

Williams

MAGAZINE FALL 2017

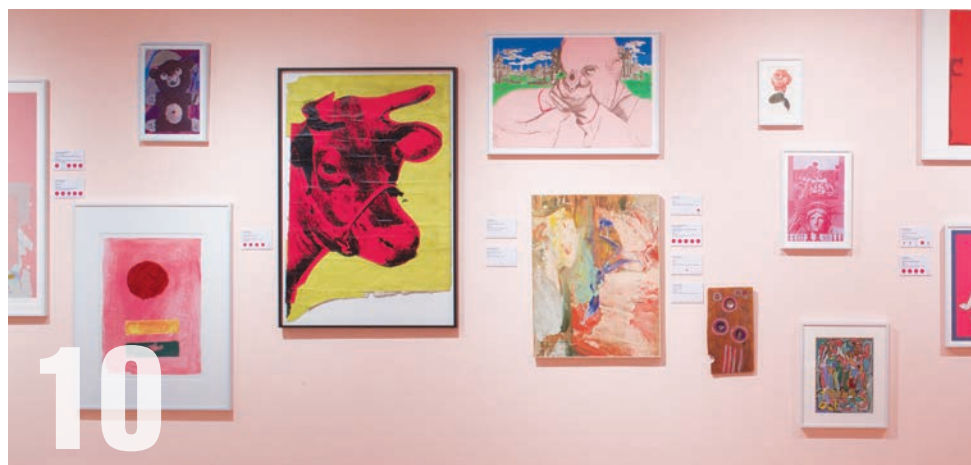
DATA COLLECTION

A model for museums

WE GREET THEM WITH A SONG

Friday, Oct. 13, dawned crisp and clear—perfect weather for Mountain Day. President Adam Falk rang the chapel bells to kick off a day packed with outdoor activities, including a performance atop Stone Hill. Watch a video recap of Mountain Day at <http://bit.ly/mtnday2017>.





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The Choices Ahead

AFTER EIGHT YEARS AS PRESIDENT, I'LL BE LEAVING WILLIAMS IN DECEMBER. And while I'm looking ahead to my future at the Sloan Foundation, I'm also looking back on what we as a community have accomplished together.

I see much to be proud of. We're moving toward completion of a sophisticated new Science Center. Recruiting a new generation of faculty to continue our renowned commitment to teaching. Frequenting a vibrant new college bookstore. Welcoming extremely diverse and academically excellent students—including many who couldn't enroll without your support. Investing in our community, attracting global acclaim, and ambitiously reaching to fulfill a \$650 million campaign.

While I'm looking ahead to my future ... I'm also looking back on what we as a community have accomplished together.

Williams is thriving. And yet few of us, regardless of what we think about politics, would say the future feels secure. It seems to me that our continued thriving will depend on our ability to carry out two types of work, each captured in the pages of this issue.

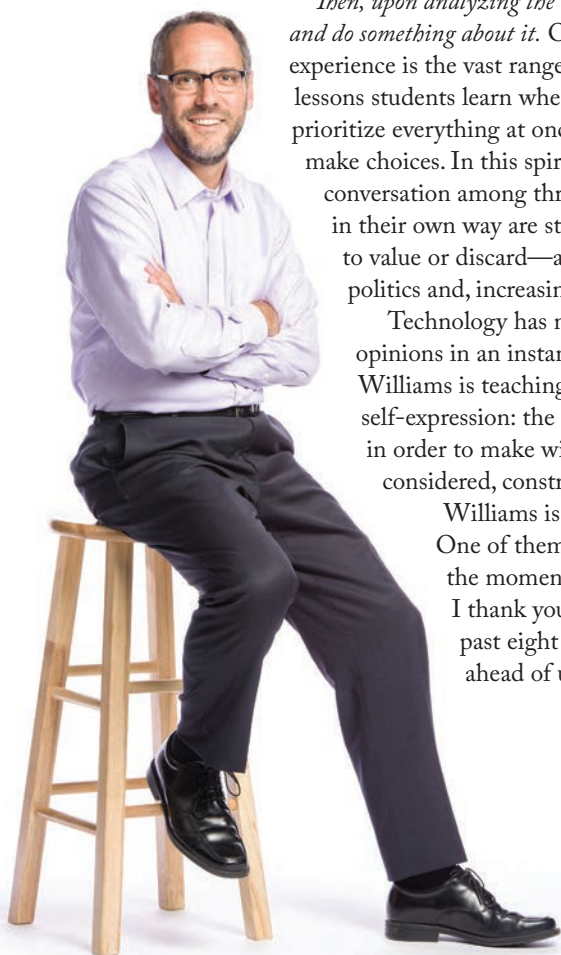
First, we need to teach students to study and make sense of the world. Our existence and thriving depends on this work. One must start by considering the broadest range of ideas and facts with an open, questioning mind. The article "Data Collection" illustrates the ways Williams is teaching students to draw on unusual sources—in this case, data about the artworks in our museum collection—to reach unexpected insights.

Then, upon analyzing the world, we need to decide what matters to us—and do something about it. One of the wonderful things about a Williams experience is the vast range of opportunities we can offer. And one of the lessons students learn when faced with all these choices is that you can't prioritize everything at once. A Williams education involves learning to make choices. In this spirit, "The Value of Waste" captures a provocative conversation among three outstanding Williams professors who each in their own way are studying what communities or societies choose to value or discard—and how those choices shape culture, economics, politics and, increasingly, our natural environment.

Technology has made it easy to express ourselves and act on our opinions in an instant. The central stories in this issue depict how Williams is teaching students the hard work that comes before self-expression: the research, analysis and reasoning that we need in order to make wise choices and contribute to the world in considered, constructive ways.

Williams is the product of 200-plus years of such choices. One of them made a tremendous difference in my own life: the moment when you selected me as your 17th president. I thank you for the privilege of serving Williams for the past eight years, and I look forward to the choices still ahead of us.

—ADAM FALK, PRESIDENT



Williams

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CONTINUING THE QUEST

I find it very unfortunate that you did not mention Gina Coleman '90, the former associate dean who convinced the Williams administration to join QuestBridge ("Begins the Quest," summer 2017). I was in the second class of Williams students admitted through the program, and I know from personal experience how much time, effort and genuine care Gina put into starting and cultivating the QuestBridge contingent at Williams. I attribute much of my success to how involved she was in the admission process, and I know I am not alone in feeling this way.

—BRITTNI MICHAM '10,
MAUMEE, OHIO

SACRIFICE, OVERSIMPLIFIED

Being Muslim was difficult at Williams when I first entered in 1999. "The Face of Sacrifice" (summer 2017) typifies how it might continue to be so today. Sacrifice and scapegoating is far older than Afghanistan or Islam. These phenomena go back to Leviticus and Ancient Greece. A poorly framed case study of Afghanistan is used to isolate Islam as problematic. Furthermore, according to the University of Chicago, the first suicide attack in Afghanistan (since 1974) happened in 2001, resulting in two deaths. What changed in the Afghanis' methods of violence/resistance/war-making until 2001 versus 2002 onward? Why is the rest of the Muslim world not as violently suicidal? By essentializing what demands nuance, sacrifice fly balls in America become sheep in some

external, imagined Islam, as if Eid-al-Adha is not commemorated by sheep's slaughter by adherent American Muslims. A stronger example of surrogate victimhood would be the twin invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in response to 9/11. It was distasteful to draw a direct line from the mujahideen of the '80s to ISIS without mentioning Western (particularly U.S.) involvement. This simplistic treatment could have been avoided with a simple phone call to any scholar of Islam.

—KHURRAM AHMED '03,
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

DOC: NOT INFLUENCED

I read about economics professor Matthew Chao's research in the summer 2017 issue ("Docs: Under the Influence?"). As a private practitioner in the D.C. area for 35 years, I was treated in the 1980s and 1990s with gifts and royalties by the big pharmaceutical companies but only because I had high volumes of prescriptions belonging to the company before I was selected as a candidate. I used the drug because it proved in multiple studies to be superior to its competitors. I wanted the best for my patients. There was no influential carrot placed in front of me. Today, we rarely see drug representatives anymore. Most insurance companies have clamped down on the use of brand drugs. So many of our prescriptions are generic (cheaper, but many times not the best drug). Fancy (and many times great) drugs that you see on TV are too expensive for insurance companies to pay for. Don't worry, America.



Most physicians, I believe, are ethical and not gullible. We are not under the influence.

—MICHAEL D. DARDEN, M.D., '74,
GLENN DALE, MD.

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE ENEMY

Thank you for the story of Jack Platt '58 and Gennadiy Vasilenko ("Making Friends with the Enemy," summer 2017). However, I don't enjoy seeing Williams succumb to popular culture dumbing down. St. Basil's cathedral in Moscow is a church. It is an iconic symbol of Russia located in Red Square but, despite the constant media portrayal, should not be used to symbolize the Russian government.

—MARGARET WALTON '80,
NEW YORK, N.Y.

Six pages of well-drawn, celebratory Trumpismo-brand patriotism is far from the ideal way to represent Williams. There's always been a slightly odoriferous Williams-CIA link—in the 1950s I was felt out about "interest in national intelligence" by the chair of the history department—but no more than people need to know how Williams grass gets cut and snow gets cleared... There are a

surfeit of other Williams stories and figures worth illustrator Raoul Allen's skill. Please keep things on the intellectual plateau where the college belongs.

—D.E. STEWARD '60,
PRINCETON, N.J.

DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

Here's a follow-up to the story about the Center for Development Economics (CDE), "Developing Economies" (spring 2017). In 1980, Williams awarded an L.L.D. to then Vice President of Botswana Quett Masire. The next month, he became president following the death of Botswana's first president, Sir Seretse Khama. Masire held office until 1998. As finance minister, Masire created, managed and oversaw Botswana's highly successful economy (world's fastest growth rate from mid-1960s through 1990s). He was aided by a host of Ephs—Ken Matambo, now minister of finance, was the first to graduate from the CDE in '75. Ken and Blackie Marole, CDE '82, were the first black African directors of DeBeers. At one point the top civil service workers in finance and planning, budget, and mineral resources and the top economist advising the president were all CDE graduates. The late Professor Earl McFarland and I were consultants to Masire and his successors in finance for many years. Dr. Gaositwe Chiepe, one of Masire's key ministers, once said to me, "You know, Steve, we think of Williams as *our* college." Not a bad record for a small program at a small college.

—STEVE LEWIS '60, ST. PAUL, MINN.

NOTICE



JUST MERCY

Bryan Stevenson, whose book *Just Mercy* is this year's Williams Reads selection, visited campus on Sept. 14 for a talk and book signing. The founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Institute spoke to a packed Chapin Hall about "American Injustice: Mercy, Humanity and Making a Difference." Stevenson's talk kicked off a year of programming related to his book. Williams Reads fosters connections among the campus community by exploring diversity through a common reading experience. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/williamsreads2017>.





MAROJA RECEIVES \$137K IN GRANTS

LUANA MAROJA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY, RECEIVED TWO grants from the National Science Foundation totaling \$137,315 to support her research into evolutionary genetics.

The grants will help fund two projects Maroja is working on related to speciation and genetics. She and her students are collaborating with colleagues at Cornell University to study the importance of sex chromosomes in speciation. They are also working with researchers at Union College to understand the processes that cause speciation.

