. To make even stickier notes, use a bit less gelatin and/or more glycerin.

Deep in the Game

By
Abe Loomis

Computer science professor Aaron Williams and his students explore the code behind classic video games to understand how they work, to make improvements and to create their own.

As a high school student, Aaron Williams challenged himself to put together the perfect mixtape. For him, that meant figuring out how to arrange the songs to fill a cassette so there was no dead air before his Walkman automatically switched between sides A and B.

“That was the first time I wrote a really complicated program, to generate all these possibilities and test them,” the computer science professor recalls. “And that ended up becoming the theme of my career.”

As did the 1980s, the golden age of the mixtape—and of video games.

In addition to teaching courses on data structures, advanced programming and the theory of computation, Williams has a deep interest in retrogame archaeology. That means digging into the code of old video games with his students to understand how they work, making improvements and creating new



ones using the same tools, technology, hardware, budget and time constraints developers encountered three or four decades ago.

Williams and his students do this work in a tiny game lab tucked deep in Schow Science Library. The space, which once housed maps, is now filled with row upon row of consoles, joysticks, connectors and game cartridges in plastic sleeves. The sights and sounds are recognizable to anyone who ever popped a quarter into the slot of a video game at the arcade. Screens display pixelated, two-dimensional scenes populated by

aliens, spaceships, knights, bees and other characters drawn in boxy outlines. Repetitive, electronic music emanates from the speakers.

Some items collected in Williams' lab are well known, like *Dr. Mario*, an action puzzle video game released by Nintendo in 1990 that's part of the widely popular Mario Bros. universe. Others are more obscure, like an original 1982 *Monster Mansion* cartridge from Nintendo's Japanese rival, Epoch. Played on Epoch's Casette Vision console, *Monster Mansion* was the company's answer to Nintendo's hit game *Donkey Kong*,

Photograph by Kris Qua



Jennifer Lee '22 (left) and Elijah Washington '24 are frequent visitors to computer science professor Aaron Williams' game lab in Schow Science Library.

whose massive success helped launch the video game revolution of the 1980s.

And then there are the games designed by students themselves. As many as a dozen students work in Williams' lab on Friday afternoons during the academic year and summer. Many were introduced to retrogame archaeology during Williams' Winter Study course on the subject.

In the final week of Winter Study in 2020, Williams hosted a Winter Jam. Thirty students ranging in experience from first-time programmers to seniors pursuing a concentration in computer

science contributed 23 games built in the programming language Lua on a platform called Pico-8. The platform mimics the look and feel of a game played on a console but runs in a web browser.

The games appear simple. In *Honey Havoc*, players can move a bee up, down, forward and backward to avoid getting stuck in honey while racing against the clock. *Ghostly Night* involves navigating increasingly complex two-dimensional mazes to reach a heart guarded by growing numbers of strategically positioned guards.

Computer science and studio art major Jennifer Lee '22 designed *Bird With a Gun*, which features a sparrow battling rats and vultures in a McDonald's parking lot. She says she is drawn to the way retrogame graphics are similar to the repetitive patterns in quilts and textiles.

Lee is now working in Williams' lab on her thesis, which involves developing artificial intelligence to solve *Dr. Mario* puzzles "as fast as possible." After graduation, she plans to work at Amazon Web Services in Arlington, Va.

Elijah Washington '24 began working in Williams' game lab last summer on a project to make classic Nintendo games accessible to people with vision deficiencies. He and several students developed a tool to improve how color is implemented in the games.

Washington went on to take Williams' Data Structures and Advanced Programming course in the fall and then the retrogame archaeology course this past Winter Study.

"Part of the interest in the code was seeing how developers would deal with those constraints," he says. "It was definitely difficult, but it was fascinating to see how things that just seem sort of magical when they happen in video games have a set routine that can be found—and altered, even—if you know where to look."

Says Williams, "It's natural for people to look at these games and think that the developers just had limited creativity or couldn't see obvious things that would have made the game better.

"In reality," he adds, "these were incredibly talented people pulling off miracles." 🍷

Play games developed by students during Winter Jam 2020 at bit.ly/wmswinterjam2020.

“This Here Black Life”

Honoring the legacies of influential scholars.

In the past nine months, the world said goodbye to several highly influential Black scholars: bell hooks, Charles Mills, Julius Sherrod Scott III and Greg Tate. According to Williams Professor of Africana Studies Neil Roberts, each “served as a mentor and guiding model for how to ethically and rigorously conduct scholarship that forever will be of value to Black intellectuals and the world writ large.” Roberts and others in the Williams community paid tribute to these scholars in publications and podcasts around the country. Excerpts of their tributes follow.

bell hooks:

Radical Love and Reckoning

The question of bell hooks’ legacy is urgent and rightfully demanding. We owe her the scholarly care reserved for men like Frederick Douglass and Frantz Fanon, as bell was equally profound and prolific. We hold her memory close with Toni Morrison, whose work she studied through her 1983 dissertation. hooks was an influential voice in the legendary scholarship of Saidiya Hartman, her former teacher’s assistant at Yale. She is part of a lineage of women who call on diverse genres of literature to access the inner life worlds of Black people. Her writing is a testament to the passionate poetics of Black performance.

