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Among the students participating in a summer research trip to the Irish coast with geology professor Brendan Cox is Nathan Liang ’25, pictured recording the sounds of waves. Photograph by Peter Cox.

Among the students participating in a summer research trip to the Irish coast with geology professor Brendan Cox is Nathan Liang ’25, pictured recording the sounds of waves. Photograph by Peter Cox.

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Kim Catley is a freelance writer based in Richmond, Va. She previously worked for the University of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University and is now a contributor to a number of university magazines.

Fernando Cobelo is an award-winning illustrator born in Venezuela and based in Italy, where he works with visual metaphors and essential images.

Justin Crowe ’03 is chair of leadership studies and professor of political science at Williams. His work largely focuses on the role of the Constitution and the U.S. Supreme Court in American political development.

Ray Felix is a photographer and fine artist based in Upstate New York. He loves to explore and find things and to stare in wonder at curiosity at people and the world around him.

Emily Halnon is a freelance writer and trail runner out of Eugene, Ore. She has published work in The Washington Post, The Guardian, Runner’s World, salon and more.

Amanda Korman ’10 is the community relations liaison for the Charlottesville City Schools in Virginia. She is also a fiction writer with an M.F.A. from the University of Virginia.

Sarah Sanders ’14 is a queer Jewish performer, writer, musician and curious collaborator raised in Montana and based in Brooklyn.

Bradley Wakoff is a photographer based in Williamstown, Mass. His work has been published by national and international media outlets and nonprofits including USA Today, Ozdam America and The Wilderness Society.

On Campus

Sustained Progress

As part of its 2021 Strategic Plan, the college identified six key areas where it will increase its commitment to sustainability: education and research; climate action; buildings, landscaping and land use; responsible consumption; community, diversity, equity and inclusion; and accountability and transparency. Here are just a few examples of progress made in these areas this past year—as well as aspirations for the future.

The Davis Center and the Zilkha Center for Environmental Initiatives partnered to offer Reet, the EphVentures program designed for first-year students interested in sustainability and social justice.

The college achieved its first-ever STARS Gold sustainability certification from the American Association for Sustainability in Higher Education. STARS tracks sustainability performance in academics and research, engagement, operations, planning and administration as well as innovation and leadership.

On Campus Buildings have received green certifications: Fort Bradshaw (LEED Gold and Living Building Challenge Petal certification), Garfield House (LEED Gold), Horn Hall (LEED Platinum), Hopper Science Center (LEED Platinum), Wachenheim Science Center (LEED Gold) and the Williams Inn (LEED Gold).

25% Reduction on food-related greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, largely by shifting to plant-rich menus, is the goal set by Dining Services, with support from the Zilkha Center, as part of Williams’ engagement with the Cool Food Pledge.

The college’s annual update on environmental initiatives at bit.ly/sustained-progress.
Support for Teaching

A new center dedicated to helping Williams professors honor their craft will benefit from a $30 million commitment from Joseph Lee Rice III ’54 and Franci L. Blaaberg.

The Joseph Lee Rice III ’54 Center for Teaching, located on the main level of Sawyer Library, will be a centralized hub for programs, workshops and resources focused on teaching and pedagogy. Starting July 1, 2023, Matt Carter, associate professor of biology, will serve a three-year term as the center’s inaugural faculty director. Susan Engel, senior lecturer in psychology and the Class of 1999 Director of the Program in Teaching, will serve two years as senior faculty fellow. Together they will consult with faculty on their needs and interests, develop programming and resources, and help design the center’s physical space and online presence.

“I have always felt that the heart of the institution is its faculty, and anything that I can do to support them should be done.”

Carter says the center “will inspire and support effective teaching strategies, creativity and experimentation in the classroom and practices that provide for inclusion and well-being. Because effective teaching promotes intellectual growth and meaningful experiences in and out of the classroom, the ultimate beneficiaries will be our students.” Rice’s financial commitment is just the latest expression of his ongoing support of Williams faculty. “I have always felt that the heart of the institution is its faculty,” he says, “and anything that I can do to support them should be done.”

Physics Honors

Adam Donne ’22 is continuing his research in biological physics—slime molds, specifically—at Harvard University’s School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (BEAR) with support from the American Physical Society’s 2022 LeRoy Apker Award.

The award, which includes $5,000 for Donne and $5,000 for Williams’ physics department to support undergraduate research, “recognizes outstanding achievements in physics by undergraduate students and provides encouragement to students who have demonstrated great potential for future scientific accomplishment,” according to the society.

Donne’s senior thesis at Williams drew on several scientific and mathematical disciplines to examine the behavior of the slime mold *Physarum polycephalum*—how it self-organizes a decentralized method of transporting nutrients through a series of tubes that each pump independently. At BEAR, he’s building on his research of the organism while pursuing a Ph.D. in applied physics.

Only two students—a graduate and an undergraduate—are selected each year from colleges and universities in the U.S. to receive the Apker award. A Williams student first received one in 1999, and Donne is the college’s sixth.

Giving Guidance

Efraín Agosto is on a mission to help Latinx students thrive in academia. A native New Yorker whose parents migrated from Puerto Rico in the early 1950s, the visiting professor of Latinx studies and religion credits his passion for teaching and mentorship to those that guided him from a young parishioner in Brooklyn all the way through his doctoral studies in New Testament and Christian origins at Boston University.

Agosto recently received an Outstanding Mentor Award from the Society for Biblical Literature’s Committee for Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession. In addition to teaching courses at Williams such as Religion & Bible in Latinx Literature, Memoir, Art & Film, he says he is enjoying the experience of mentoring undergraduates for the first time.

He shares with Williams Magazine his thoughts on mentoring and the challenges Latinx students face in the field.

What brought you to Williams? It’s refreshing to have the opportunity to teach undergraduates, especially in broader issues of religious and Latinx studies. I’ve had to expand my horizons in those fields beyond some of the specialty courses in my field of biblical studies that I taught for so long. It has been a rewarding experience for those later years of my teaching career.

Whom have you mentored? For most of my career, I’ve taught graduate students at schools of theology in Boston, Hartford and my hometown, New York City. Additionally, for more than 25 years I’ve served on grants with the Hispanic Theological Initiative, that helps develop Latinx doctoral students in religious and theological studies. At Williams, I’ve enjoyed getting to know undergraduates more personally and exchanging stories about growing up in New York City and our shared experiences with coming from families of immigrants.

What barriers do Latinx students face? There’s a core body of research that all doctoral students in religion and theology must be familiar with for their comprehensive exams. But there’s a whole body of Spanish-language materials, biblical interpretation in Spanish and so forth, that Latinx students, given their backgrounds and interests, may also want to incorporate into their studies. Students who wish to explore these materials might feel trepidation to approach their advisers about expanding their possibilities.

Do you consider yourself a natural mentor? I like talking with people about where they’re headed, exploring opportunities for vocations and callings and how I can be helpful. In that sense, it seems like being a mentor came naturally to me. There’s something about offering guidance, encouragement and friendship to the next generation of academic leaders that, for me, makes teaching and mentoring truly important—and fun.