Maroja and her students plan to develop evolution workshops for middle and high school students, and she will continue developing workshops and labs in partnership with the Flying Cloud Institute, a local education nonprofit working with underserved girls and minorities.

MAJUMDER NAMED INTERIM PRESIDENT

Protik “Tiku” Majumder, the Barclay Jermain Professor of Natural Philosophy and director of the Science Center, will serve as interim president of Williams beginning Jan. 1, 2018.

The announcement follows news of the upcoming departure of President Adam Falk, who after eight years at Williams will become president of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

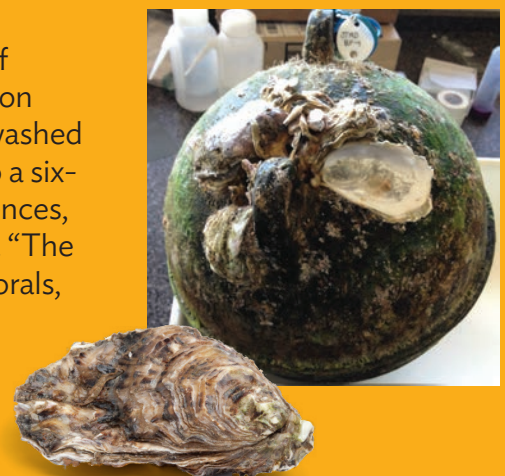
Falk says his goals for his last semester at Williams include “the successful conclusion of our decennial reaccreditation process, raising support for Williams through the Teach It Forward campaign, continuing to advance the Science Center project and paving the way for a smooth transition for my eventual successor.”



A presidential search is now under way, led by a committee of Williams students, faculty, staff, alumni and trustees, with the assistance of the executive search firm Spencer Stuart. Visit <http://bit.ly/WilliamsPresidentSearch> for more information.

IN THE NEWS

In what news outlets around the world are calling “the largest and longest marine migration ever documented,” nearly 300 species of fish, shellfish and other ocean life rafted across the Pacific Ocean on manmade debris from Japan’s 2011 earthquake and tsunami and washed ashore, alive, on the Canadian and U.S. coasts. That’s according to a six-year study published by James T. Carlton, professor of marine sciences, emeritus, and other researchers in the September issue of *Science*. “The diversity was somewhat jaw-dropping: mollusks, sea anemones, corals, crabs, just a wide variety of species, really a cross-section of Japanese fauna,” Carlton said in an interview with CBS News, adding, “It was the plastic debris that allowed new species to survive far longer than we ever thought they would.”





OCTET TAKES THE FIELD

THE WILLIAMS OCTET, ONE OF THE college's longest-running a cappella groups, sang the National Anthem at Yankee Stadium on Sept. 27.

After rehearsals with Brad Wells, Williams' Lyell B. Clay Artist in Residence and director of choral activities, and a simulation of the two-second feedback over the stadium's sound system, 20 student and alumni members took to the field in front of a crowd of more than 30,500 at the start of the Yankees-Rays game.

"More than one member told me that this performance was fulfilling a true childhood dream," Octet co-president Mack Radin '19 said in an interview with *The Williams Record*.

The group last visited the Bronx to sing the anthem in 1979, when George Steinbrenner '52 owned the team. (His son Hal Steinbrenner '91 is now co-owner and managing general partner.) The Yankees' VP of marketing recently invited the Octet to sing again next season, Radin said.

AT A GLANCE

HOW WILL YOU TEACH IT FORWARD?

Mark your calendars for the second annual Teach It Forward: Impact Challenge, which will take place from Jan. 25 to Feb. 5, 2018. Last winter, 325 alumni participated in the 10-day challenge, which involved making a gift of any size to the Alumni Fund and then performing volunteer work. Ephs were able to multiply their gifts by their hours of service—2,517 in all—for a total of \$212,190 in matching grants from Sanae Ishikawa and Richard Georgi '87, Anne Melvin '85, and Lee Shackelford '80, all of whom are making matching gifts again this year. In addition to knitting, cleaning and fixing bikes, and jumping rope for their communities, here's how some Ephs spent their time:



Mulching trees lining the sidewalks near Soundview Park in the Bronx



Caring for homeless dogs and working with potential adopters through PAWS Chicago



Volunteering in the Toddler Room at Horizons for Homeless Children day care center in Roxbury, Mass.



Distributing produce for Bread Day at Grove Christian Outreach Center in Williamsburg, Va.



Singing with a 16-voice a cappella group in Greenwich, Conn., area nursing homes and senior centers



Working with Hong Kong Disneyland to use surplus food to create meals for 60 underprivileged families





CELEBRATING THE SKIES

PEOPLE PASSING BY SCHAPIRO HALL IN EARLY OCTOBER WERE MET with an unusual sight: the construction of a celestial pavilion. The structure was the result of a biennial design competition in the course Architectural Design II, taught by Lecturer in Art Ben Benedict. Students were given two weeks to design a small structure that captured the movement of the sun through the seasons. They then voted on their classmates' work and built the winning design, developed by art history major Kate Latimore '19 (above, right). Inspired by shadows moving across Chapin Hall's columns, Latimore's pavilion allows sunlight to enter through 12 slots on one wall. As visitors move through the space, the slots get closer together and then widen apart, evoking the passage of the seasons from winter to summer and back to winter. "Kate's project was simple and powerful," Benedict told *The Williams Record*. "The combination makes it both memorable and buildable."

\$5.5M MELLON GRANT AIMS TO DIVERSIFY THE ACADEMY

The Creating Connections Consortium (C3) has received a \$5.5 million, five-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund tenure-track positions in the humanities across 28 liberal arts colleges within the Liberal Arts Diversity Officers consortium (LADO).

Williams, with Middlebury and Connecticut College, cofounded C3 in 2012 to address the challenges of diversity in higher education through programming that builds capacity, invests in graduate students and faculty from underrepresented groups, and creates connections between colleges and universities committed to institutional change.

"This critical, collaborative work will enhance the experiences of faculty, students and other community members at colleges across the nation," says Leticia S.E. Haynes '99, Williams' vice president of institutional diversity and equity and a member of the C3 and LADO executive committees.

IN MEMORIAM

Retired professor John Sheahan and retired hockey coach William McCormick died in August. Sheahan was 93, and McCormick was 88.

Sheahan, the William Brough Professor of Economics, emeritus, began a four-decade career at Williams in 1954 as a member of the original faculty of the Center for

Development Economics, which he served twice as chair. In the 1970s, U.S. President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the White House Council on Wage and Price Stability, and he also served as an adviser to USAID and the World Bank. He retired from Williams in 1994. He is survived by two children and their families.



McCormick was head coach of the men's ice hockey team for 35 seasons. During that time, he was



elected president of the American Hockey Coaches Association and was a member of the Ice Hockey

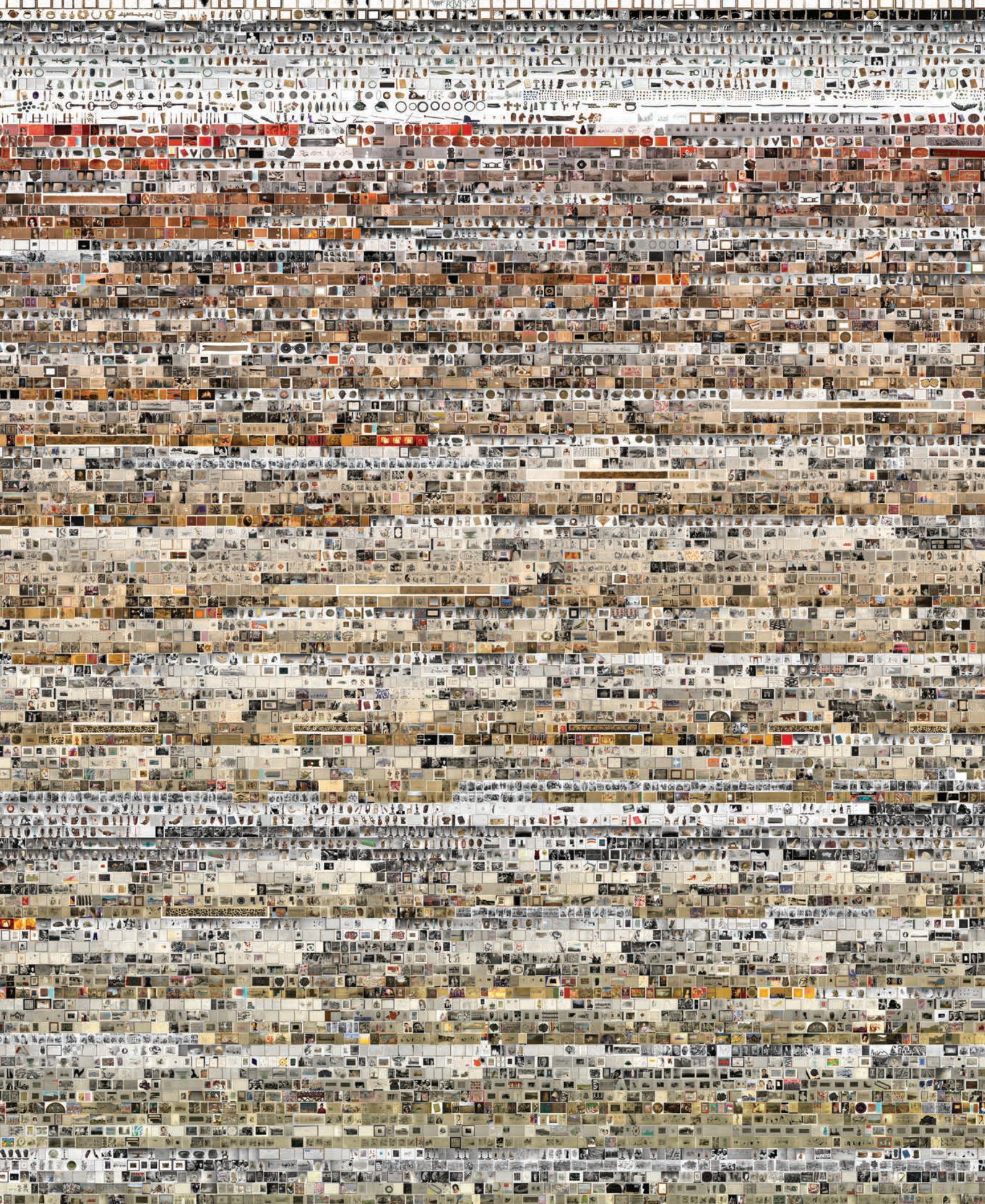
Rules Committee of the NCAA. At the time of his retirement in 1989, he had coached longer at a single school than any of his peers in college hockey. He is survived by two sons, Jim McCormick '76 and John McCormick '93, three daughters, including Susan McCormick '77, nine grandchildren and three siblings.



