

# Williams

MAGAZINE SPRING 2018

## ELECTION RESULTS

Political influence after  
the 2016 race **p.10**



MICHAEL NEEDHAM '04



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CORTNEY TUNIS '04

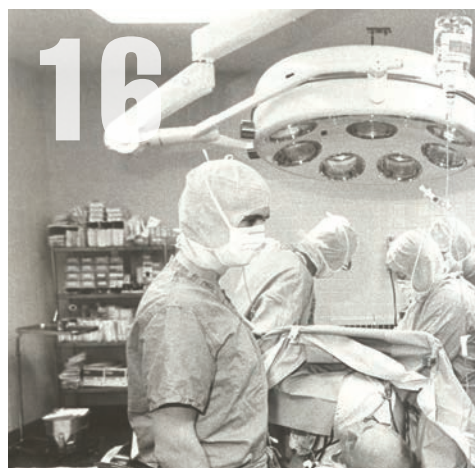


## NEW YEAR, NEW MUSIC

In January the college hosted its ninth I/O Fest, what the music department calls its “annual immersion in the music of now.” Held over four days and nights at the '62 Center for Theatre and Dance and The Clark Art Institute, the contemporary music festival featured workshops, talks and performances (like *Anthem*, pictured during dress rehearsal) that “take a deep dive into new and adventurous music from around the world and down the street.”







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Front cover photos: Stephen Voss (Michael Needham '04 & Hannah Fried '04), Webb Chappell (Cortney Tunis '04)  
Back cover photo: Shannon O'Brien



## A New Role

I'M PLEASED TO BE PENNING MY FIRST COLUMN AS INTERIM PRESIDENT.

I was honored when the Board of Trustees asked me to assume this role after 23 years as a professor of physics at Williams. I deeply love this place and have benefited greatly from the college's support for my teaching and experimental physics research program. Now I'm looking forward to advancing Williams' work in my new capacity.

**I'm particularly looking forward to having conversations with many of you about your own experiences of Williams and your hopes for its future.**

I'm particularly looking forward to having conversations with many of you about your own experiences of Williams and your hopes for its future. The features in this issue make a nice starting point for discussions about the further work we can do together.

One article looks at how people who've graduated from Williams go on to shape the world. It's a profile of a group of alumni from the Class of 2004 who, remarkably, have all become influential in national politics and policy debates. Hannah Fried,

Jon Lovett, Michael Needham and Cortney Tunis collectively model the diversity of thoughtful viewpoints we want to foster at Williams that's so important to civic life.

A second feature—an excerpt from a new book by Tufts historian Kendra Taira Field '99—exemplifies the intellectual curiosity Williams encourages in our students. As a child, Field loved listening to her grandmother's stories about growing up African-American and Creek Indian in what is now Oklahoma. Those stories, along with decades of archival research, inform her scholarship on the experiences of tens of thousands of freedpeople who pushed westward after the Civil War. Field explores the circumstances and social forces they encountered as well as the ramifications of shifts in racial thinking for their lives, for those of their descendants and for the nation, generally. In the acknowledgments, she mentions several Williams professors, demonstrating the influence our faculty often have on graduates' careers and contributions.

A third article spotlights a curricular innovation that's now deeply ingrained in Williams culture. This year is the 50th anniversary of Winter Study, and "50 Years of Lessons" collects facts and stories that, together, speak to the ongoing importance of this experience: a time when students, faculty and many others—including alumni—stretch their minds and immerse themselves in new ideas and experiences. A favorite experience of mine was developing a hands-on Physics of Musical Instruments Winter Study course early in my time here. It evolved into a semester-long interdisciplinary class that I've enjoyed teaching over the years. Many of you will have your own such memories, and I hope you'll share them on social media, at reunions and in conversation with me and my colleagues.

No issue of a magazine can capture the richness of everything that happens at a college like Williams. But you'll find much that's interesting and inspiring in these pages, as I know you will on your next visit to campus.