Quoted

“Collette [Chilton] exemplifies everything we are hoping to achieve with Vision 30/40, whereby women will hold 30% of senior investment roles and executive committee positions by 2040. Her professional accomplishments and breadth of volunteerism across various organizations are inspiring and noteworthy.”

—Amanda Pullinger, CEO of 100 Women in Finance, announcing that Williams Chief Investment Officer Collette Chilton is the recipient of the global organization’s 2022 Americas Industry Leadership Award. Read more at bit.ly/collette-chilton.

Photograph by Ray Felix
Toward Deeper Inclusion

Alex Deaderick ’15 is leading a collective fundraising effort in support of Williams’ Davis Center Initiative, which seeks to provide expanded space and programming toward the college’s goal of deeper inclusion.

A volunteer for the annual Williams Men of Color Weekend and the national organization Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, Deaderick is rallying fellow Black alumni who graduated over the last 10 years to pledge gifts of at least $2,500 to help fund the renovation and rebuilding of Rice House. By October, he had raised nearly $10,500, with a goal of reaching $100,000 this winter in tandem with an Alumni Fund gift. He’ll expand the call to all graduates of the last decade once the goal is met.

“I’ve always been passionate about diversity, equity and inclusion and, in particular, making the Williams experience more accessible to more folks,” Deaderick says, adding that it’s especially important for young alumni to give, no matter the amount.

“There aren’t very many of my contemporaries who can write six-figure checks,” he says. “But I still want us, especially Black students, to feel that we can be involved in writing the future history of Williams.”

Inspired by the alumni-led effort, Liz Robinson ’90, chair of Williams’ board of trustees, has pledged to match the first $100,000 raised. “I’m grateful for and motivated by Alex’s leadership and the commitment to young alumni,” she says. “And I am delighted to magnify the impact of their generous gifts to help the college create a more inclusive and equitable institution where students of all identities and experiences can thrive.”

Learn more about the Davis Center Initiative at giving.williams.edu/davis-center.

Bicentennial Medals Awarded

The college community gathered for Convocation in September to celebrate the Class of 2023 and the awarding of Bicentennial Medals to six distinguished alumni.

In her Convocation Address, Nandini President and CEO Adena Testa Friedman ’87 spoke of mentoring and work-life balance. “Those moments aren’t flashy. But it’s those moments that gave me the conviction, credibility, capacity and capability to do the job I have now... We’re all running a long-distance marathon. And while there are big milestones along the way, you only get to them because of the steps in between.”

Also receiving medals that day were Dr. Elizabeth “Libby” Hoffman, a staff physician in the Infectious Diseases Division at Massachusetts General Hospital; Katherine Krieg Fischer ’08 and Anokh Dey ’09, founders of Schoolchildhood in Amman, Jordan; Pamela Council ’72, an artist who uses sculpture, architecture, writing and performance; and Lina Khan ’90, chair of the Federal Trade Commission.

Read speeches and citations and watch videos from the day at bit.ly/williams-convocation-2022.

ON THE BOOKSHELF

“My research brings together the sciences and humanities to inform environmental policy,” says Laura J. Martin, an environmental studies professor at Williams since 2017. “To tackle the twinned biodiversity and climate crises, we need both perspectives.”


Published by Harvard University Press in May, the book focuses on the ways humans intentionally and unintentionally shape the habitats of other species, positioning environmental restoration as a separate path from preservation and conservation. Instead of maintaining untouched wilderness and natural resources, supporters of environmental restoration deliberately intervene in nature to help it survive human-generated harms. Martin defines restoration as “an attempt to co-design nature with non-human collaborators.”

The book traces the history of environmental restoration in the U.S. from the beginning of the 20th century to now, starting with William Temple hornaday, founder of the American Bison Society. Martin argues that Hornaday’s efforts to restore the bison helped preserve the native species at the same time as it entrenched white settler colonialism. His story and others in the book illustrate how government policies and ecological science have affected nature for better and for worse.

Martin, who teaches courses including Nature and Society; An Introduction to Environmental Studies, says Wild by Design offers “a history that informs the many restoration projects that governments, non-governmental organizations and corporations are currently pursuing around the world. I argue that all biodiversity management projects need to also explicitly promote human social justice.”

ALSO RECENTLY PUBLISHED


Storied Stone: Reframing the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s South Indian Temple Hall, by Darin hand Mason ’82 (Yale University Press Books)

Panics Without Borders: How Global Sporting Events Drive Myths About Sex Trafficking, by Gregory Mitchell, Williams chair and associate professor of women’s, gender and sexuality studies (University of California Press)

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

IN MEMORIAM

More than 100 family members, friends and colleagues of the late John Wesley Chandler, Williams’ 13th president, gathered in Thompson Memorial Chapel on Oct. 8 to celebrate his life and share memories and stories. Chandler, who was president from 1973 to 1995, died on Aug. 5 at the age of 98.

In her opening remarks at the gathering, President Maud S. Mandel said of Chandler: “Here at Williams in the wake of Jack Sawyer, the success of coeducation and curricular change—and Williams overall—depended on the qualities of innumerable daily decisions. Today we can testify to the skill, wisdom and compassion with which John led the college through that work.”

Chandler was passionate about education and leadership. He taught religion at Williams from 1955 until 1968, when he left to become president of Hamilton College. As a Williams professor (later the Cluett Professor of Religion) and department chair, he established the college’s major in religion. He also served as acting provost, the first dean of the faculty and, later, as a trustee.

Chandler lectured around the world on a Fulbright scholarship and wrote books including The Rise and Fall of Fraternities at Williams College (2014) and On Effective Leadership (2013). In addition to Chandler, the college said farewell to Robert F. Dalden Jr., the Frederick Rudolph ’42 Class of 1965 Professor of American Culture, emeritus, who died on June 22; Colleen Little, special assistant to the VP for the Office of College Relations and director of principal giving strategy, May 11; C. Ballard Pierce, professor of physics, emeritus, June 18; Michael Reid, former Williams trustee and VP for strategic planning and institutional diversity, Aug. 1; and William Wagner, the Brown Professor of History, emeritus, and former interim president and dean of the faculty, Sept. 12.

Together at Williams

Scenes from the summer and fall.

Opposite:
Mountain Day festivities on campus include a mid-morning performance by Ritmo Latino dance group.

This page, from top:
Students in geosciences professor Mea Cook’s course Oceanography examine blue crabs in a tidal marsh in Weekapaug, R.I., during a field trip hosted by Williams-Mystic staff.

President Maud S. Mandel celebrates National First-Generation College Student Day at a hot chocolate reception with members of Williams Firsts.

Photographs by Bradley Wakoff unless noted.
Chemistry professor Kerry-Ann Green (second from left) makes liquid nitrogen ice cream during a Summer Science Program lab for incoming students.

A student working in geosciences chair and professor Phoebe Cohen’s summer research lab cleans up footprints on the new dinosaur trackway in the Wachenheim Science Center.