A CLOSER LOOK

SUSTAINING ZILKHA

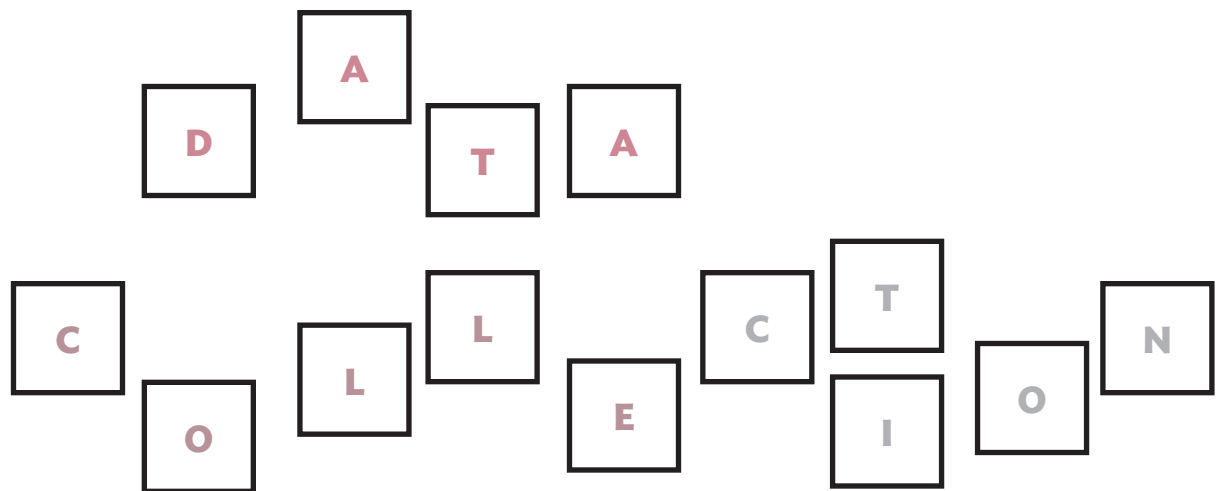
SINCE 2012, THE ZILKHA CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL Initiatives has selected six to seven students each year for its summer internship program. Interns have worked as food-waste specialists, energy conservation analysts and artists in residence, among the many jobs focused on sustainability that impact the campus community. “Our internship program speaks to the college’s commitment to community by creating a space where our interns are allowed and encouraged to learn from each other,” says Elayne Elliott, sustainability coordinator. “A core part of the Zilkha Center’s mission is to provide opportunities for action and seek new methods for addressing sustainability challenges. Our interns, who come from various academic disciplines, provide perspective and enthusiasm that enable us to further the reach of our work.” This past summer, some of that work included (1) picking peaches from the orchard area outside of the Class of 1966 Environmental Center; (2) providing tours of the center’s building and grounds for admission open houses; (3) making jam with locally sourced blueberries to be used in the college’s dining halls; and (4) assisting Caretaker Farm in Williamstown with projects such as spreading mulch over the garden beds.





The Williams College Museum of Art
is pushing the boundaries of curation and
blurring the lines between art and technology.

BY DENISE VALENTI



WHAT IS PINK? IT SEEMS A STRAIGHTFORWARD ENOUGH QUESTION. PINK IS flamingos and cotton candy. It's pencil erasers and Pepto-Bismol. It can be lips or lipstick, the delicate petals of a tea rose, the firm flesh of salmon. Artists recognize pink as a tint—the hue that results when red is mixed with white.

But line up every single thing you can think of that's pink, and its true nature becomes less apparent. It's berry, leaning toward purple and blue. Its undertones can be orange or even yellow. Its overtones can be political or gendered. Pink is probably as complex, mysterious and symbolic a color as we can identify, making it naturally compelling as a subject for an art exhibition like the one currently on view at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA).

In terms of its subject matter as well as its development, "Pink Art," which opened in September, pushes the boundaries of traditional curation. It's based on technology developed by Professor of Computer Science Duane A. Bailey and the Office for Information Technology to "crowdsource" a definition of pink. Using that definition, Bailey and his students wrote algorithms to mine and sort WCMA's digital collection of more than 15,000 objects, ranking them in order of their pink-ness. Curators used the results to select the pieces that now hang in the Faison Gallery.

The exhibition, featuring 21 works of art, is just the latest in a series of projects and innovations at WCMA aimed at "generating new models for how a museum's digital collection can catalyze teaching and learning in the liberal arts," says former Class of 1956 Director Christina Olsen, who recently became director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art.


**A hi-resolution image
of the 15,000-plus
objects in WCMA's
digital collection.
By Chad Weinard,
Mellon digital
projects manager.**

Another exhibition, last spring's "Accession Number," considered every single work of art acquired—and in some cases lost, damaged or sold—by WCMA over the period from 1960 to 1962, based on the number it was assigned when it entered the collection. The result was a rare, unfiltered look behind the scenes at the museum.

Building on WCMA's role as a campus museum, a new working group is investigating ways to leverage the digital collection to more thoroughly infuse art throughout the curriculum. In addition to providing gallery and classroom spaces designed specifically for the close study of objects, the museum is gathering the data and context generated when faculty and students make use of them. That information, in turn, will help deepen the understanding of and add dimension to the collection.

WCMA is doing all of this work with the help of a three-year, \$500,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation aimed at strengthening the development of digital resources and academic uses for the collection. In the long term, the goal is for WCMA to become a model for other campus museums by inspiring new ideas and practices.

"We know the pedagogical potential of both the physical and digital collection is enormous," Olsen says. "This project deepens and widens the value of museum collections in the 21st century, especially in higher education."

 Imagine lining up a museum's entire collection and organizing it by the predominant color in each work of art. Or sorting it chronologically, by the year each work was created, or when its artist was born or when it entered the collection. What if you could scour tens of thousands of objects and select any having to do with, say, pink?

Not very long ago, such endeavors would have been impossible. Only in the 1990s did museums start building databases of their artworks. WCMA began in 1991, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, says Rachel Tassone, WCMA's associate registrar. It took the better part of a year to enter data manually from original catalog cards and curatorial files. It took another decade for digital images to replace film in documenting every piece. In 2009, WCMA began to fully digitize its holdings, beginning with its African collection.


Another huge shift came when museums began offering their digital collections to the public for use, says Rich Cherry, principal of the museum consulting firm Modern Operations and co-chair of the annual Museums and the Web conference. Just this past February, the Metropolitan Museum of Art made all images of its public-domain works accessible (more than 375,000), along with data for all of its digitized artworks (about 440,000 to date). WCMA's newly redesigned website

Last spring's exhibition "Accession Number" considered every single work of art acquired—and in some cases lost, damaged or sold—by WCMA from 1960–1962.

features a prominent link to its fully searchable digital collection at wcma.williams.edu/collection.

Providing the public with the technology to explore and experience artworks—without the help of a curator and outside the walls of a museum—is cutting edge, Cherry says. So, too, is transparency.

"This day and age is about engagement," he says. "Not just in museum spaces, but online and in social media. Museums are inherently relevant, but there's an opportunity to reach even more people when they're able to engage a museum on their own terms."

 ccession Number," which ran at WCMA from February to July 2017, was all about transparency and engagement. It challenged traditional notions of curation and was notable for its openness about the work of museums and the life of the objects within their halls.

The exhibition focused on a pivotal time for both the museum and society at large. Under then-director S. Lane Faison Jr. '29, the Lawrence Art museum (which later became WCMA) acquired 396 works of art, including ancient Egyptian amulets, Chinese Qing dynasty vases and a massive painting of Niagara Falls by William Morris Hunt. Each object was assigned a code—an accession number—recording both the year and sequence of its acquisition.

Two-hundred ninety items, displayed in order of their accession numbers (from 60.12 to 62.34), were included in the exhibition. Works of art that were damaged were hung anyway. Those that had gone missing or were sold were represented by square outlines on the walls. As part of the programming, local writers were asked to imagine lives for the missing objects.

"In exposing the collection's data, we wanted to be honest, and people were fascinated by that frankness," says WCMA curatorial assistant Jessie Sentivan.

In the overview of the exhibition, curators Olsen and Kerry Bickford, MA '17, wrote that "Accession Number" poses different questions: What did the museum prioritize, why, and what did it overlook? Which works of art do we still value today? And, finally, how do we infer meaning from this or any archive?"

"Accession Number" explored this last question in a nearby installation where the public could use an iPad to curate their own digital displays of the artworks. The interface was developed by Bailey and three students—Julia Kawano '19, Evelyn Mahon '18 and Javier Esparza '20, with help from the Office for Information Technology.

"The content and presentation of the show defied the notion of curation," says Sonnet Coggins, WCMA's interim deputy director. "Not only was the content breaking convention, but the convention we used to present the content was being shifted."

61.19.15.E

61.19.15.F

61.19.15.G

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61.19.15.K

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61.19.16

61.19.15.L



For “Pink Art,” WCMA curators used results from algorithms that rated works in order of their “pink-ness.” The ratings accompany each selected work.



“Pink Art” shifted those conventions even further, asking the question: “What happens when you see the museum’s collection through the lens of one color?” Pink was chosen for its history, symbolism and cultural relevance—and also because it’s more challenging than one might think to define it.

Bailey and his students worked with information technology staff to develop a new app to get at that definition. The app, designed for use on an iPad, showed users blocks of color and asked them to choose which ones they considered to be pink. Hues ranging from magenta to flesh tones were interspersed with other colors, including blue and green. The app collected more than 34,000 responses that were used to define what Bailey calls “a common sense of pink.” He and four students used the definition to write five different algorithms to scan WCMA’s digital collection for pink art.

The process revealed the algorithms’ subjectivity, which is no surprise, Bailey says. “We computer scientists think of what we do as a creative process,” he says. “Algorithms can disagree, they can get things wrong. Some are beautiful and some less so, and the exhibition embraces those kinds of differences.”

The algorithms “saw” pink in many works of art that, to most viewers, didn’t look pink at all, while other pieces that were decidedly pink were overlooked, says Chad Weinard, WCMA’s Mellon digital projects manager. One work the algorithms passed over—but that certainly would have caught a curator’s eye—is a 1957 Andy Warhol print of a pink flower on a white background.

“The essence of this picture is pink, but it is a relatively small part of the overall picture,” Weinard says. “So in a connoisseur’s view, this picture is all about this color and the tenderness of this flower and the sentimentality of it all. But to the algorithms, it was mostly white. The

PHOTOGRAPH: ARTHUR EVANS



conception of pink in a work of art ranges widely, and it's hugely interesting."

Some of the algorithms favored old photos that deteriorated over time, becoming a purplish-pink as the photographic paper and chemicals degraded. Others seeking tonal values close to pink honed in on sculptures. Curators used an average of the algorithms' results to begin their checklist for the exhibition and then added and subtracted works. Each piece is accompanied by its algorithmic average.

"Part of what we learned and hoped to emphasize was the creative process of writing code and the creativity involved in computer science," Weinard says. "We have this conception of robotic, almost impersonal, imperfect mechanisms that are working apart from any sort of human hand. And that's not true at all. These algorithms are just as subjective, just as arbitrary, sometimes as full of errors and interesting ideas as any other kind of writing."

CROWDSOURCED COLOR

To help develop the Williams College Museum of Art exhibition "Pink Art," Computer Science Professor Duane A. Bailey set out to find a consensus for what constitutes pink. He built an app that would define the color by comparison—asking people what they think pink is and isn't. "Crowdsource is a useful way to get a sense of what we mean about things like pink," he says.

His app works like a game and can be somewhat addicting—so much so that it has received tens of thousands of responses. Each round offers users a choice of 16 squares. Users click on the squares they consider to be pink and submit their results. Try the app at apps.williams.edu/define_color.

As if pink weren't challenging enough to define, Bailey and his students decided to tackle Williams purple as their next project. As an Amherst graduate, Bailey says he's particularly sensitive to the results of this exercise. "I think it will vary quite a bit, and it might intrude on Amherst purple," he says.

You can participate in crowdsourcing Williams purple at apps.williams.edu/define_purple.