—TIKU MAJUMDER, INTERIM PRESIDENT



## Williams

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## SOLVING PROBLEMS CREATIVELY

I read with great interest Professor Tiku Majumder's essay, "Solving Problems Creatively," about creativity and science (part of "Moving Forward, Together," fall 2017). He mentions the role that Williams is playing as an undergraduate college that "blends the best of both worlds"—research and teaching. Being at Vanderbilt, an R-1 university, I certainly can concur with his view of R-1 universities. Over my 50 years at Vanderbilt I have witnessed the incredible de-emphasis on undergraduate teaching along with the increased emphasis on graduate research. In fact, this blending of teaching and research is nothing new at Williams. I was a chemistry honors major, having done my honors thesis research under J. Hodge Markgraf '52. Under his tutelage, I was well prepared for my graduate research at Yale University as a synthetic organic chemist. I was able to compete with my fellow graduate students from schools such as Cal Tech, Berkeley, Yale and MIT, being the first to complete the Ph.D. in my class. The



**For this issue, we created three different covers featuring members of the Class of 2004 profiled in the article "Election Results." You've received one of the three options as part of a randomized mailing to our readers.**

first of my 200 publications was based on my honors thesis work with Professor Markgraf. I also note that three classmates of mine, who majored in chemistry at Williams, also went on to become professors at R-1 universities: Buckley Crist '62 at Northwestern University, Scott Mohr '62 at Boston University and Jack Sabin '62 at the University of Florida.

—B. ANDES HESS JR. '62, NASHVILLE, TENN., AND TORUŃ, POLAND

### PINK ART?

I enjoyed the article about the Williams College Museum of Art exhibition "Pink Art" ("Data Collection," fall 2017), but I was dismayed to see various shades of pink described as "hues ranging from magenta to flesh tones." This reference to "flesh" in an article about pink art seems to imply a default flesh tone of pink (Caucasian). But even Crayola renamed its "flesh" crayon "peach" back in 1962. I wish the editors had worded this more accurately.

—HOLLY STEPHENS '96,  
SILVER SPRING, MD.

### FALL ISSUE KUDOS

OMG! An expression that belies my age... The fall 2017 issue should be the college's best recruiting tool. I read it cover to cover, starting on the last page with Wendy Young's '83 essay about Kids in Need of Defense ("Embracing 'We the People'"). When I dried my eyes, I went on, still, from back to front because my arthritic hands turn pages more easily that way. What a smorgasbord of topics: art and technology, language and culture, creative problem solving, the environment, and the testimony to the Renaissance qualities of Adam Falk ("Moving Forward, Together"). If it isn't already happening, I'd love to see the art people and the language people and the science people look at how art embodies grammar and grammar affects culture, and how our science is dependent on and altered by both. All three are expressions of the human existence and models of creative problem solving. Without any one of those elements, meaningful communication in any

discipline for any purpose doesn't happen. Stuff that in a 144-character Tweet—or whatever the new limit is! I wouldn't know.

—CARMANY THORP '76,  
MULLETT LAKE, MICH.

### THE VALUE OF WASTE

It really hurt to read "The Value of Waste" (fall 2017), which completely ignored the tremendous growth in the waste management industry, the great growth in the use and discarding of plastic containers, and the horrendous unsolved waste-management problems in developing countries. My view was supported only by the brief note in "In the News," on p. 6, which pointed out that the 2011 Japan tsunami gave rise to "the largest and longest marine migration ever documented." The migration rafted all the way across the Pacific Ocean to North America on plastic debris! Maybe a follow-up article on the economics of waste management might be helpful.

—ROBERT RAYNSFORD '57,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Williams Magazine welcomes letters about articles or items published in recent issues. Please send comments to [magazine@williams.edu](mailto:magazine@williams.edu) or Williams Magazine, P.O. Box 676, Williamstown, MA 01267-0676. Letters may be edited for clarity and space.



# NOTICE

A photograph of a line of chefs in white uniforms and hats standing in a kitchen setting. The scene is dramatically lit with blue stage lights, creating a high-contrast, artistic effect. The chefs are standing in a line, facing right, with their bodies slightly angled towards the camera. In the foreground, a metal cart with a wicker basket and other items is visible. The background shows a large, modern kitchen with wooden paneling and a large window or opening.