H.E. Dr. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, President of Iceland, visits with students in Chapin Library.

The nonpartisan student group EphVotes conducts outreach in the Paresky Center in the fall.

Students select original artwork for their dorm rooms during the Williams Art Loan for Living Spaces (WALLS) pickup in September.
The Court in Context

Over the summer, the Supreme Court of the United States announced the latest in a series of decisions that are dramatically changing the American landscape. The court’s majority overturned Roe v. Wade, which for 50 years protected abortion rights at the national level. It struck down part of New York State’s 111-year-old law governing concealed-carry firearms. And it ruled that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can’t impose limits on carbon emissions without congressional authorization. Already on the docket for 2023 are two cases addressing whether race should be considered in college admissions.

The controversial decisions come at a time when polls suggest the court is out of step with public opinion. A July Pew Research Center report stated that 57% of respondents disapproved of the decision to overturn Roe. A September report by Pew stated that “Americans’ ratings of the Supreme Court are now as negative as—and more politically polarized than—at any point in more than three decades of polling on the nation’s highest court.”

To understand what this all means, Williams Magazine turned to Justin Crowe ’03, chair of leadership studies and political science professor, whose courses include American Constitutionalism I and II, and Power, Policy and Democracy in America. He led a conversation in the fall with Cassandra Kirk ’89, chief magistrate judge in Fulton County, Ga., Rachel Levinson-Waldman ’95, managing director of the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, Jeffrey Sutton ’83, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, and Alison Tucher ’84, presiding justice of the California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, Division Three. They discussed, among other topics, the court’s relationship to other governing bodies, the historical context of its recent decisions and how its power—and public perception of the court’s power—have changed over time.

The following conversation has been edited for clarity and space.

Justin Crowe ’03: What pops into your head when I say the U.S. Supreme Court?

Cassandra Kirk ’89: Protests and events that follow.

Jeffrey Sutton ’83: We’re at an interesting point in American legal history.

Rachel Levinson-Waldman ’95: Legitimacy crisis.

Crowe: The legitimacy crisis is something a lot of people are talking about. It’s a unique year in terms
of popular confidence in political institutions generally and our legal institutions specifically. What problem does that pose?

Levenson-Waldman: There have been times when the Supreme Court is a step ahead of where society is. The Supreme Court was stepping out a bit in Brown v. Board of Education, because there were still a lot of districts dragging their heels on implementing desegregation. That was seen as a net positive—the Supreme Court was leading the way. Other times, the Supreme Court and the country have been moving in concert. With gay marriage, there was an incredibly quick shift over the course of a decade or so. Now we’re seeing a time when the Supreme Court is lagging on things like reproductive rights and feels out of step with where a majority of the country is by virtue of the fact that it is restricting rights rather than expanding them.

Kirk: Being in the heart of a historically civil rights-oriented community—Atlanta, Ga.—we anticipate protests. That’s where the will of the people is heard—in the streets. In 2020, people took to the streets to protest human rights violations, voting rights, police actions, treatment of marginalized and privileged communities, and crime. Anytime I hear that the Supreme Court is dragging their heels on implementing a known murderer because the police officer’s search and seizure violated the Fourth Amendment or invalidating a popular law because it violates the free speech guarantee of the First Amendment, such decisions do not undermine the rule of law. They enhance it, even if opinion polls show immediate public popular disagreement with the decision. Some of the controversial cases decided by the Supreme Court in recent years—Roberts v. Dobbs [c. J. Johnson Women’s Health Organization]—do not end the debate and permit several democratic avenues for change. The decisions may be inconsistent with what most Americans want, but they allow the citizenry to do something about the decision if they don’t care for it, whether by seeking federal or state legislation or by seeking relief under state constitutions. It’s difficult to know whether we are at a transition point when it comes to the role of the U.S. Supreme Court. But I predict that at least one feature of the Supreme Court’s work over the last 75 years will change in the next 75. First, the court has exercised constitutional review—the power to invalidate democratically enacted state and federal laws—in a more muscular way than any court in world history. Second, it has done so by interpreting the Constitution in a way that perhaps may be the hardest to correct in the world. The U.S. Constitution requires three quarters of the states to approve any amendment. Third, the justices all have life tenure with no age or term limits, a feature of the federal judiciary with few parallels in other judicial systems. I suspect that at least one aspect of this remarkable combination will not hold true for the next three-quarters of a century.

Crowe: Cassandra, Jeff and Alison, you have taken different paths to your chambers in terms of experience and selection processes. How has that shaped how you do your job?

Kirk: Having been appointed by Republican Gov. Nathan Deal after a selection and voting process, I had to remind Democratic legislators that I have been in the community for a very long time. The person who ran against me in my first nonpartisan election used my Republican Party affiliation as a potential to be unseated at every election. That is something of which I’m acutely aware. It does not affect what I do on the bench or in setting policy for our court, but I recognize I have to ask the people in the court in recent years—Rachel and Kirk—has generated a gaping contrast between our federal and state governments. The difficulty of amending the U.S. Constitution, the federal system continues to have many non-democratic components to it, all reflective of an 18th-century perspective on government.

Tucher: My oath is to uphold the state and the federal constitutions, so my job is to decide cases consistent with the California and federal constitutions to the best of my ability and on a schedule that serves people in terms of how the court runs. I don’t view myself as running for re-election, I am on the ballot for another reason: whether I keep my job or should be replaced.

Crowe: Rachel, what is your take on how issues of privacy and national security are dealt with by judges who are elected or appointed or who have judicial terms or term limits?

Williams Magazine Fall 2022

Alison Tucher ‘84, presiding justice of the California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, Division Three: “As the Supreme Court declines to recognize rights under the U.S. Constitution, taking itself out of the action on certain issues, it makes state courts more important.”

The Supreme Court’s 2021 ruling in a key decision that strikes down constitutional provisions require the states to provide rights to women. (Francis Speck via Getty Images)
2022, where the Supreme Court ruled on the constitutional warrantless search and seizure of digital contents of a cell phone, as unconstitutional, so we can resolve this fairly easily. But in the questioning, it was a trespass and violates the Fourth Amendment, in and affected by privacy and surveillance issues. The best-known example is in the oral arguments for Levinson-Waldman: They have seen themselves represented as judges were on their state supreme court, and that's too bad. Justice Scalia's decision says, if a winning insight emerges, then, by all means, we can adopt it for the whole country. The great debate in American history is what should be national and what should be local. Today's citizenry may come to see the value of deciding some difficult issues at the local level. I appreciate that some people may wish that today's Supreme Court acted more like the Warren Court of the 1960s, which nationalized a lot of rights. But in a democracy like ours, it can be helpful to let different approaches have their time in the sun. Give the current court a chance to show over time that its approach to deciding cases has virtues of its own—that it is neutral and not driven by policy-laden outcomes. Judges, as I can attest, can't live for long from being judged themselves over whether their decisions turn on the rule of law or the rule of individual men and women.