ART HISTORY 104

MATHEMATICS 3372

AMERICAN STUDIES 307

Pushing the boundaries of curation is just one outgrowth of the Mellon project. The larger goal is to use data and technology to create a model for faculty, staff and others teaching and learning with artworks to contribute their knowledge to WCMA's collection.

Museum staff regularly collaborate with professors on exhibitions, programming, installations and publications. This semester, students in anthropology professor Antonia Foias' class *The Seeds of Divinity: Exploring Precolumbian Art and Civilization in a Museum Exhibit* are examining how divinity was materialized in everyday life and researching artworks from WCMA and other collections for an exhibition this spring. Students in biology professor Matt Carter's *Neural Systems and Circuits* are using works by Richard Joseph Anuszkiewicz, Wassily Kandinsky and June Wayne to better understand the functional organization of the vertebrate brain.

The artworks selected by faculty and museum staff to hang in Object Lab provide physical and visual form to research and ideas.

Artworks for these courses and seven others currently hang in the Object Lab, a hybrid gallery-classroom that WCMA describes as a "responsive pedagogical platform." Working with Elizabeth Gallerani, curator of Mellon academic programs, faculty select objects for course-specific installations that hang side by side along with those of other classes.

Now in its fifth semester, Object Lab moved in the fall to a larger space that's more suitable for faculty to actively teach class sessions and for students to linger and study.

Gallerani also works closely with faculty to customize course sessions that take place in the Rose Object Classroom not far from the Object Lab. These sessions allow for close study of works, some of which are rarely seen on gallery walls.

WCMA is gathering more information than ever about which artworks are being used and how, in hopes of helping more faculty make even better use of the collection in the future, Weinard says.

PHOTOGRAPH: ARTHUR EVANS



THE ART OF COMPUTER SCIENCE

Why algorithms can't agree on "pink" art.

Algorithms are sets of rules to be followed in problem-solving operations, especially by a computer. They are widely considered to be objective, impartial and even dispassionate. But as the exhibition "Pink Art," on view at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), demonstrates, algorithms are just as subjective as humans—because they're designed by humans.

To help develop the checklist for the exhibition, computer science professor Duane A. Bailey and four students wrote five algorithms that scoured WCMA's digital collection for pink works of art. Rarely did the calculations agree with each other. Only one identified Andy Warhol's *Flower*, a depiction of a pink rose on a white field, as pink. None saw pink in John Hoyland's *Red Block on Pink*, Willem de Kooning's *Springs (from "Door Cycle")* or Joseph Cornell's untitled, mixed-media display of mostly pink rubber balls.

The artwork that did the best job of catching an algorithm's attention was Eduardo Luigi Paolozzi's *Fifty-Nine Varieties of Paradise (from "General Dynamic F.U.N.")*. But perhaps it makes sense that the algorithms viewed the distinctively pink lithograph differently than the other works. In his lifetime, Paolozzi was best known for exploring the interplay between art and technology in his work.

Here are the five algorithms and their designers:

PIXEL

Computes the percentage of "pink" pixels in an image using a crowdsourced definition of pink.

Duane A. Bailey, Professor of Computer Science

TOON

Converts an image into flat, outlined shapes, like the hand-drawn animation cels in classic cartoons, and tallies the resulting "pink" pixels.

Maria Mejia '20

CRAYOLA

Sees images through Crayola-colored glasses and tallies the percentage of pixels that match one of 11 Crayola "pinks."

Lily Hyerin Lee '17

ISLANDIZE

Sees the image as collections of discrete color shapes, or islands, and then reports the percentage of shapes that are "pink."

Jordan LaMothe '17

RECOLOR

Simplifies the image into the eight colors that best represent it and calculates the percentage of "pink" pixels generated in the process.

Haley Lescinsky '18

Visit apps.williams.edu/pinkArt to see the exhibition through the lens of each algorithm.

"When a physics professor uses objects for a class in Object Lab or Rose Object Classroom, not only is the professor getting new teaching tools, but he or she is also contributing knowledge to the collection," he says. "By providing physics context, the professor becomes a co-creator of collection knowledge."

Though it is only the first year of the Mellon grant, it has become clear that the gathering and sharing of data has potential far beyond the classroom. Technology is showing promise to create even greater value around objects and collections, beyond their intrinsic historical, aesthetic or monetary value.

"The Mellon project essentially redefines collection knowledge by capturing new information and context generated by faculty, students and museum audiences more broadly," Coggins says. "When this happens, so many new meanings are unlocked." [W](#)

Denise Valenti is a New Jersey-based freelance writer.

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATIONS BY AARON TILLEY

AT THE RISK OF OVERSIMPLIFYING THINGS, Williams professors Joel Lee and Eiko Maruko Siniawer '97 are fascinated by trash. For Lee, an anthropologist, what began as a cultural and religious history project within a community of sanitation workers in north India led to an ongoing exploration of urban sanitation infrastructure and how the organization of space has social, psychological and even biochemical effects on communities. For Siniawer, a historian, the experience of living in Japan while researching and writing a book on the institutionalization of violence in politics there sparked a scholarly interest in the country's perceptions of waste in its broadest sense—including waste of resources, time, money and material possessions—the subject of her forthcoming book. In a far-ranging conversation in August, Lee and Siniawer spoke with sociology professor Olga Shevchenko, who studies memory, culture and consumption in post-Soviet Russia, about the material and moral implications of waste, shifting ideas about affluence—and Americans' obsession with "stuff."

THE VALUE OF WASTE

A LOOK AT WHAT WE ACCUMULATE
AND WHAT WE DISCARD—
AND THE CHANGING SYSTEMS
AND JUDGMENTS
SURROUNDING BOTH.



OLGA SHEVCHENKO:

Let's start by talking about your scholarly interests, generally, and then more specifically about how these interests have led to your research on waste and social values.

EIKO MARUKO SINIAWER '97: My first book was on violence specialist types, mafia types and their involvement in politics—so political history from the 1860s to the 1960s. My current book project on waste and wastefulness in postwar Japan is a social and cultural history. If there's anything that links these two projects, it's an interest in phenomena that are unseen, or phenomena that people don't want to see. But they are ubiquitous.

JOEL LEE: Before graduate school, I was doing human rights work with the Dalit community. Dalit means "ground down" or "oppressed" and is the prevailing self-designation of those formerly called "the untouchables," a fifth of the population of South Asia. When I went to graduate school, I wanted to do research with Valmikis, a particular Dalit community associated with sanitation labor. It started as a cultural and religious history project. In the course of my research, though, it became clear that sanitation labor and its infrastructures, rhythms and relations to municipal government profoundly structured people's lives in ways that had to be taken into account.

SHEVCHENKO: Can you talk about the specific social groups that emerge as key movers and shakers in these projects and how they fit into the larger social tapestry of the settings you look at?

LEE: In a lot of the world, including the U.S., sanitation work intersects with structural inequality based on class or ethnic group. In South Asia, sanitation work and work dealing with animal or human death have for a long time been the preserve of an intermarrying community or caste—the Valmikis in north India and Chuhars or Punjabi Christians in Pakistan—and they continue to deal with structures of entrenched discrimination.

SINIAWER: For my work, it's the middle class. I'm thinking about waste conceptually—not just garbage and trash but also wasted time, wasted effort. The history of waste consciousness in postwar Japan is bound up with the construction of the middle class. The middle class is supposed to be conscious of waste, whether it means being efficient with your time or clean and

hygienic with your garbage or organizing your space in a particular way. Gender is very important. The housewife—defined as a woman who is married, even if she is working outside the home—has responsibilities including waste management in all forms: trash, running the household efficiently, managing monetary savings. The counterpoint is the more male notion of the worker who is efficient in the workplace, who is using time wisely or making double-sided copies to save paper.

SHEVCHENKO: In your case, Joel, it sounds like the groups generating ideas about waste may be rather distinct from the groups most directly affected by those ideas. Yet in yours, Eiko, it's more like these ideas emerge from the self-identified middle class and pertain to the members of that same class. Is that fair to say?

SINIAWER: Yes, ideas about waste are formulated by and for a middle class that is not defined in opposition to anything like the notion of an ultra-rich or a working class. So, the emergence of middle class-ness as a normative idea and, arguably, as a mass experience starting in the late 1950s and 1960s is defined by an ability to consume goods—the refrigerator, the car, the TV and later the color TV. It's about the achievement of some level of comfort, security and convenience.

SHEVCHENKO: Joel, what got you interested in waste?

LEE: Once you start thinking about how our notions of value seem to be ranged against notions of non-value, you get into conceptual categories that take you from the material to the moral world and back. How quickly does the word rubbish take you from a material thing to a social category? "Impurity," "pollution," "disgusting"—each of these categories takes us into the moral, the ethical, the social and the grossly material.

SHEVCHENKO: Can you share some of your field experiences that drive these notions home in palpable ways?

LEE: I accompanied street sweepers on their rounds to get a sense of their work life. Doing the rounds with Jalads, members of a Dalit caste whose job is to remove the carcasses of goats, dogs and cats brought home the olfactory consequences of this form of labor. Temperatures are much higher in India, so decomposition happens at a different pace. There's a backlog of animals. To do that work, you're surrounded by the smell of rotting carcasses. The literature on the science of olfaction calls smells



OLGA SHEVCHENKO, professor of sociology, teaches and does research on the issues of memory, culture and consumption in post-socialist Russia.



EIKO MARUKO SINIAWER '97, professor of history, specializes in the history of modern Japan and teaches Japanese history.



JOEL LEE, assistant professor of anthropology, teaches and conducts research on religion, the state and caste, particularly the Dalit, in South Asia.

“odorants,” which are volatile chemical compounds. In Jalad work, these odorants lodge themselves in your pores, in your hair, in the folds of your clothes, and linger beyond the working day. In the olfactorily neutralized spaces of the global middle class, it’s very difficult to imagine that you’re breathing different air from others—to recognize that space is not neutral, not sensorily democratic, but partitioned into zones of different sensuous materiality. When you relate it to the literature of the U.S., it comes very close to what we call environmental racism.

SHEVCHENKO: What you say about the olfactorily neutralized environment is interesting, because your work butts you against the limits of cultural relativism in that there are certain dimensions in which a sense of pleasant or unpleasant smell is culturally constructed. Travelers in the Soviet Union remark on the absence of deodorants, and of course it’s an everyday smell of human co-activity. Yet there are certain smells that one doesn’t get habituated to or that can’t be normalized.

LEE: What qualifies as perfume? Which kinds of smells are valued in different ways? Certain smells are universally culturally marked as bad, as opposed to something like animal manure, which some people may enjoy and appreciate and others might find disgusting.

SHEVCHENKO: That gets at the connection between adjudications of pleasant and unpleasant, disgusting and not disgusting, in larger moral categories. Some of your work, Eiko, reminds me of the work I did about the late 1990s in Russia and the ways in which people dealt with the sudden influx of consumer electronics and household durables. What struck me in that setting was that people very enthusiastically bought new things, but they wouldn’t throw away their old ones. Instead, they reframed them as something else. You’d go to people’s homes and see three refrigerators—one of which was unplugged, working as a cupboard or a console for a TV. Or it would be there, as people said, in case of an emergency. It became clear that these kinds of judgments were also judgments about the insecurities of the present and the ways in which people always expect the worst times, so they stockpile these items as a buffer against threats that are still imagined. In that sense, waste could be used as a lens to understand larger anxieties, hopes or values in the present.