## DINING AND DANCE

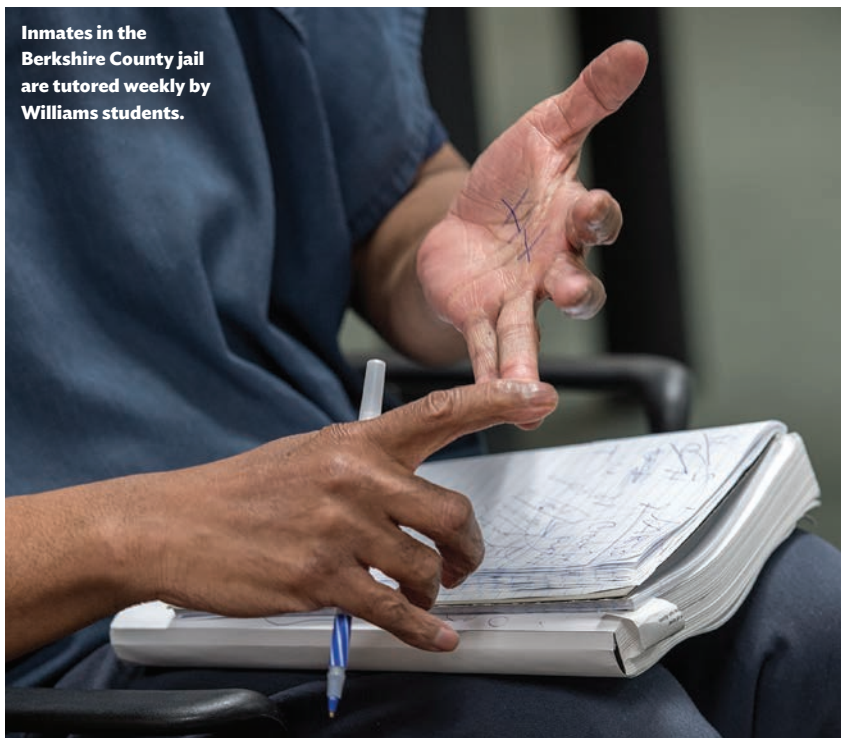
For three days in February, more than 50 members of Williams' dining services staff were in the spotlight, performing live at the Paresky Center in *Served*, a show based on their everyday movements. The production was developed and choreographed by Forklift Danceworks, which seeks to give voice to people whose work sustains daily lives and whose stories are often untold. Says Lisa Armstrong, a prep and service attendant who participated, "I have a lot of pride in myself and the people I work with, because we have a job to do, and I think we all do it well once we all come together."

PHOTOGRAPH: BRAD WAKOFF









Inmates in the Berkshire County jail are tutored weekly by Williams students.

## POSITIVE PATHWAYS

A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WILLIAMS' CENTER FOR Learning in Action (CLiA) and the Berkshire County House of Corrections offers tutoring in writing, reading and math to inmates planning to take the HiSET high school equivalency exam in preparation for their upcoming release.

The Positive Pathways Partnership (P3) is coordinated by Sharif Rosen, a CLiA assistant director and the college's Muslim chaplain. He volunteered as a prison chaplain before coming to Williams in 2015, an

experience he says showed him how important such programming is to a population he describes as "entirely forgotten."

"I helped start P3 because I wanted to think about the ways in which we in our community can write new narratives and create venues for hope where you may least expect to find them," Rosen says. "We have huge, systemic criminal injustice issues in our country, and P3 is one avenue through which we can seek local ways to become part of the change that needs to happen."

Rosen says the student inmates in the program are a motivated group, eager to get their high school diplomas and begin new chapters of their lives. To help them achieve that goal, Williams student tutors travel to the jail once a week to work in small groups on concepts that will be covered on the HiSET.

Omar Kawam '20 has been a P3 tutor since the program began in the fall of 2016. "I wanted to ground my college experience within the wider community and to make a tangible difference in someone's life," he says.