Rachel Levinson-Waldman '95, managing director of the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice: “As some big cases start to hit the court, presumably over the next five years, I’m curious about where people will land and where the center of gravity goes.”

Kirk: My biggest concern is the push to defend the police, regulate the police or privatize the jails. I am unsure from a safety standpoint what those policies will look like. For example, I could make a decision that follows the law and is good for me, my family and my community. But if others disagree with my decision, I could find myself looking for a new job the next election season.

Tucher: I’m not holding out for reform in the process of selecting, or the tenure of, our Supreme Court justices. Before we could get that kind of reform, we would be able to get a lot of congressional action on issues that would cause the result of what the Supreme Court is doing to turn out quite differently, dissipating the urgency of reform. Regarding who gets selected, I believe the Supreme Court now has no justice who’s ever served on a state supreme court, and that’s too bad. Justice O'Connor, Justice Brennan and Justice Souter were three fabulous U.S. Supreme Court justices. Their formative years as judges were on their state supreme courts, and they brought with them a respect for and intuitive understanding of what state and state courts do. That is a real blind spot— but not the only blind spot—in the current makeup of today's U.S. Supreme Court.

Tucher: I want to pick up on Jeff's earlier points that there's an imbalance in the size of the policy footprint the U.S. Supreme Court is exerting—and that this court is exercising the power of judicial review in a “more muscular way.” Than ever before, I wish that our Supreme Court justices would have, written on their hearts, the idea that it is not only the people directly hit and careful in striking down the laws passed by elected representatives. And that they wouldn’t try to us so tightly to the 18th century as in some of their recent constitutional decision-making. In particular, the [New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v. Bruen] case seems to say, if a particular restriction on firearms didn’t occur in the 18th century and occur often and appear in court of appeal records, then it isn’t constitutional now.

Levinson-Waldman: I’m especially interested in whether there will be changes to lifetime tenure at the Supreme Court. That would be a positive development in terms of less gaming of the system. The other piece is that Fourth Amendment issues and, to some extent, First Amendment issues— especially privacy and surveillance—produce strange bedfellows. Certainly this is true on the legislative front and on the judicial front. You can’t necessarily predict where people are going to land on those issues. As some big cases start to hit the court, presumably over the next few years, I’m curious about where people will land and where the center of gravity goes.
Title IX touches nearly
every aspect of higher
education. As the
landmark law celebrates
its 50th year, alumnae
examine its past,
present and future.

The Path Forward

Fifty years ago, Title IX became law. A single sentence, it banned sex
discrimination in any educational program or activity receiving federal
funding. Even though there was no mention of sports—or of women,
specifically—the law became synonymous with expanding opportunities
for female athletes.

Yet Title IX’s reach has been far greater, affecting nearly every aspect
of daily life on school campuses around the country. Its influence can be
felt in admission practices, hiring and promotions, the handling of sexual
harassment and violence cases, rules governing study abroad, and even the
curriculum. Meanwhile, our understanding of who is protected by the law is
evolving, with calls to include trans and nonbinary people, among others.

Title IX continues to be challenged at every turn by some who argue that its
regulations go too far and others who say they don’t go nearly far enough.

To understand Title IX’s history, the challenges it faces today and how it
might evolve in the next 50 years, Williams Magazine reached out to two
alumnae experts. Donna Lisker ’88 has worked on Title IX and gender issues
for more than 20 years at schools including Duke University, Smith College
and Brown University, where she is now chief of staff in the Office of the Vice
President for Advancement. And attorney Ellen Vargyas ’71, who specialized
in Title IX enforcement, is the author of the book Breaking Down Barriers: A
Legal Guide to Title IX. On the following pages, they share their observations.
Interviews have been edited for clarity and space.
**Title IX States:**

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

**Title IX, Tested**

**Reflections by Donna Lisker ’88**

Title IX is 47 words long. The word “sports” is nowhere in there. The people who drafted Title IX in 1972 were thinking about remedies like removing quotas on the number of women admitted to medical or law school. The fact that it instead became associated with sports is something of a curiosity—though it did remove quotas and other limitations on women’s educational opportunities. It’s no coincidence that formerly all-male schools, including Williams, admitted women around 1972.

In subsequent years, Title IX has been interpreted as applying also to sexual harassment and violence. These problems are endemic on college campuses and they, too, are gender issues; you can’t talk about sexual harassment and sexual violence in a gender-neutral way. To say, for instance, after researching Title IX, they experience sexual violence on her campus. Most sexual violence happens between acquaintances, so the most likely perpetrator would be someone she knows on campus. If that is not appropriately addressed—if the person who alleges harmed her is allowed to continue at school without consequences—then she is subjected to discrimination on the basis of her sex.

That’s the basic argument, but the application of Title IX to sexual violence has waxed and waned under different presidential administrations. There have been stretching at what Title IX was fairly vigorously enforced, like the Obama and Clinton administrations. And there have been stretches when Title IX was not enforced at all. Part of the debate has been colleges and universities figuring out when there are likely to be consequences for sexual violence and how to address. You see some colleges respond to the regulations issued by the Trump administration by changing the standard of responsibility in university-conducted investigations from “a preponderance of the evidence” to “clear and convincing evidence.”

That’s the advocate for sexual violence survivors saw this as a step backward.

Today, Title IX has developed an even broader scope, as it is being used to argue that equal opportunities need to apply to all people, regardless of where they fall on the gender spectrum. This represents the evolution of our understanding that sex is not a simple binary. To illustrate this, I’ll take us back to sports for a minute.

One of the classic early applications of Title IX to athletics had to do with locker rooms and changing facilities. There is a familiar story about the women’s rowing team at Yale, which did not have a locker room at the boathouse though the men counterpart did. The women had to go on the boathouse rise, wet and cold, while the men showered. They pointed out the inequity and asked the administration to rectify it, but that was the limit of Title IX’s enforcement. By 1977, Congress had passed the Education Amendments Act, which updates civil rights law and extends to education discrimination. President Carter appointed a commission to revise the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education recommended what was known as an education equity study by the NCAA. The act finds stark discrepancies in financial aid awards and academic outcomes. Title IX does not specifically address racial discrimination or discrimination based on disability, to give two examples. As we look at the application of Title IX to transgender athletes, the female student-athlete does not feel that she is going to be excluded from participating in a sport. The U.S. Supreme Court ran the story with photos, and, soon enough, they were covered.

The legal frontier continues to evolve and apply to issues beyond locker rooms.

Title IX was never meant to be all things to all people; it has always been about the specific rights of a female student in a particular set of issues that go with their gender identity. As we look at the application of Title IX to transgender athletes, that's the basic argument, but the application of Title IX to transgender athletes.

Transgender athletes argue, among other things, that Title IX does not specifically address racial discrimination or sexual harassment based on disability, to give two examples. As we look at the application of Title IX to transgender athletes, we must be mindful that the regulations do not specifically address racial discrimination or sexual harassment based on disability, to give two examples. As we look at the application of Title IX to transgender athletes, it is not clear that the regulations do not specifically address racial discrimination or sexual harassment based on disability, to give two examples. As we look at the application of Title IX to transgender athletes, we must be mindful that the regulations do not specifically address racial discrimination or sexual harassment based on disability, to give two examples.