SINIAWER: It reveals different things in different time periods—shifting ideas about the desirability of affluence, different levels of recognition about the costs and consequences of economic growth, and different definitions of wealth and affluence itself. In the 1950s and 1960s in Japan, the discussions were about what exactly should be considered wasteful, especially when it came to consumption of electronic goods, consumer durables, etc. In this transitional moment, with wartime and postwar poverty not so far behind, was it OK to spend money on a TV? Was it different to spend that money



“WHAT STRUCK ME IN THAT SETTING WAS THAT PEOPLE VERY ENTHUSIASTICALLY BOUGHT NEW THINGS, BUT THEY WOULDN’T THROW AWAY THEIR OLD ONES. INSTEAD, THEY REFRAMED THEM AS SOMETHING ELSE.”

—OLGA SHEVCHENKO

on a washing machine than a TV? There was a sense that consumption was a marker of progress and ultimately desirable. It was a sign that you were making it into the middle class. In the early 1970s, there was the oil shock and the war against garbage declared by the governor of Tokyo, and the economy faltered. It was a wake-up call that there were costs and consequences to high economic growth—that, in hindsight, we were acting wastefully in the 1960s. At the same time, there was a desire to hold on to the notion of a wealthy middle class life. By the 1980s and especially the 1990s, the umbrella for what constituted waste consciousness expanded. Waste was thought of in environmental terms and also in terms of what you did with your time. Being very efficient on the assembly line or in the office has been a thread in efficiency literature for a long time. But in the 1990s, people began to say, “It’s not wasteful to take more time for yourself,” not just for the leisure created by the leisure industry but in thinking about what meaningful time is to you. The more

expansive thinking about waste goes hand in hand with the expansion of ways of defining and thinking about affluence—not just in terms of GDP growth but also in terms of social and environmental commitments.

SHEVCHENKO: Joel, do you see fluctuations in how waste is thought about or practically handled over time?

LEE: For the last 200 years and more, it seems, as Marx observed, everything begins to assume the commodity form. Once everything assumes the commodity form, then things that were not considered waste before become waste. Take manure. Before the British government in India, manure was something that a particular group of people had a hereditary right to collect, distribute and exchange for certain privileges and a share of the collective grain at harvest time. This is a part of what is

known as the Jajmani system. The British saw a potential source of profit and had a decades-long struggle with the community that has the hereditary right to the manure—which is the same community that does the sanitation work, historically—to turn manure into a commodity. The British argument was that they owned the municipality, the land and everything on it, and they wanted the right to sell manure at a profit to local farmers—a right they ultimately took by force.

SHEVCHENKO: So, these transformations are diagnostic of larger cultural shifts or political or economic shifts.

SINIAWER: I think about the example of “night soil” in Japan—where people from rural areas would come into the city, collect human waste and take it out to the rural areas to use as fertilizer. That practice was replaced in the early 1960s by chemical fertilizers, so human waste ceased to have value as a commodity and became valueless waste.

SHEVCHENKO: Joel, what is the connection between the changing value of commodity and the value of people who traffic in that commodity? Is commodification a way to lay a claim to some kind of social contribution, or do you see the reverse in north India?

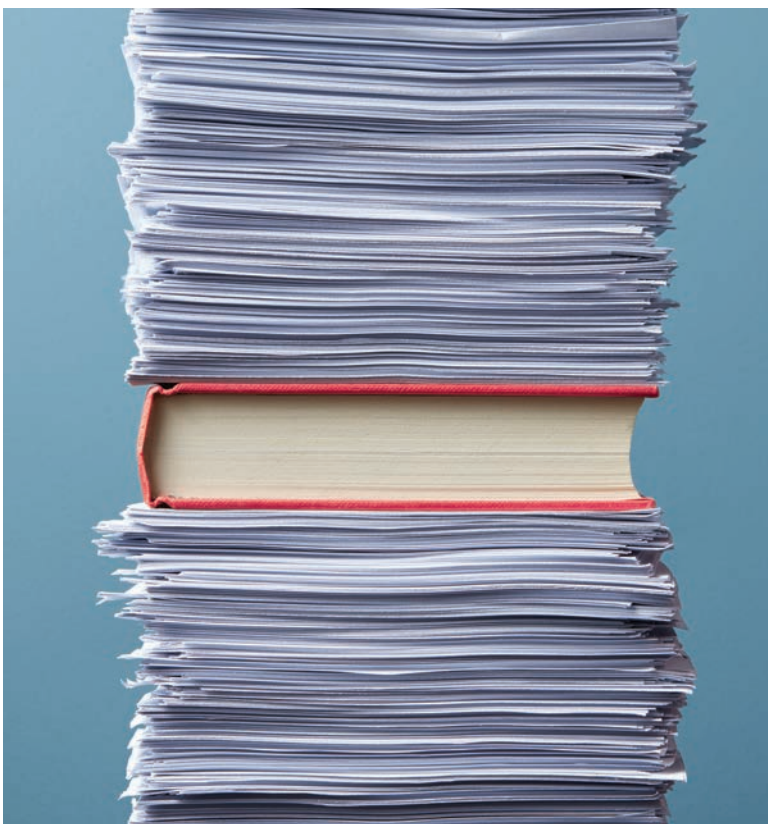
LEE: Anti-caste efforts within various Dalit communities have taken the line of: “Abandon these stigmatized forms of labor altogether.” The way out is to get a different kind of job, leave the village and go to the city—a radical break with traditional occupations and materials associated with them. At the same time, because municipal work is relatively well paying and secure, there’s a strong incentive for workers to stick with it but maybe to do the work in more dignified, safer ways. For example, sanitation workers’ unions have demanded basic protections to stop the slow violence of doing this work without gloves and masks.

SINIAWER: In Japan, the social stigma of rag pickers (who make their livings scavenging rags and refuse) was quite strong. In the early 1960s, the figure of the rag picker disappeared. There was a push in the 1970s to build incinerators, but there was political contestation about where the incinerators should be situated. In Tokyo, they ended up being located in the middle of residential areas. The negotiation was: OK, there’s going to be an incinerator here, but the electricity generated by that incinerator is going to heat the community pool that we’re also putting in. The incinerator became a symbol of cleanliness, hygiene and the ability to tame waste, such that the social stigma of people who work for the sanitation industry—bureaucrats or municipal workers sitting in the incineration room looking at computer screens all day—is not the same as the social stigma of the rag picker who is handling the trash.

LEE: The mediation of a machine or technology is key. The largest category of sanitation worker in India is the municipal street sweeper who manually sweeps the streets. That was the case in New York—in most of the world—

“WASTE WAS THOUGHT OF IN ENVIRONMENTAL TERMS AND ALSO IN TERMS OF WHAT YOU DID WITH YOUR TIME. BEING VERY EFFICIENT ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE OR IN THE OFFICE HAS BEEN A THREAD IN EFFICIENCY LITERATURE FOR A LONG TIME.”

—EIKO MARUKO SINIAWER '97



until the critical shift to trucks. There's a desire, although an ambivalent one, among street sweepers in my fieldwork site, to mechanize. And here, too, you see how the mediation of the machine matters. When I take students in my Trash course to our local waste facilities, the people working there often tell us, "We don't like it when people say 'You work in the dump.' This is not a dump. Everything is computer operated, look at the technology." So even here in our region, the machine technology does a great deal of social work in distancing and overcoming stigma, yet the stigma lingers.

SHEVCHENKO: In much of your work, waste is associated with stigma. But there's a reverse logic where waste—being able to afford being wasteful—confers distinction. American sociologist Thorstein Veblen is very critical of what he calls "conspicuous consumption" of people who squander time and money, yet he argues this is just how people affirm their status in modern times.

SINIAWER: Conspicuous consumption has been a marker of wealth in different ways at certain moments in postwar Japan. In the early to mid-1950s, as the country was just coming out of its most desperate economic situation, people began wondering, "What would be most scandalously luxurious? Maybe to be able to waste things. I could smoke half a cigarette and then throw it away! Wouldn't that be the most luxurious thing?" The idea would be met with a gasp. In the 1980s, at the height of conspicuous consumption, there were women in their 20s with their Louis Vuitton handbags. But in neither case was there a flaunting of wastefulness itself.

LEE: We read Veblen in my Trash class. The students came up with the marble slabs in Williams' library quad as an example of conspicuous consumption, a flaunting of the college's wealth. One student did an analysis of the "Give It Up!" campaign. (At the end of each school year, the Center for Learning in Action and Zilkha Center for Environmental Initiatives organize a program for students to donate unwanted items, which local charities and nonprofits then distribute or resell to raise money.) She interviewed people at all levels—students, custodians, the people who organize the resale later. Her analysis was that this is, in effect, a redistribution of wealth that affirms the dominant status of those who are getting rid of the items and putting them into a secondhand market. Of course our notions of propriety keep anyone from actually saying, "I'm a conspicuous consumer."

SINIAWER: The popularity in recent years of the idea of decluttering has similar overtones. Marie Kondo (author of *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*) has been on *The New York Times* bestseller list for months. Her kind of decluttering has become as popular in the U.S. as it is in Japan. It masquerades under the idea of separation from stuff and materialism—decluttering as what the *Times* calls a "ruthless war on stuff." But she's also very concerned

about what you keep and where you put it. It elides the fact that the people for whom the idea of decluttering is so powerful are people who have accumulated so much stuff that they don't know what to do with it.

SHEVCHENKO: That's a great parallel to the marble slabs in the Williams' library quad, which are rejected pieces from a quarry. They're actually somebody's trash.

LEE: And on the opposite end is the fascination with TV shows about hoarders and keeping stuff as pathology.

SHEVCHENKO: Which is also very classed, right? Being preoccupied with stuff means you're insecure.

SINIAWER: There's the tiny house phenomenon in the U.S.—not so much in Japan, because the average Japanese house is already much smaller than the typical American house. The idea of making do with less space is popular as a form of entertainment. But as a percentage of the actual real-estate market, it's miniscule.

SHEVCHENKO: Before we finish our conversation, talk about how your research factors into your teaching.

SINIAWER: Early in my project about waste, I taught the Winter Study course Waste, which was formative for me. It was an opportunity to talk through with students a range of material and approach it in an eclectic way. We read everything from environmental literature to Don DeLillo's *Underworld*.

LEE: My Trash class derives from my interest in sanitation labor and broader questions about race, value and culture. I want students to learn anthropology by doing it, so part of the idea is for them to rediscover themselves as embedded in and part of systems of waste production and circulation. We track the waste streams that Williams is part of—the incinerator in Pittsfield, the sewage treatment plant in Williamstown, the recycling facility in Pownal, Vt., and the composting facility in Bennington, Vt. Students do their own microethnographic study of some aspect of the local waste system.

SHEVCHENKO: What are some of the lessons you hope students will get out of your material, intellectually or in terms of their own practice?

SINIAWER: That Japan is not unique in terms of the ways it has thought about, defined and grappled with issues of waste and wastefulness. Questions of mass consumption, mass production and wealth should resonate with an American readership and trigger reflection about the ways in which decisions about waste permeate our lives—not just in terms of what we choose to keep or throw away but also what we deem meaningful to do with our time.