Kawam took an orientation course at the jail with several other students, including Diana Sanchez '17. Soon they were driving to Pittsfield every Thursday to work two-on-one with a student inmate who later took and passed his HiSET. "It was great to witness that firsthand," says Sanchez, a biology major at Williams.

Now a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Sanchez serves as a re-entry coordinator in Arizona. She is also applying to graduate programs in public health. "I wouldn't be where I am now if it hadn't been for P3," she says. "I walked away from each session feeling like I made an impact, however small it might have been."

Says Rosen, "When the right students and the right tutors come together, they create very powerful, intangible but potent interactions. Those are the kinds of connections that help inmates, however momentarily, transcend the walls of the institution."

—BY JULIA MUNEMO

### IN THE NEWS

What's the difference between cultural appropriation and appreciation? LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant, associate professor of Africana studies, considered the question in a Feb. 7 *HuffPost* article published when Lebanese designer Zuhair Murad drew criticism for using Native-American imagery at his spring Haute Couture runway show in Paris. "Imitation is the best form of flattery," Manigault-Bryant stated. "Most people believe that and agree with that, and yet if you're imitating something but you're not actually giving credit where credit is due—in academic communities we would call that plagiarism."





## DAVIS NAMED SCHWARZMAN SCHOLAR

Newton Davis '12 has been selected to pursue a master's degree at Tsinghua University in Beijing as part of the highly selective Schwarzman Scholar program.

Now in its third year, the program funds a year of study and is designed to prepare the next generation of global leaders for the challenges of the future. Davis was among more than 4,000 applicants from around the world to compete for 142 spots. He hopes to connect with Chinese venture capitalists, refine his investing skills and immerse himself in Chinese culture.

"China (and Asia more broadly) will be extremely important in venture capital in the coming years," Davis says. "The industry will need to understand how China's giants go about building their global empires. China's political and economic rise go hand in hand."

Davis works in investor education at 500 Startups, a global venture capital firm headquartered in Silicon Valley. He is also a board member of Dream Outside the Box, a Fort Worth, Texas-based nonprofit dedicated to expanding the horizons of youth in grades K-5.

At Williams, Davis majored in history and Arabic studies. He received a Harry S. Truman Scholarship, awarded to college juniors who demonstrate exceptional leadership potential and are committed to careers in public service.

### AT A GLANCE

#### CURRENT RESEARCH

Williams psychology professor **Nate Kornell** and fellow researchers have shown that monkeys can make fairly accurate judgments about their own memories. "We thought monkeys might be less sophisticated than [humans] are, and, ironically, this would make them less prone to certain mistakes," he says of the study, published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* in September 2017. "But it turns out they use the same fluency mechanism as we do, and they are prone to the same illusions."



#### ON CAMPUS

From Feb. 8 through March 15, the college hosted its annual Faculty Lecture Series, a six-week program in which professors share their research with one another. This year's speakers were **Rashida K. Braggs**, associate professor of Africana studies, on "Diasporic Research through Embodied Performance"; **Mea Cook**, associate professor of geosciences, on "Carbon Dioxide and Ice Age Cycles"; **Jon Bakija**, professor of economics, on "Tax Policy in the Age of Trump (and Beyond)"; **Bernie Rhie**, associate professor of English, on "Zen and the Art of American Literature"; **Bernhard Klingenberg**, professor of statistics, on "How to (Not) Lie With Statistics"; and **Sarah Allen**, associate professor of comparative literature, on "Telling Tales in Medieval China."

#### FACULTY APPOINTMENTS

As the new Gaudino Scholar, **Susan Engel**, senior lecturer in psychology, is exploring processes that lead to deep intellectual change. Beginning July 1, **Gage McWeeny**, professor of English, will serve as director of the Oakley Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, focusing on the arts in relation to scholarly work in the humanities and social sciences. Also on July 1, **Neil Roberts**, associate professor of Africana studies, will become the W. Ford Schumann Faculty Fellow in Democratic Studies, working to promote campus dialogue on democracy and civic responsibility.