The female student-athlete does not feel that she is going to be excluded from participating in a sport. If I allow myself to dream for a minute, I can start to imagine a place where the vision of Title IX is fully realized. I see campuses where every student has the opportunity to pursue what interests them—academic programs, athletics, clubs, study abroad—and their experience is not influenced by gender. The female student-athlete does not feel that she is going to have a lesser experience than her male counterpart. The student studying abroad does not have to spend 50% of her time when women make up 53% of the student body.

Title IX can also occasionally create barriers on the very paths it was initially designed to clear. When I worked at Duke, I cofounded a women’s leadership program called the Baldwin Scholars, a four-year program that includes residential, academic, and experiential learning for women. The program provides supplemental skills and support that counteract some of the more damaging messages of patriarchal culture, addressing the socialization specific to that particular gender identity. This is one of the rationales that supports women’s colleges, which were granted an exception under Title IX.

In creating this program, one of the questions we had to ask ourselves was whether we were violating Title IX. We were excluding people who identified as male from the Baldwin Scholars. The general counsel felt comfortable with it, because the same opportunities the program afforded to women were also available to men, though packaged differently. With unlimited funding, we might have created a complementary program for men that addressed the particular set of issues that go with their gender identity. What would it look like to have a program that focused on the challenges of a hypermasculine culture that doesn’t value men’s emotional development? There’s room for all of this. People think about Title IX as something that only affects women, but the language is gender neutral. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. That has meant sometimes Title IX applies to male athletes who have felt that their opportunities have been taken away as opportunities for women have risen—and all the attendant lawsuits and complications. It’s a much thornier issue than people realize.

If I allow myself to dream for a minute, I can start to imagine a place where the vision of Title IX is fully realized. I see campuses where every student has the opportunity to pursue what interests them—academic programs, athletics, clubs, study abroad—and their experience is not influenced by gender. The female student-athlete does not feel that she is going to have a lesser experience than her male counterpart. Title IX can also occasionally create barriers on the very paths it was initially designed to clear. When I worked at Duke, I cofounded a women’s leadership program called the Baldwin Scholars, a four-year program that includes residential, academic, and experiential learning for women. The program provides supplemental skills and support that counteract some of the more damaging messages of patriarchal culture, addressing the socialization specific to that particular gender identity. This is one of the rationales that supports women’s colleges, which were granted an exception under Title IX.
Increased freedom and equity are good for everybody. People think about Title IX as something that has been good for women, and there's no question that it has. It's also good, broadly, for all educational environments to not discriminate against an entire class of people.

My favorite example comes back to Williams. When I started on the crew team in 1984, both the men and the women were club teams. Despite that apparent equality, the men's team had a full-time coach. The women's team had a part-time coach who also had to work another job. New equipment generally went to the men, while the women got hand-me-downs. I don't think I was specifically aware of Title IX at the time, but it did not feel like equal treatment to me or my teammates. A group of us wanted to bring greater equity to our program. After lots of research and drafting a petition, we had the team captains meet with Bob Peck, the athletic director, in the spring of 1986. We were very worried that we would lose our coach, who did not know what we were doing, in trouble, so we did this in secret. Our captains presented our research, including information on Title IX, and told Bob why we thought women's rowing should be a varsity sport and receive more support from the college. He looked at it and—in the most anticlimactic moment possible—said, “Hey, you're right. You should be a varsity sport. And, by the way, the men will be, too.” That experience taught me about the power of activism and the power of female community. Together we made this happen. If we had waited for someone else to notice, then it would not have changed for a good long while. And, in the end, both the women's and the men's programs received greater college support and greater financial resources because of the work we did. What was good for us was good for everybody.

Opportunity, Promised

How would you characterize the promise of Title IX when it was first passed? Back in those days, the men would fly to athletic competitions; the women would take rickety buses. The women’s coaches were way underpaid, they didn’t have access to the fields, and they didn’t have access to the weight room. It was just such blatant discrimination. Title IX was part of a broader sense of the time that it was just enough already.

Tell us about one of the early cases that came to shape the impact of the law as we know it today. Women had not been part of the NCAAs. Those who were on the cutting edge of forming women’s competitive athletics programs were trying to create a somewhat different model of athletic competition—some of the women did not want scholarships. They wanted a true student-athlete model. Once women’s sports got some momentum, the NCAA moved in and tried to impose its model on the women’s sports, although with less of everything. The women’s governing body at the time filed an antitrust case against the NCAA. It was a very bitter case, and the women lost. Then attention turned to trying to think about equity within the NCAA model. It’s a complicated history.

Women’s rowing took off in large part as an effort to even up opportunities and balance the shoe numbers on a football team, because rowing was a sport that could accommodate a lot of athletes, and you didn’t have to have been doing it since you were 5 years old. What has been the greatest impact of Title IX? It’s had an enormous impact. Even if you just go to athletics—in our society it’s symbolic of so much. You have, not just at the collegiate level but at the high school level and younger, girls playing sports and nobody giving it a thought. My daughter rowed in high school, and her friends—they were very polite, they would not roll their eyes when I started talking about Title IX—needed to understand that. They did not get this opportunity because of their sheer wonderfulness. They got this opportunity because a lot of people fought for them to have it. They understood that, but at another level it was not their world, which was a good thing.

Additionally, establishing that sexual harassment violated the law was a huge change in terms of what expectations were and how students and faculty were treated. It’s not to say there aren’t still problems. Of course there are. And there are a lot of issues around how far, exactly, Title IX goes, what the due process is, how you navigate a complaint. But I think these were fairly profound changes.

What would it look like for Title IX’s vision to be fully realized on college campuses? I am not an originalist in any sense. These laws need to evolve to address issues as they evolve. It’s for people who are involved now in schools to try and answer that question. It’s very important not to lose the history but not to be hostage to the history either. Things change.
On Campus

Mater ial
World

So says Pamela Council ’07, a studio art major who spent a lot of time exploring the design, marketing and cultural impact of fashion and sneakers. Captivated by these everyday objects—a staple in many people’s wardrobes—they were the subject of Council’s senior thesis. After Williams, they worked in product development for Reebok while also pursuing their passion for creating art. “Through the sneaker,” they say, “I’ve really learned how to look at an object from every possible angle.”

Today Council is gaining notice as an artist whose work combines the disciplines of sculpture, architecture, writing and performance. Material culture permeates their art, which incorporates items such as acrylic nails, hair lotion and rhinestones—materials that they say celebrate Black Joy and are used to help others find strength and healing in these traumatic times. “That’s the whole thing with this restorative, reparative work,” they say. “You want to be able to reconcile with history without re-traumatizing people. I’m also having a lot of fun, which is kind of like the ethos of my work.”