LEE: I want students to recognize their own emplacement and involvement in waste systems. I also want them to become more aware of how the shadow categories underneath value—waste, pollution, impurity and the disgusting—operate in clandestine ways in our moral codes and in the ways that we assess the social world and think about people and politics. **W**

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Adam Falk will leave Williams in December to become president of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. When we sat down with him to plan the magazine's coverage of his tenure, he made an important observation: "This story is about Williams' ideals, principles and priorities; it shouldn't be about me." We took what he said to heart and realized the best way to tell the story of his presidency at Williams is to tell the story of Williams during his presidency. So we asked the people responsible for some of the most important changes during Falk's time to share their thoughts. Their essays follow.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JAMES STEINBERG

REAFFIRMING CORE COMMITMENTS

I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE TO HEAD THE SEARCH COMMITTEE THAT recommended Adam Falk as Williams' 17th president. Adam arrived on campus at an exceptionally challenging time, right after the 2008 financial downturn. Williams, like other colleges and universities, was facing both threats and opportunities. Our endowment had dropped by more than 25 percent, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) were starting to disrupt traditional teaching, schools were opening global campuses in China, India and elsewhere, and there was a growing chorus questioning the value of a liberal arts education. Many people wondered if Williams needed to reinvent itself, too.

But Adam asked us to pause and consider what factors distinguished Williams, and then he steered us to double down on them. Given all the competing pressures, this approach was not as simple as it might sound. But it enabled us to reaffirm our commitment to the things that truly mattered, with an eye toward the future.

What were those things? One, of course, was our faculty, which is committed to excellence in teaching, scholarship and service to the college community. Because of a large cohort of retiring faculty, the college is intently focused on attracting the absolute best new professors while securing and providing resources to the faculty as a whole as they continue their outstanding work. We also dedicated ourselves to continuing to attract and educate the best, increasingly diverse group of students and to provide financial aid so that they may attend regardless of need. We needed to create or renew facilities where faculty and students could work together and individually to learn, research and grow. And we endeavored to expose our students to life beyond Williams through volunteer opportunities, business and social venture internships, and learning experiences.

After I left the board, I was fortunate to become chairman of the Teach It Forward Campaign Steering Committee. The core commitments we defined with Adam became campaign pillars. By encouraging us to affirm what was unique and important about this place, he helped us develop a vision that connected our past strengths to a promising future.

The campaign ends in June 2019, and we have already raised more than \$560 million toward our \$650 million goal. Even more extraordinary is the fact that we've reached 77 percent alumni participation—and it's still climbing. And this campaign is about more than dollars: Parents and alumni are volunteering to help recruit students, offer career advice and create internships. Few colleges in the country have reached that level of enthusiasm and participation.



GREGORY M. AVIS '80
is chairman of the Teach
It Forward Campaign
Steering Committee
and a Williams
trustee, emeritus.

This work, under Adam's leadership, has set the table for the next president and the decades to come. Williams is in the enviable position of being able to look ahead.

Adam's leadership style is catalyzing. And while he is key to making things happen, he is careful to credit others around him. The campaign is a great example. Teach It Forward isn't about him. It's about Williams. The campaign is well on its way, and, thanks to the incredible generosity of the Williams community, we are optimistic about exceeding our ambitious goal.

The college has been exceptionally fortunate to have Adam at its helm. And I am blessed to have had the opportunity to work with him.

LEARNING BY DOING

BEFORE ADAM TOOK THE JOB AS WILLIAMS' PRESIDENT, he came to campus for a tour. He didn't tell anyone who he was or why he was there. Just like everybody else, he was here to get a sense of the place.

That story always stuck with me. It's funny to think of a future college president tagging along, incognito, with a bunch of teenagers and their families. But it also speaks to Adam's understanding of the value of on-the-ground research, paying attention and looking closely and deeply. He seized the meaning of how well evidence-based research fits with a liberal arts education.

Early in his time here, Adam responded to student requests for more support for community engagement by commissioning a study. At the time, I was the coordinator of experiential education, working with

faculty and staff to help increase the number of opportunities for and improve the quality of experiential learning in the curriculum. We were conducting a parallel study led by Vice President for Campus Life Steve Klass about the challenges of getting students involved in local schools.

I sat on both committees, and we realized that the Rolodexes for engagement and experiential learning overlapped in terms of resources and relationships with community partners. What came out of the work was the vision for the Center for Learning in Action (CLiA).

The center will be five years old next spring, and we're really hitting our stride. Participation has increased, with more than 800 students involved in experiential learning

and community service in 2016-17. The number of courses involving experiential education pedagogy or learning grew from 80 in 2014-15 to more than 90 so far this year. The number of student groups engaged in community work increased from 22 in 2014-15 to 30 so far—"so far," because we encourage and facilitate new ideas as rapidly as they come to us. And they keep coming!

Experiential learning is critical to personal development. Study after study shows that when you're personally, deeply connected to what you're learning, it sticks. You're able to address issues in a way that helps you understand not only the challenges but also how to navigate the complexity.

And our faculty members understand the value of this work. A huge team of economics professors teaches Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, a Winter Study course in which students are trained to do taxes for low-income residents. We have a social theorist inspiring her students to develop K-12 curricula using storytelling to bridge gaps in cultural understanding. A computer science professor is sponsoring students who applied for and received a grant to organize a high school technology club. There are so many examples.

The world is changing so quickly that there's a need for students to help create new knowledge. Faculty and staff see our students' potential. Students are hungry to start fulfilling it now.

Adam recognized that energy and the need to invest in and follow through on experiential learning and community engagement. When we help our students "learn by doing," we are better preparing them to be full, engaged citizens of the world.



PAULA CONSOLINI
is director of the Center
for Learning in Action.





BUILDING THE CURRICULUM

ADAM'S PRESIDENCY HAS COINCIDED WITH AN unprecedented moment in the college's history. Our faculty is in the midst of a huge demographic shift. Within 10 years, about 100 full professor positions will have turned over.

It's a rare opportunity to bring a lot of terrific people to the college. Because we're a small faculty, hiring just a couple of folks can make a huge difference, not only for an academic unit but for the entire curriculum. The current turnover in faculty empowers us to ask what our curriculum should contain and how we can teach it most effectively so that we can remain an outstanding liberal arts college in the 21st century.

We are being very thoughtful and intentional in our work. In recruiting the next great scholars and teachers, we're working closely with individual units and with the Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity and asking important questions. How do the *what* and *how* of the

"Because we're a small faculty, hiring just a couple of folks can make a huge difference, not only for an academic unit but for the entire curriculum."



DENISE K. BUELL, Cluett Professor of Religion, will return to her position as dean of the faculty in the fall, following a yearlong sabbatical.

curriculum relate to who is teaching? How does this relate to historical dynamics of exclusion and inclusion as well as to changes in academic fields? What does it really mean to diversify the faculty, and how do we accomplish that goal? It's something the college has been explicitly dedicated to for more than a decade, but it's still a work in progress.

Early on, Adam expressed a formal commitment to inclusion and the benefit of multiple perspectives in the college community. He has dedicated resources to the work of diversifying the faculty and the academy. He has done a lot of work communicating to partners like the Mellon Foundation—which supports the college in so many ways—about the good work that Williams is doing. And he has asked questions that have led to some significant changes.

He asked me to lead a task force that led to the creation of the Curricular Planning Committee (CPC). The CPC's mandate is to help advise the Committee on Appointments and Promotions by analyzing where the curriculum has shifted or is shifting and by looking for the gaps in the curriculum. That way, we can be thoughtful in staffing and curricular decisions going forward.

It's exciting to see the recent changes in our faculty and curriculum. We've expanded significantly in statistics, computer science, environmental studies, Africana studies, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, among others. South Asia is increasingly well represented. We also introduced Arabic studies to the curriculum over the last 10 years.

Within and across academic units, our faculty are more interdisciplinary now. At its best, interdisciplinarity lets us see our blind spots or new possibilities within a department as well as innovations that might carry over across academic fields. Building on our differences in all dimensions makes the work we do in our particular areas stronger, and Williams is all the better for it.

CHANGING THE PLACE

WHEN I ARRIVED AT WILLIAMS, VERY FEW COLLEGES or universities had senior-level staff focusing on first-generation students. That the Dean of the College's Office created a position like mine speaks highly of this place and how important this work is. To this day, I get calls from colleagues at schools that are just starting to build this focus into their roles.

I intentionally chose not to be "the first-gen dean," because it can't be about a single position or a single person doing the work. This year, nearly 20 percent of our entering class is first-gen. That's 109 first-year students. I'm still in awe of that number. All of my colleagues in the dean's office are involved in supporting these students. We work collaboratively across campus, too, so that students see the Career Center, the Davis Center and other offices as places that value them. I don't do this work alone. It's Williams.

And Williams does this work well. Resources help, but money alone won't do it: You need people who will say, "I'll be there."

I saw an example of this while I was planning our annual first-gen meet and greet. The meet and greet is a space for first-gen students to get to know each other and to connect with faculty and staff at the college. I wanted to invite Adam. So I asked the dean at the time if she would ask him. She encouraged me to talk to Adam myself. I came from a big, bureaucratic school, so I thought, "I can email the president?" But he responded right away and said, "I'll be there." He has come to every meet and greet since to talk with the students. It sends them a strong message that the president sees them as important, that they are a critical part of the fabric of Williams.

We've created a culture at Williams in which it doesn't matter where you come from or what your background is. Adam's philosophy has helped make that possible. We don't force first-gen students to change to accommodate the place. We change the place.

Places like Williams were built to be selective and elite. Now we're a different kind of college, where anyone who's committed to learning can get a great education. And if you need help, for whatever reason, we're there for you, because we chose you, and we want you to be here.

Now, like Adam, I'm leaving Williams. This place helped set me on my own path. I'm happy to have built this environment with him and all of our colleagues—and to see how the students are benefiting.



"We've created a culture at Williams in which it doesn't matter where you come from or what your background is."



ROSANNA FERRO served for four years as Williams' associate dean of the college. On Oct. 30, she became the first-ever vice president of student affairs and campus life at Ithaca College.



SOLVING PROBLEMS CREATIVELY



TIKU MAJUMDER,
Science Center
director and Barclay
Jermain Professor of
Natural Philosophy, will
become Williams' interim
president in January.

SOME OF MY MOST MEMORABLE AND REWARDING experiences have been in my atomic physics laboratory, where I've had the pleasure of seeing more than 60 students get their first tastes of research. It's been the perfect Williams experience—combining one-on-one teaching, collaborative research and mentorship—as we conduct complicated laser spectroscopy experiments, design and build apparatus, analyze data and, ultimately, publish papers together.

That experience is replicated day in and day out in labs and classrooms across the sciences at Williams. It's a recipe for science education that you don't see very often. Many small colleges tend to emphasize teaching. R-1 universities tend to focus on research. What we do blends the best of both worlds. I like to call it research training, and we do it very well.

In the Class of 2018, roughly half of Williams students will graduate with at least one major in science or math, compared to about a quarter when I first started teaching here 23 years ago. Many of these students will attend graduate programs within these disciplines, and others will pursue interdisciplinary programs, benefiting from their basic science background at Williams and moving into new, exciting areas of inquiry. Williams ranks very near the top among undergraduate institutions receiving grant funding for pre-doctoral student fellowships in addition to faculty research.

None of this success is sustainable without a serious investment in the infrastructure of science, something Adam committed to early in his time here as president. And so we're hiring young, ambitious faculty members

who come to Williams because they really want to get involved with students—not only in the classrooms but also by engaging them in their research. We're stepping up resources for equipment and labs.