She was an educator and public intellectual who handwrote the first drafts of all her books. She crafted critical lectures in the fiery spirit of her maternal great-grandmother and (chosen) namesake Bell Sarah Hooks, born in 1893. She was the product of many Black Southern women whose sharecropping feminism shaped the voice that encircles us. We owe bell hooks for how she laid her body on the academic front line—how she nuanced questions about Black life that set us up for a more imaginable freedom.

One strategy to achieve this freedom, she believed, was radical

love. bell hooks gave Black women a new way to understand the life of a mind as the starting point for activism and personal transformation. Thank you was never enough.

A central figure in Black feminist thought, she forced us to reckon with how patriarchy sometimes appears on the faces of our mothers. She helped bring new language to our critique of popular culture, to show how the legacy of slavery revealed itself through the American imagination.

Her conviction that “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” is an active system that lives in us all means that imagined freedom is for all of us or none of us.

We owe her for the way we wrapped ourselves in her intellectual curiosity, which became a force field around the Black people she laid theoretical hands on. Hands that drew on leftist literature, Buddhist psychology, soulful arguments and sound interventions against racialized and gendered capitalism. We must offer our own contributions and bodies of work because bell hooks gave us a compass out of the shadows.

—Lynnée D. Bonner, *Sterling Brown ’22 Visiting Professor of Africana Studies, writing for the Los Angeles Times, Dec. 18, 2021*

Charles Mills:

Understanding the Idea of Race

Charles Mills was an extremely important 20th- and 21st-century philosopher most well known for his book *The Racial Contract*. One of the long-standing interests of Mills is how do we understand the idea of race? And also, by extension, notions of racism? ... Mills wants to suggest that if we are to understand race and racism, we actually have to go to the founding of modernity in the period of 1492 [when] Columbus and crew arrived in what we now call the Bahamas.

It’s at that point that notions of race and racial difference from Mills and [writer and cultural theorist] Sylvia Wynter and others really begin. And Mills became particularly interested in the social contract tradition—the idea that humans are born into some type of originary state.

[In answer to the question of what prompted him to write *The Racial Contract*] Mills is making an argument that the foundational political system of the modern period starting in 1492 in settler colonial states, but not exclusively those, has been in his view the system of white supremacy not as a prejudice but as a political system. He wants us to talk about white supremacy as we would talk about libertarianism or conservatism or other types of political systems. And only then, if we understand white supremacy as a political system, can we think about ways in which to overturn that system or change social arrangements.

Mills’ biggest legacy is having us think that traditions like the social contract tradition can be more than just thought experiments. [They] actually can be windows into thinking about the world

in which we live and that we do have the possibility to change it.

—Neil Roberts, professor of Africana studies, from the *Future Hindsight* podcast, Feb. 17, 2022

Julius Sherrod Scott III: Recentering the Haitian Revolution

[His original thesis, *The Common Wind*] is arguably the most read, sought-after and discussed English-language dissertation in the humanities and social sciences during the 20th century. Scott underscored the importance of the Haitian Revolution and its aftershocks when the “Age of Revolution” remained overwhelmingly reduced to only the American and French Revolutions in the historiography of the day. Scott highlighted the complex relationships among slavery, capitalism and freedom, whose effects resonate with us today.

—Neil Roberts, professor of Africana studies, quoted in *The New York Times*, Dec. 16, 2021

Greg Tate: Finding the Intellectual Center

[Greg Tate] arrived at Williams College my senior year, in 2015, as a visiting lecturer in Africana studies. My adviser, Professor James Manigault-Bryant, who took up the department-chair gig at the time, introduced us. ... I’d read his work in *The Village Voice* and had seen his byline in a number of hip-hop publications. It was clear he was in a completely different league, and possibly planet, than his colleagues. I didn’t know what to make of him at first. I appreciated the cool-uncle vibes of his flamboyant fabrics—in particular, a spectacular array of kaleidoscopic scarves and hats—but didn’t understand them as sartorial id. The man I met was kind and uninterested in the whole



“sizing up” thing that many influential men do. He was a visiting professor and wasn’t anti-establishment to be quirky. This was just him.