Council was one of six alumni to receive a Williams Bicentennial Medal for distinguished achievement in September. They shared their insights with Williams Magazine about a handful of their artworks, including their first-ever public installation in New York City’s Times Square.

“Anyone who knew me at Williams knew me as ‘the sneaker girl.’”
1. wtf is juice/gw smile  “This is my first official Fountain for Black Joy. It’s a party punch bowl filled with purple Listerine and grape drink. Sitting on top of the pedestal is a photo collage of George Washington’s dentures, covered with this velvet drape that’s been visualized through an acid process that eats away at the nap of the velvet. George Washington’s dentures, which were made from the teeth of humans and other animals, are in the archives of Mount Vernon. So I’m thinking about this archival object that belongs to all of us. And I’m thinking about our collective tooth and nutrition history—the differences in what Black kids consume and this idea of drink versus juice.”

2016. Sugar, water, purple, Listerine, George Washington’s raggedy ass enslaved peoples’ teeth dentures, gold party foil, Grapeade cans, lights, fountain, silk velvet with surface devoured by the artist. 65 x 100 x 48 in. Photo credit: Pamela Council ’07

2. Relief (series) “I work a lot with molds using prosthetic silicone—the gummy stuff that if you were shooting a film you would use to make a witch’s nose out of—and sculpting these different tile patterns. I’ve been using the texture library I have from the time I worked at Reebok. I’m really interested in parquet; the pattern reminds me of sports. These relief tiles make me think of my lifelong relationship with sneakers and also with mapmaking and ideas of travel and topographies. So, this work is really a topographical exploration. I’ve been working on these molds since 2017. About twice a year I add a new batch of patterns, and eventually I’ll have this giant lexicon of patterns.”

2021. Silicone tiles on wood panel in artist’s metal frame. 36 x 72 in. The work debuted with Council’s 2017 solo exhibition at Rush Arts Gallery in New York City. Photo credit: Julie Deamer

3. A Fountain for Survivors “When I started to do research on what I could make and thinking about Times Square history, the first thing that came to mind was, ‘OK, we’re in a pandemic, I need to make something for all of us.’ It was a little more than a year into the pandemic, and if we’ve made it this far we can all identify as survivors, even if we hadn’t beforehand. Of course, many of us already considered ourselves survivors; but I thought this was a great moment to welcome people into this new identity. And I thought that I could do that by working with this material from my visual language: acrylic nails.”

2021. 400,000 acrylic nails, dense foam, resin, steel, paint, wafers: Wishing Wafers, interior and exterior lighting, music, heaters, swarovski crystals, rhinestones, wampum. The work was commissioned by Times Square Arts. Photo credit: Michael Hall

4. Talking Hands: Watch My Hands, Don’t Watch Me “This video piece was part of Times Square Arts’ Midnight Moment, the world’s largest and longest-running digital public art program. It allows artists to take over commercial screens in Times Square with a three-minute-long artwork at midnight every night for a month. I worked closely with curator Anna Harsanyi and this awesome L.A.-based influencer named Amber Wagner. She’s known for doing these motivational talks, moving her hands with her iconic, super-long nails. It’s hypnotizing and inspiring. The idea for this video came from thinking about luxury and different ways for her to luxuriate on camera. So we’ve got fruit, we’ve got lotion, we’ve got combs—things you fiddle around with during a phone call to your friend. That makes some really juicy images.”

2021. Three-minute, four-channel video installation at Times Square Arts. The work was commissioned by Times Square Arts. Photo credit: Anna Harsanyi
Life of the Mind

Since the early 1980s, on a small island off the coast of New Brunswick, Canada, researchers including biology professor Heather Williams have captured audio recordings of the Savannah sparrow crooning away. The eclectic playlist has become the basis of her new study showing that the birds’ songs are only getting better over time.

The study, co-authored with students and math professor Julie Blackwood, was published in the July issue of Nature Communications and shows evidence of cumulative cultural evolution. These incremental improvements in learned behavior among the sparrow—improvements ubiquitous among humans—are rarely observed in the wild.

As is the case for many songbirds, only the male Savannah sparrow sings. They reach out vocally to attract a female mate, adapting parts of their songs to compete with other males and better communicate their desirability.

Working on Kent Island in the Bay of Fundy, Williams and her team recorded the songs of male birds tagged by colored leg bands and tracked the number of offspring for each bird. Williams found that some parts of the birdsong changed over time from clusters of high notes to a series of short clicks that attracted more females and led to more offspring. And when she played recordings altered to include more clicks on an outdoor speaker in the sparrows’ grassy habitat, she observed that male birds attacked the speaker, while the female sparrows showed curiosity, standing upright and hopping toward it.

The birds’ reactions “implied that something sophisticated is going on,” she says. “Baby birds are observing that seven-click songs are more exciting, so they are probably learning that it’s more important and more interesting to have more clicks.”

But why?

Williams suspected cultural evolution, and she needed a way to prove it.

At the suggestion of a student, Anna Ryba ’16, Williams reached out to Blackwood, whose work involves developing and analyzing mathematical models to better understand ecological processes. Blackwood has used these models to study insect management, disease ecology in humans and wildlife, and coral reef conservation. In this case, she applied her tools to decades of data and field observations of the Savannah sparrow, testing out a series of Williams’ hypotheses.

The result, according to the study’s authors: “We suggest that a combination of social learning, innovation and sexual selection favoring a specific discrete trait was followed by directional sexual selection that resulted in naturally occurring cumulative cultural evolution in the songs of this wild animal population.” In short, the Savannah sparrow was actively improving its song.

Ryba, a biology major, and Andrew Scharf ’18, a biology and math major, joined the research team and were co-authors of the study. Now a Ph.D. student at The Rockefeller University in New York City, Ryba continues to study how evolution shapes animals’ senses and their interpretation of the world.

“She’s a brilliant and creative person fundamentally shaped how I think scientifically,” she says of the experience. “Getting to be the person in the room to bridge two disciplines gave me lasting confidence in my own thought process and communications skills.”

While the clicks and songs of birds may seem rudimentary, Williams says the Savannah sparrow offers a powerful example that cumulative cultural evolution is not restricted to human civilizations or experimental studies of managed animal populations. It’s happening in the wild, too.

Pointing to the humpback whale and the White-throated sparrow, she and her co-authors write: “It will be interesting to follow this Savannah sparrow population, both to study further steps in the cultural evolution of song and because our data suggest interesting parallels to other examples of culturally evolving vocalizations.”

The songbirds’ reactions to recordings of their songs “implied that something sophisticated is going on.”

Heather Williams, biology professor

See and listen to the Savannah sparrow at bit.ly/savannah-sparrow.
Rock Music

By Greg Shook

An interdisciplinary research project engages with the geology and musicality of Ireland’s coast.

How do places in nature feel and sound? It’s a question that longtime colleagues and friends Rónadh Cox, Williams’ Edward Brust Professor of Geology and Mineralogy, and Brad Wells, the Lyell F. Clay Artist in Residence, explore in their first-ever collaboration.