And next summer, we're opening a new laboratory science building that's designed to be flexible enough to support current research and also lines of inquiry we can't yet imagine. Some of the coolest things in science are happening not in the middle of a discipline but in the spaces between.

It's all in the service of training our students to be able to solve the next problem they've never seen before. What's happening in the sciences mirrors what my colleagues across Route 2 are doing in the arts, humanities and social sciences. We're all teaching students how to think critically and solve problems creatively.

Now I'm getting ready to assume a new role, as interim president of Williams while we search for Adam's successor. He and I were in graduate school together as young physicists, but who could have imagined that he would be handing off the presidential baton to me at Williams so many years later?

It's fascinating to begin to see this place from a new angle. And one of the things I'm seeing is how well Adam has everything running. His senior staff, and through them the whole administration, are encouraged to take responsibility for their work and the welfare of the college as a whole. It makes it very easy for someone like me to come in as interim after Adam, because he fosters a team approach and has worked hard to make sure it isn't all about him. It's about Williams and the good work we're all doing together. **W**

STUDY



NOTICING LANGUAGE

Comparative literature professor Lama Nassif is examining how society influences the way we speak and how the way we speak influences society.

HOW AND WHY DO LANGUAGES CHANGE OVER TIME? HOW CAN language choices reflect a person's identity? And how do the words we speak intersect with and communicate power relationships among and between individuals in a society? These are some of the questions assistant professor Lama Nassif and her students are exploring this semester in a new course, Language and Society.

"Sociolinguistic competency is an essential aspect of our language use," says Nassif, who joined the Williams faculty in 2016 and teaches Arabic language and courses on linguistics. "We must be able to use language appropriately, to judge the context in order to know what is acceptable to say in any given situation."

In her new course, students are examining whether language varies according to gender, how language varieties form and what determines a language's status within a speech community. These questions tie back to Nassif's research into second language acquisition and the pedagogical underpinnings of teaching Arabic as a foreign language.

Nassif, who earned a Ph.D. in foreign language education at the University of Texas at Austin, studies how students of Arabic acquire the language. "I'm interested in cognitive approaches to second language acquisition, and so I study a process called 'noticing,'" she says. "Noticing is the conscious registration of certain occurrences in a language. I want to know which occurrences of language input—what the students hear and read—are noticed and what variables influence learners' noticing."

Lama Nassif teaches Arabic language and courses on linguistics.

This approach to understanding second language acquisition influences Nassif's opinion in what she describes as a "heated debate" about how to teach Arabic. Many Arabic language programs teach exclusively Modern Standard Arabic—the language of newspapers and textbooks—but not what one hears on the streets or in the homes of native Arabic speakers. "When students learn only Modern Standard Arabic and then travel to an Arabic-speaking country, they sound like they're speaking Shakespeare" in a modern English speaking country, Nassif says.

Nassif, who grew up in Syria and came to the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar and later for graduate school, believes that the answer is what's called the integrative approach to language learning. This is when students are taught both Modern Standard Arabic and one colloquial variety simultaneously.

The approach, which considers the sociological aspects of language learning,

ties in with Nassif's research. "In my data analysis, I drew on the simultaneous integration of Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic," she says. "I considered what patterns second language learners show as they are learning the two varieties, and I made comparisons with native speakers, asking if they show similar patterns." She found that they did. "You would be surprised at how comprehensible it is. It's systematic, and language learners show awareness of register."

That awareness will lead in time to those students properly navigating sociolinguistic situations, switching register as appropriate, which is applicable across any language setting, says Nassif's student Joana Fernandez '20. "This class has made me more conscious about attitudes toward different languages, accents, dialects and varieties," she says. "I used to be quick to make assumptions about people based on how they spoke. Now, I question why they use such varieties and even reflect on the way I speak. Why do I speak differently to different people?"

Questions like this are percolating across campus this semester. Anthropology professor Joel Lee is teaching a course called Language and Power, which poses questions about how we create community by the way we talk, what role speech plays in the accumulation of cultural capital, and how racism and colonialism have been sustained by language practices. Both classes, which meet at the same time, are fully enrolled.

"There is a lot of interest in linguistics on campus, in part because of the current political situation," says Nassif. "When we start to question policies about bilingual education or English-only laws, we start to ask what a multilingual community really means. I thought that this would be a timely course for our students."

—JULIA MUNEMO

OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

Critics have drawn connections between Barbara Takenaga's abstract paintings and the Big Bang Theory, the night sky and psychedelic experience. But as viewers consider a new survey of her work curated by Debra Bricker Balken at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), Takenaga wants them to keep in mind: "I still see them as open to interpretation."

Preparing for the survey was a "strange and wonderful activity," says Takenaga, the Mary A. and William Wirt Warren Professor of Art. "It allows me to see the group as a whole and revisit images that I had forgotten."

More than 60 works are represented, showcasing distinct changes in the style, subject matter and size of her paintings. Twenty years ago, Takenaga shifted from small works based on tiny black whorls and curlicues in her dog's fur to enormous pieces that evoke galaxies. The transformation came "all at once," she says, one day when she switched the colors she was using.

"At the time, I was thinking a lot about mortality in my personal life," she says. "It was interesting to have these little outer space paintings that seemed funny but cosmic and a little trippy, too, like they were little elegies."

Her work went from being quite small—in the 12-inch by 10-inch range—to being quite large. She currently has a 100-foot-long piece at MASS MoCA that was first printed as wallpaper and later hand painted. Today, a typical painting is 6 feet by 11 feet, composed, sometimes, as diptychs or triptychs.

She also challenged herself over time to reconsider her style. "As a teacher, I decided to give myself an assignment when I felt I was being too tight or structured in my work," says Takenaga, who joined the studio art faculty at Williams 32 years ago. "I wanted to make myself loosen up, so I started throwing paint around and then using whatever fake abstract expressionist forms showed up as the source of the image, in a kind of Surrealist parlor game."

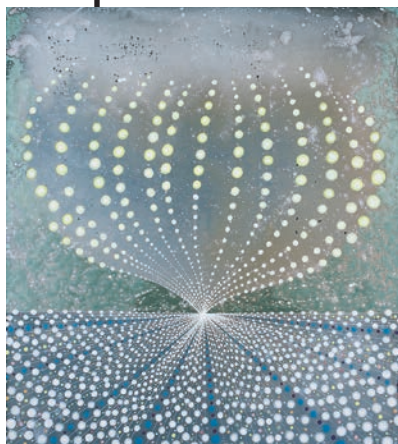
In an essay for the catalog accompanying the survey, Jim Shepard, Williams' J. Leland Miller Professor of American History, Literature and Eloquence,

writes that "for all of her obsessiveness," Takenaga has made it a point to "continually embrace radical change." It's what he calls "a paradox of self-exploration and self-effacement" that's central to her work.

Lisa Dorin, WCMA's interim director, says the survey's 20-year span "helps us understand the trajectory of Barbara's practice to date but also gives a glimpse toward where it may lead as she enters the next phase of her career."

Says Takenaga of the exhibition, "It's like a reunion of old friends, looking backward and forward—it's lovely and poignant at the same time."

—JULIA MUNEMO



COURSE CATALOG

The Law has long been a concept in Jewish thought and practice, as was famously articulated in the early 20th century by Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law." Kafka later included the parable in his novel *The Trial*, published posthumously in 1925. This semester, students in religion professor Jeffrey Israel's course Judaism: Before the Law are being

introduced to the academic study of Judaism through Kafka's parable, hoping to understand concepts including the rabbinic distinction between "Oral Law" and "Written Law," medieval philosophical justifications for the Law, and modern interpretations of the Law as Moral Law. Read more about Israel's course at <http://bit.ly/judaismbeforethelaw>.



MOVING PEOPLE AND THE ECONOMY

Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi.

By Kenda Mutongi. The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

KENDA MUTONGI WAS WALKING ALONG A street in Nairobi, thinking about what she'd like to research for her second book, when she realized the answer was right in front of her. "Matatus are everywhere, but we don't know anything about them," says the history professor. "All we know is their bad reputation."

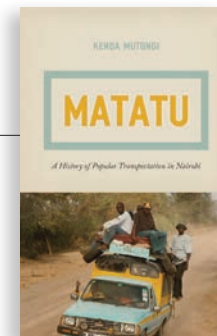


Matatu is the word used in Kenya for the minibuses ubiquitous throughout Africa. In Nairobi, they transport more than 2 million people per day, from commuters on their way to work to mothers bringing children to doctors' appointments and kids headed to school. But matatu drivers and conductors are considered dangerous and are blamed for much of what can feel like the chaos of this large city.

"They are looked down upon and thought to be corrupt," says Mutongi. "Foreigners consider matatus too dangerous to ride, and they write them off as unimportant. But so many people depend on them."

EXCERPT

Without its matatus, the city of Nairobi comes to a near standstill. It happens some 10 to 15 times a year when matatu workers go on strike. Whenever they suspend their scramble through the streets, everything in the city slows down—the town center grows quiet, offices sit empty, stores close their doors, and the last lingering pedestrians are able to walk the sidewalks with ease. There are no commuter trains or trams, the traffic and poor road conditions make cycling impossible, and the government, regrettably, provides only a few irregular and ineffective buses. ... Whenever the city's moving mosaic of matatus comes to a stop, the forsaken commuters are once again reminded of just how much their lives depend on these flamboyant minibuses and the army of workers who operate them. ... It is unlikely that Nairobi's economy could survive without the overwhelming achievements of the matatu industry. Since the early 1960s, the matatu has provided transportation to at least 60 percent of the city's population, and the matatu industry has become the largest employer in the so-called popular economy by providing livelihoods to mechanics, touts, fee collectors, drivers, artists and other associated businesses. ... The matatu industry is homegrown. The owners and workers are making it on their own, without foreign aid or government support and despite subsidized competition, government interference and systemic corruption. For several decades now, the matatu industry has provided a rare example of a highly profitable business that has turned out to be vital to the development of Nairobi and its identity—as the acclaimed Kenyan writer and activist Binyavanga Wainaina has remarked, "Matatus are Nairobi, and Nairobi is matatus."



In her new book, *Matatu*, Mutongi traces the history of this industry. "I hope my book helps dismantle the notion that the only way Africans can earn money is if an NGO comes in and sets people to making beads, jewelry or baskets," she says. "We need to hear more stories like those of the people in the matatu industry, who have created a highly profitable business."

Mutongi, who is originally from Kenya, has been teaching courses in African history at Williams since 1995. Her first book, *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family and Community in Kenya*, was published in 2007.

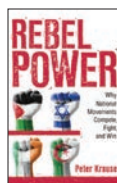
FROM EPH'S BOOKSHELF



The Care and Feeding of a Pet Black Hole.

By Michelle Cuevas '04. Dial Books, 2017. A girl's friendship with a lonely black hole that

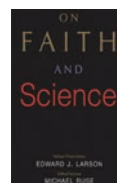
follows her home from NASA helps her to face her own sadness.



Rebel Power. By Peter Krause '02. Cornell University Press, 2017.

The balance of power among cooperative and competing national-

ist groups may be key to why some achieve statehood and others don't.



On Faith and Science. By Edward J. Larson '74 and Michael Ruse.

Yale University Press, 2017. A historian and a philosopher of science

address the conflicts and intersections of science and religion.