Almost instantly, I found his pedagogy to be just as fluid as his writing, collapsing the institutional demand for in-class hierarchies and helping his students get into the funk of this here Black life. Sitting with us at eye level, Tate didn’t feel so much like an instructor as another student who might learn as much from us as we, him. He’d mix Socratic chop-up sessions with wide-ranging ambles on the making and remaking of Black Harlem; Ron Isley’s rhythm and woozy tutelage—and lowballing—of Jimi Hendrix; or the Pan-Africanist lineages of Black “American”-made crystal in Amiri Baraka’s *Blues People*. He introduced us to the work of his friend and co-conspirator Arthur Jafa through his 2013 documentary *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, in which

radical thinkers like Kathleen Cleaver and Saidiya Hartman excavate the machinations of global racial and sexual violence against Black people and consider how to actively resist it.

Tate’s guidance through the diaspora reignited my sense of curiosity. Prior to his teachings, I had a pretty good handle on Black culture through an American lens; I could make cross-cultural connections and engage with what I believed to be a Black radical politic at the time. But Tate was adamant about finding its intellectual center, about situating Black cultural production as not just an offshoot of Africa but as African property and invention.

—Tirhakah Love ’15, senior newsletter writer at *New York Magazine*, writing for *Vulture.com*, Dec. 13, 2021

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On the Big Small Things

By

**Bernie Rhie, chair and associate professor of English
as told to Regina Velázquez**

When I was younger, I spent a few years living in a Buddhist temple, motivated in particular by the suffering that afflicted my troubled adolescent mind. It was a very important time in my life and helped me sort things out. Then I went to college, grad school, ended up in this job here at Williams. None of what I did in school was about Buddhism or anything I studied at the Zen temple; it informed the way I thought about things, but I wanted to keep it separate.

Then, seven years ago, my son got very sick. He had a condition called necrotizing fasciitis, a flesh-eating bacteria, and came very close to losing a limb—losing his life. It was a very, very difficult few months—the experience was traumatic all around. And it caused me to reevaluate my priorities.

My son needed a different setting, and the only way to do that was for me to leave my job. So I worked for a couple of years as a high school teacher at Berkshire School, a boarding school in southern Berkshire County. It reminded me of the kind of teacher I wanted to be.

When we were ready to reconnect with our lives here, I returned to Williams. I knew I wanted to teach in ways that speak as much to students' hearts as much as it does to their minds and all the different things they're going through at this age.

I had the idea for a course—Zen and the Art of American Literature—which I began teaching in 2018. In the class we explore how Buddhism came to be a cultural force. We range far beyond the world of literature into other cultural domains in which Buddhism has had a deep impact, like environmentalism, psychotherapy and Western attitudes toward death and dying. And we undertake an experimental investigation of the benefits of incorporating contemplative practices like meditation in the classroom, learning a variety of techniques and using time each class session, two to three times per week, practicing and reflecting.

Meditation is so popular today, but the quality of instruction out there is uneven. It's good for students to be able to learn about it with someone who's done it for a while. Here at Williams, Georges Dreyfus (the Jackson Professor of Religion) and Kim Gutschow (lecturer in religion and anthropology/sociology) also teach classes on meditation. For a college as small as ours, there's a good number of opportunities for students to be exposed to meditation practice in serious ways and in different styles and voices.

The first time I taught the class, it was a seminar of about 25 students. By the fall of 2021, more than 150 registered.

It just didn't seem possible to turn away so many students. So I re-envisioned it for 90 students, broken up into six groups, each with a dedicated online group chat. Every time we have a reading assignment, I ask them to share with the others in their group a quotation and why it spoke to them, perplexed them, inspired them, upset them—whatever it might be.

I offer optional discussion groups every other week and eight solid hours of office hours each week. Because I'm inviting students to delve into stuff that's challenging both personally and politically, it wouldn't be right if I weren't available to meet with them.

In a way that surprises me, this class has felt more intimate and connected than any other version I've taught. It may be the best version. Students have probably been more open, honest and vulnerable in the group chat than they would have been in class. Speaking in class about what's weighing on us heavily is not always easy. But with the slight distance that typing allows, people become even more open.

Meditation practice gives us a tool with which to face uncertainty and impermanence. It gives us a way of making friends with the full range of emotions that we're going through, especially in a moment like this. Covid is producing a lot of anxiety and stress. We have all of the productive tumult that's coming with the racial reckoning of the U.S. And there's the ecological crisis. Those are all topics I deal with directly in class.

One unit that profoundly impacts the students is on death and dying. It's a powerful thing to ask college students to reflect on the fact that their lives aren't going to go on forever, so what do you want to do with the time you have? Though it's difficult, they all understand why it's important to incorporate awareness of death into one's life—for the sake of life.

I think one of the things my students get from this class is a sense of importance of something like just looking at the flowers. The big stresses of college student life can be so overwhelming. There are ways to slow down and appreciate the small moments here. 🌻

Bernie Rhie also leads the Williamstown Zen Group, which meets online on Tuesday evenings. Find out more at williamstownzengroup.org. For tips on meditation and Buddhist wisdom, follow him on Instagram @zen_prof.



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