Cox received a three-year, $344,000 grant from the National Science Foundation in 2020 for a project titled “Boulder beaches—the understudied archive on high-energy coasts.” The grant supports her research, begun nearly 15 years ago, on how boulder beaches respond to storms and change over time. The study focuses on 22 sites in Ireland, but because of the wide range of boulder-beach settings there, the results will be applicable to other locations worldwide.

“High-energy coasts, including boulder beaches, increasingly attract visitors, mostly unaware of hazards,” Cox says of these coastlines, which experience particularly intense wave activity. “In the Instagram era, photo seekers are driving up the number of accidents in extreme environments, and it’s not unusual for people to be taken off guard and dragged into the ocean by unexpectedly amplified sneaker waves or rogue waves.”

In June, Cox and a group of five students studied some of those sites on Ireland’s western coast. The students collected field data for geoscience projects they will continue working on throughout the year, but the work also included capturing wave sound recordings for a musical component of the project.

As part of the NSF grant, Cox is using music to investigate ocean wave activity and wave-coast interactions. In particular, she hopes to convey the unpredictability of wave motions. The recordings provided excellent material for Wells, who is the founder and co-artistic director of the Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth. "I loved this idea that Rónadh's research could be boiled down to the essentials in a musical performance," he says.

Wells sought a composer to translate the sounds and unpredictability of ocean waves to an eight-person vocal arrangement. After several months he found the right fit in Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti, a Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) composer and sound artist whose work involves experimenting with nontraditional techniques. Says Wells: “I was searching for somebody whose music has a kind of material, textural aspect to it as opposed to more melodic.”

Lanzilotti’s approximately 15-minute composition, “On Stochastic Wave Behavior,” debuted in August at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Mass. The music blends vocal sounds inspired by ‘Ōlelo Hawaiian and layered harmonic tones that build patiently, coming to a powerful crescendo before returning to a calm. In the program notes for the piece, Lanzilotti writes that “reclaiming language and supporting indigenous language revitalization have been essential to my artistic work in the past year.”

Nathan Liang ‘25, one the students who visited Ireland with Cox over the summer, was also inspired by the musicality of the ocean and boulder coastlines. Using recordings he collected there, Liang created The Storm Orchestra, a digital instrument available online that allows anybody to “play” a storm or compose pieces using the sampled field recordings of waves and boulders moving. The Storm Orchestra is supplemented with other instruments, including the bodhrán (an Irish frame drum) and uilleann pipes.

Cox points out that music and language can help people better understand scientists’ work, citing a 2017 article in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society that explains how scientists and artists have transformed long-term weather records into musical compositions for cello and string quartet.

“Hope that using music as a different and unusual framework may help the data jump the science-public divide so that the awareness can make its way into a more public consciousness,” Cox says. “From the Williams perspective, doing music-science collaborations has made students aware that science and art can be interlinked, and it’s a great way of encouraging more arts-minded students to consider science, and vice versa.”

Listen to The Storm Orchestra at bit.ly/storm-orchestra.
Embodiment

By Sarah Sanders ’14

A new course in the performing and visual arts teaches students to focus on creativity and imagination as much as—if not more than—the finished product.

“There was clay on the floor, glitter on the walls.”

What sounds like a description of Studio 54 in the days of Andy Warhol is in fact theater professor Shanti Pillai recalling the condition of Room 222 in the W.L.S. Spencer Studio Art Building one day last spring. Her students had taken over the so-called “flex space” as part of her new course Living Things: Bodies and Objects in Sculpture and Performance, which Pillai is teaching again this spring.

Alternating between Spencer and the ‘62 Center for Theatre and Dance’s Directing Studio, students engaged in “art making that transgresses the boundaries between the visual and performing arts to see a life that animates both bodies and objects,” according to the course description. In the ‘62 Center, students did physical work, such as a series of exercises drawn from yoga, to “activate the psychophysical capacities for exploration and to allow the body to be an active agent in a creative process,” Pillai says. In Spencer, they created objects that they would then “enliven through performance,” she says.

Pillai gave weekly performance assignments called Études, where students gathered in groups with different collaborators and quickly had to make something and then present it. The prompts were varied: one week, to perform a one-minute costume piece pulled from a box. At the end of the semester, the class, which included a balance of theater and studio art students with different backgrounds and artistic reference points, participated in the studio art department’s final art show in Spencer, where they shared presentations of their work.

“The spatial structure of the class mirrored the multidisciplinarity of its curriculum,” says Pillai, whose own work as an artist, scholar and writer is varied and multidisciplinary. In addition to receiving a Fulbright Research Award in 2017 for a project about women artists’ contributions to contemporary performance across genres in India, she has performed with Frente de Danza Independientes, an artistic association in Ecuador, and has created and performed original pieces with collaborators in Cuba. In October she performed a work-in-progress, To the Academy, which she created with actor Marc Gomes and a team of design collaborators, as part of an artist series hosted by The Clark and the Williams Grad Art program.

Teaching is an important part of Pillai’s own artistic practice. In Living Things, Pillai encouraged her students to prioritize cultivating their creativity and imaginations over making polished, finished or familiar products. “The arts are about launching into something where there’s not necessarily an end goal, where there’s no clear right and wrong answer, where there’s no immediate solution,” she says. “You discover things. You’re in full-on investigative mode.”

Obi Nwako ’24, a theater major from the Bronx, N.Y., says that during the weekly Études, he didn’t have time to be picky with the ideas that came to mind. “I had to stick with either my first or second idea, even if it seemed crazy, and find a way to make it work,” he says. “I appreciated being put in these situations, because following these inspirations created the mindset for me that there is a way to create the things you want to make. You just have to have the rigor and the creativity to see it through.”

Pillai wants her students to know that she, too, is always exploring and trying to figure out the unknown. So this spring’s version of the class promises to be something new—in part because she will co-teach the class with Williams’ Arthur Levitt Jr. ’52 Artist-in-Residence Sean Devare. Devare is a New York-based multidisciplinary theater artist and designer whose work examines “the complexities and contradictions of assimilation in the first (and second) generation American experience,” according to his website.

“The fact that two teachers are also collaborating with one another in a live creative process in front of the students is going to give a different kind of course and a different kind of dynamism to the instruction,” Pillai says. “It’s really important that I keep that flame alive in myself, and that’s what I wish to share with the students.”
After a lengthy journey to conserve and digitize it, a fragile, rare birch bark manuscript is now part of the Chapin Library’s collections.

In 2019, Candida and David Low ’69 discovered a fragile, disintegrating book made of birch bark in storage at their home in Pownal, Vt. The house had been in the family for multiple generations, and while the Lows knew little about the manuscript and its origins, they recognized it as a valuable object.

They decided to donate the manuscript in memory of Candida’s father, Frank L. Connard, Class of 1929, to Williams College’s rare book collections at the Chapin Library so that it could be preserved and used for teaching and research.

“We discovered it in the basement, wrapped up in aluminum foil,” Candida says. “I didn’t want it sitting there, not being used. I wanted to see researchers enjoy it and learn from it.”