Kiss Me Someone. By Karen Shepard '87, Williams senior lecturer in English. Tin House, 2017. A collection of short stories

about women who use their liminal positions to leverage their power.

To see more works and submit new publications, visit <http://ephbooksshelf.williams.edu>.



THE HIBERNATION EQUATION

Medically induced hypothermia, also known as targeted temperature management, is becoming standard care to treat patients suffering from cardiac arrest, and it's currently in clinical trials for stroke treatment. Cooling the body in this way reduces brain damage associated with cardiac arrest, perhaps by slowing metabolic demand of the brain. Currently, hypothermia in a clinical setting is induced while a patient is unconscious. But biology professor Steven Swoap thinks there may be a better way to evoke a cooling response—by learning lessons from the natural world with animals that cool using torpor, commonly known as hibernation. With the help of Williams students and a three-year National Institutes of Health grant, he's working to understand the links between torpor and the dive response, which prompts a physiological response similar to hypothermia.

WILLIAMS MAGAZINE: *What is the dive response?*

STEVEN SWOAP: When humans dive under water, our heart rate, blood pressure—even our desire to breathe—drop quickly and drastically. It's a physiological response that reminds us very much of torpor. Humans are not known to hibernate, but we have the dive response. We wanted to find out if these two states, diving and torpor, are truly the same. The first step was finding an animal model that hibernates and also has the dive response. This is where mice come in. We teach mice, which experience the dive response as soon as their nose is submerged, to swim across a small pool. We then measure their physiological responses.

WILLIAMS: *How does the dive response help you understand torpor?*

SWOAP: If we can figure out all the pathways activated during the dive response in mice, and if they turn out to be the same as those activated during torpor—which we're also studying—we might find a way to activate those same pathways in humans. This could ultimately lead to finding a way to trigger human hibernation, which means it's possible we could use torpor rather than forced hypothermia to slow everything down in a medical emergency. Using forced hypothermia to stop a heart attack is like severing the pipes in a house when you want to cool it down. It's a blunt tool, and I think mimicking a natural bout of torpor could be more effective.

WILLIAMS: *What surprised you in this research?*

SWOAP: I didn't know how important blood glucose levels are in torpor. I'd imagined blood sugar would start out high and go down slowly, maybe over the course of a winter for a hibernating animal like a bear. But it turns out that's false. Blood sugar drops like a rock as soon as the heart rate and body temperature go down. It comes back up just as quickly, possibly triggering a hibernating animal to come out of torpor. So my students and I are now working to understand the role of blood glucose in torpor.

WILLIAMS: *Why else might humans want to hibernate?*

SWOAP: This may sound funny, but if we really want to send people to Mars, human hibernation will be a part of space travel because of how long it takes to travel there. This is hundreds of years from now, and there's a lot that needs to be figured out, but one of those things is human hibernation.



Emmett Blau '18 (left)
and José Constantine in
the Housatonic River.

A photograph of a river with a rocky bank and dense green foliage with yellow flowers. The river is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored rocks and some fallen branches in the water. The background is filled with lush green trees and bushes, some with bright yellow flowers. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

THE MEANDERING HOUSATONIC

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF GEOSCIENCES JOSÉ

Constantine and geosciences major Emmett Blau '18 are investigating whether a river's natural movement across its floodplain, and the subsequent oxbow lakes it produces, are acting as natural filters of the river's pollutants. Their case study is the Housatonic River, which cuts through Berkshire County and western Connecticut before releasing into Long Island Sound.

The Housatonic—like many rivers in the U.S.—is what's known as a meandering river. The river moves laterally across its floodplain, sometimes as much as 100 feet per year. "If you look at a series of satellite images taken over the course of several years, it looks like a movie of the river moving back and forth," says Constantine, who has studied meandering rivers all over the world, including the Amazon.

All of that back and forth movement can cause the creation of oxbow lakes, which—as their name suggests—are curved bodies of water formed when a meander breaks off from the main waterway.

"The Housatonic and its oxbow lakes make a perfect case study because they are badly polluted," says Constantine. "General Electric released waste associated with building electric transformers in the area in the 1970s and 1980s." That waste contained polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Now, with data collected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as well as their own core samples from the river and its oxbow lakes, Constantine and Blau are hoping to show that a river's natural movement carries out an ecological service.

"We are testing our theory that the floodplains and oxbow lakes act as a filter," says Constantine, who is teaching a course this fall on how climate change is reshaping our landscapes. "The PCBs bind to very fine-grained clay particles in the river's sediment, and when that sediment sinks, it buries the PCBs with it."

During flood events, contaminated sediment can jump the riverbanks. "The magic here is that the existing oxbow lakes take in that sediment, further filtering it for us," says Blau, who will work in Constantine's lab as a research assistant after he graduates. "If it weren't for those lakes, the PCBs would be released back into the river after the flood waters receded."

But several sections of the Housatonic are what Constantine calls "straightjacketed." This is a common practice when development encroaches on a meandering river. In order to build closer to the water, people have cemented the river's bank or otherwise constrained the river in order to control its movement.

"Without its natural ability to filter the water, all of that contaminated sediment has a straight shot to the sea," Constantine says. "I hope our work can demonstrate that riverbeds and oxbow lakes should not be constrained or developed because they are the very thing cleaning our water."

Constantine and Blau spent the early part of the fall semester taking roughly 200 core samples in sections of the river and oxbow lakes throughout Pittsfield. In October, the pair headed to Seattle for the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America, where Blau presented a paper based on his analysis of the EPA data. "The work we've done demonstrates the complex and diverse functions of the floodplain, both as a dynamic ecosystem and as a natural filter for harmful industrial pollutants," says Blau. Now back on campus, they will spend the winter analyzing the data they collected from their own core samples, with the aim of co-authoring a paper. "I hope that the eventual paper we publish will help guide floodplain land use in the future," Blau says.

Says Constantine, "We're excited that our work could have a positive impact on the restoration of meandering rivers, both in the Housatonic and beyond."

—JULIA MUNEMO

EMBRACING “WE THE PEOPLE”

BY WENDY YOUNG '83

IN MY ROLE AS PRESIDENT OF KIDS IN NEED OF DEFENSE (KIND), I WORK with children ranging in age from toddlers to teenagers who have had few choices in life. Most have been raised in abject poverty under repressive governments, subject to human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, abduction and torture. They are often witnesses to the murder of friends and family members. Most come from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, among the top five murder capitals of the world. Transnational gangs and narco cartels dominate their societies, systematically taking over communities to terrorize and exploit them because governments are too weak or corrupt to control them. The rule of law has broken down, and these countries are teetering on the edge of complete breakdown.

These children's lack of choices, their desperation, presents the United States—and us as individual citizens—with choices. Who do we want to be? What do we stand for? Are we as a country going to turn our back on those in need, thereby limiting our stature in the world? Or are we going to embrace our longstanding and hard-won reputation as a country that stands up for human rights, freedom and democracy?

Here's an example of what I mean. I met Maria, a 5-year-old, in immigration court. The judge, dressed in his robes, sat behind the bench when he called her deportation case. A trial attorney from the Department of Homeland Security sat at the front, prepared to argue for Maria's removal from the U.S. Maria was by herself, without a lawyer by her side. She approached the bench wearing her Sunday best, clutching a doll. She sat behind the respondent's desk, barely able to see over the microphone. The judge asked her a number of questions about why she was in the U.S. and about her life here, none of which she could answer. Her eyes grew bigger and bigger as she sat silently until he finally dismissed her and told her to come back at a later date. As she left the court, he asked her what the name of her doll was. In Spanish, she replied, “Baby Baby Doll.” That was the only question she could answer.

That moment haunts me. I continually wonder about the insanity of asking a 5-year-old to stand alone and defend herself against deportation in a federal court room.

Even though I have spent the past three decades since my graduation from Williams fighting for refugee protection and immigrant rights, such questions, while including immigration policy, are truly becoming existential for this country and, indeed, the entire world.

The degradation and decay of our love and respect for each other is palpable. Racial divide, gender inequality, hostility toward those who worship a different God or want to marry and love someone in a “nontraditional” relationship all are spreading like a pervasive cancer. It's become acceptable to mock people with disabilities. An entire nationality is painted as rapists. Judges are deemed biased because of their ethnicity. Women are belittled, and bragging about grabbing them inappropriately is dismissed as locker room talk. Elected officials are exploiting these divisions, empowering themselves by stirring up the toxicity of “us versus them.” And we as a society too often pivot to defining ourselves and each other by our differences—as if those differences are the most critical feature of our lives rather than our commonality as human beings.

We can turn this around. We can challenge ourselves to strive for that most perfect union that shaped a vision for our country and set a standard for the world. Our history is replete with people who made the simple choice to look beyond themselves and stand up for what is right.

Many of us are engaged in daily acts of kindness, such as the thousands of private-sector lawyers who volunteer their time with KIND to represent children like Maria in court. Maria was granted protection and allowed to remain in the U.S. simply because a lawyer volunteered to help. When I asked my staff what it took for our volunteers to represent a 5-year-old, the answer was: a lot of play dough and candy. It also took dedication, empathy and commitment.

I ask you now to embrace your choices and stand up for what's right. Let's reject “us versus them” thinking and instead

embrace “we the people.”

We can be in charge of our destiny. We can change the world for the better. It's been done before, and there is no reason to give up and say we can't do it again.

Embrace your choices as you prepare to leave this beautiful, idyllic campus and set forth into the world. If we choose humanity, if we

step out of ourselves and show compassion and understanding for the stranger standing next to us, I am confident that we will turn the corner into the light and away from the darkness.

We can challenge ourselves to strive for that most perfect union that shaped a vision for our country.

Wendy Young '83 is president of Kids in Need of Defense. During Convocation in September, she was one of five alumni to receive a Williams Bicentennial Medal for distinguished service in any field of endeavor. This essay is adapted from her Convocation address. To watch a video of Young's entire address, and for links to all the speeches and presentations that day, visit <http://bit.ly/wmsconvocation17>.



For full coverage of this year's Convocation and Bicentennial Medals ceremonies, visit <http://bit.ly/wmsconvocation17>.

THE GLORY AND THE HONOR

What do an architect and urban planner, a pioneer in higher education access, a slam poet and an endocrinologist focused on gender identity in children have in common*? They are among the 161 Williams alumni to receive Bicentennial Medals for distinguished achievement since 1993. Founded on the college's 200th birthday, Bicentennial Medals were inspired by the Kennedy Center Honors program. That first year, 23 medals were given out at several Williams events. The ceremony later moved to Convocation in September so that students could take part, with one of the medalists delivering the Convocation address.

This year's speaker was Wendy Young '83, president of Kids in Need of Defense. Other medalists were Ira Mickenberg '72, founder and director of the National Defender Training Project, Richard Besser '81, CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Adam Schlesinger '89, award-winning songwriter and producer and co-founder of the band Fountains of Wayne, and Mary Dana Hinton '92, president of the College of Saint Benedict. Recipients were given medals etched with their names on one side and, on the other, Williams' bicentennial seal and a verse from the alma mater song "The Mountains." The Bicentennial Medals program will celebrate its 25th year in September 2018.

**Bicentennial Medalists mentioned above are Tao Ho '60 (in 1996), A. Clayton Spencer '77 (in 1997), Mayda Del Valle '00 (in 2008) and Norman Spack '65 (in 2012).*

Williams

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WHAT WE VALUE

A conversation about
the material and moral
implications of waste **p.18**