The manuscript has since become the subject of an international research project connecting scientists, conservators and scholars. As a result of their work, Williams students can study the text and structure of an object rarely found in North American collections.

When the manuscript arrived for cataloging on the desk of Chapin Librarian Anne Peale, a Google search showed it likely originated in Kashmir. Scholars at the University of Oxford confirmed her initial impression. They also identified the volume as a Sanskrit grammatical text written in Śāradā script.

But the manuscript was too fragile for further exploration.

“Every time we opened the pages,” Peale says, “we were afraid one of the loose sections would catch and cause further damage.”

Wanting to conserve the manuscript while also allowing for further study, library staff turned to the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) in Andover, Mass. Bexx Casswell-Olson, director of book conservation, and Mary Hamilton French, then associate book conservator, knew what to do.

When the manuscript arrived at the NEDCC, conservators found the multi-layered birch bark had delaminated. There were cracks and splits, and pages were tangled. It took the team about 520 hours to reach a point where the pages could be turned and further research could proceed.

Along the way, they found that a number of fragments couldn’t be placed. Sloane Geddes, a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto, helped the team restore some of the fragments to their original positions. She also identified the book as the first volume of the Bālabodhinī, a grammatical text by the author Jagaddhara, a 14th-century Kashmiri scholar.

At the same time, Peale connected with a project called The Book and the Silk Roads at the University of Toronto. The Mellon Foundation-funded initiative leverages a network of scholars, scientists, curators, conservators, librarians and community members to study how books have developed and moved around the world through time.

Their network of researchers used microCT, an X-ray imaging technique, to peek inside the fragile book. Through carbon dating, they determined that the manuscript was constructed between 1500 and 1640. They also created a 3D model of the interior.

“The scan allowed the conservators to see features inside the book before they tried to work on it, including huge cracks running along the book block as well as tiny features like broken pages and fragments, the grain of the wood and bark, and the sewing that held the book together,” says Jessica Lockhart, head of research at the University of Toronto’s Old Books New Science Lab. “This record will allow other scholars, librarians and caretakers to better understand similar manuscripts that may be in their collections.”

After a lengthy journey, the birch bark manuscript returned to Williams over the summer. Every page and fragment has been digitized and is available to researchers, including Williams students enrolled in The Arts of the Book in Asia, which Peale and Murad Mumtaz, assistant professor of art, will teach this spring. The class culminates in an exhibition featuring objects from the library’s collections and student research on production processes, from paper and ink to design and illumination elements.

“They get in touch with scholars from other universities across the globe,” says Mumtaz. “They do serious in-depth research, and we end up finding out so much about these manuscripts that we might not have known.”

Mumtaz and Peale say students are fortunate to be able to work directly with objects in the library such as the Kashmiri manuscript.

“It’s an incredibly rare item that represents a piece of global book history almost never accessible to students in an American institution,” Peale says. “To have it physically present at Williams is a real gift.”

Photograph by Harrison Walker/NEDCC

Object Study

By Kim Catley

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Mumtaz and Peale say students are fortunate to be able to work directly with objects in the library such as the Kashmiri manuscript.

“It’s an incredibly rare item that represents a piece of global book history almost never accessible to students in an American institution,” Peale says. “To have it physically present at Williams is a real gift.”
In the coming years, Williams is committed to building a sustainable program to enroll a dozen or so veteran, transfer and other nontraditional students in each entering class as part of its broader work to increase access and affordability for all. Expanding the cohort across all classes from around 25 each year to 40 or 50, and helping them to thrive once they’re here, involves adjusting, expanding and in some cases creating recruitment, financial aid, housing and support services—work that is already well underway. An important aspect of the college’s approach is strengthening partnerships with organizations such as the Warrior-Scholar Project (WSP), whose mission includes empowering veterans to excel at higher education via immersive academic boot camps in partnership with some of the nation’s top universities. Williams has hosted these boot camps, which feature faculty lectures, workshops and research projects, each summer since 2020.

In September, WSP announced that Cappy Hill ’76, Williams’ former provost and professor of economics, joined its board. An expert on improving access to higher education, Hill was former provost and professor of economics, joined its board. An expert on improving access to higher education, Hill was vice president of Vassar College and now leads research and advising initiatives to expand accessibility as the managing director of Ithaka S+R. She discusses with Williams Magazine her continuing work to increase the representation of enlisted veterans at selective colleges and universities like Williams.

Why did you join the board of the Warrior-Scholar Project?

WSP is proving effective at providing enlisted veterans with the skills and confidence needed to succeed in college. The military offers some, but only limited, guidance to veterans who want to earn a degree after transitioning from the military to civilian life. WSP helps them make better decisions about their higher education choices and increases the likelihood that they will use the GI Bill benefits they have earned to attain a degree. By joining the board, I hope to support WSP in its efforts to scale its impact.

As of 2022, 5.1 million veterans were eligible for post-9/11 educational benefits. Yet 68% of them have not attained a B.A. They are half as likely to enroll in institutions with a graduation rate greater than 70%. Underrepresented minorities are overrepresented in the enlisted military, and a large share of enlisted student veterans are first-generation college students. As a society, if we are to improve post-secondary educational attainment—important both for individual welfare as well as for economic growth and national competitiveness—these are the populations who need attention.

What impact can veterans have on campus, particularly at a liberal arts college like Williams?

Enlisted veterans bring very different life experiences to campus, from which the whole community can learn both inside and outside the classroom. But I don’t think this is the primary reason for recruiting veterans. Instead, it is the opportunity offered to the veterans themselves. Colleges and universities with the highest graduation rates offer superb educational and extracurricular opportunities, and enlisted veterans deserve access to these programs given their service to our country.

What makes Williams and WSP partner schools a good fit?

Partner schools offer fantastic educations to their students. Veterans in many cases weren’t ready for higher education when they enlisted, but after serving and leaving the military, they are focused and disciplined, and they want to go on and attain a degree. WSP partner schools make it more likely that they will do so. Their high graduation rates come from great faculty, many small classes, lots of advising, rich extracurricular opportunities and a variety of support services. Faculty who participate in WSP boot camps on campus become some of the strongest supporters of both the program and matriculating veterans to the college.

What challenges do veterans face as students, and what are colleges like Williams doing to make them feel a part of the campus community?

Veterans are older than most students at selective colleges and universities. Having a critical mass of veterans can be useful so that they can support each other. Having dedicated space where they can study and socialize, and a dedicated person in the student dean’s office, have proved useful. But, most importantly, encouraging veterans to take advantage of all the opportunities colleges and universities have to offer can make a big difference. Participating in the classroom is straightforward. Extracurricular opportunities can have a large impact and give them an effective way to get to know a set of more traditional-age students with similar interests.

WSP also addresses the challenges that veterans may face by showing them that they can, in fact, do the work and by introducing them to these colleges and university campuses, which may feel very unfamiliar at first. Programs like the academic boot camp are beneficial. President [Maud] Mandel taught in the program offered at Williams this past summer—a wonderful way to demonstrate support.

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