#### RECENTLY PUBLISHED

■ When it comes to discourse on issues such as climate change and medical use of stem cells, the line traditionally separating science and politics is blurred—if not broken. In *Who Speaks for Nature? On the Politics of Science*, political science professor **Laura Ephraim** "reveals the roots of scientific authority in what she calls 'world building politics'" (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

■ How is technology revolutionizing law enforcement—and what are the potential threats to the security, privacy and constitutional rights of citizens?

**Andrew Guthrie Ferguson** '94, law professor at the University of the District of Columbia's David A. Clark School of Law, answers these questions and more in *The Rise of Big Data Policing: Surveillance, Race and the Future of Law Enforcement* (NYU Press, 2017).

■ The poems in *Palm Frond with Its Throat Cut*, by **Vickie Vértiz** '98, whose writing explores the intersections of feminism, identity and Latino subcultures through everyday beauty, ask readers to view Los Angeles and cities like it "as they have always been: an America of code-switching and reinvention, of lyric and fight" (The University of Arizona Press, 2017).



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



## A CLOSER LOOK



## CLAIMING WILLIAMS

ON FEB. 1 THE WILLIAMS COMMUNITY TOOK PART IN CLAIMING WILLIAMS, a day of conversations and questions around the theme Stand With Us Now.

Julissa Arce, a writer, CNBC contributor and advocate for immigration rights and education, gave the morning address. She shared her experiences growing up as an undocumented immigrant and the challenges DREAMers face. "Our laws are always having to catch up with what is right," she said.

In the evening, Janet Mock, a writer, TV host and advocate for trans women, was in conversation with Kai Green '07, assistant professor of women's, gender and sexuality studies. Mock's message to students of color and queer students was: "Just because you don't see yourself doesn't mean you don't exist."

This year's theme was a nod to the student-led movement called Stand With Us that grew out of a series of racist and sexist incidents on campus and led to the creation of Claiming Williams 10 years ago.



## FOUR PROFESSORS RECEIVE TENURE

Four Williams faculty members have been promoted to associate professor with tenure, effective July 1. They are: Phoebe Cohen, geosciences; Laura Ephraim, political science; Eric Knibbs, history; and Gregory Mitchell, women's, gender and sexuality studies.

A paleontologist, Cohen researches the co-evolution of life and environments throughout earth's history, with a focus on life before the evolution of animals. Her work, which combines microscopic and microchemical techniques with data from field-based stratigraphy and sedimentology, is funded by the NASA Astrobiology program and the American Chemical Society Petroleum Research Fund. She teaches courses on earth history, geobiology, paleobiology and mass extinctions. She serves on the program advisory committee for women's, gender and sexuality studies and on the Faculty Steering Committee.

Ephraim is a political theorist focused on modern political thought, environmental studies, science and technology, and democratic and feminist theory. She is the author of the book *Who Speaks for Nature? On the Politics of Science* (University of Pennsylvania





Laura Ephraim

Press, 2017) and co-editor of *Second Nature: Rethinking the Natural Through Politics* (Fordham University Press, 2013). Her work has appeared in the journal *Political Theory*. Her courses include Politics After the Apocalypse, Politics Without Humans?, and Modern Political Thought. She serves on the Committee on Educational Affairs.

Knibbs studies medieval legal history and the phenomenon of medieval forgery, including forgeries associated with Pseudo-Isidore. His books include *Amalar: Liber Officialis/On the Liturgy* (Harvard University Press, 2014) and *Ansgar, Rimbert and the Forged Foundations of Hamburg-Bremen* (Ashgate, 2011). He teaches courses on the medieval world, magic and sorcery from the medieval to the early modern periods, and the cultural and political



Gregory Mitchell

transitions that took place between Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. He serves on the Justice and Law Studies Committee.

Mitchell's research, which includes ethnographic studies of male and female sex workers during global sporting events, has received awards from the Ford Foundation, National Science Foundation and American Anthropological Association. He is the author of *Tourist Attractions: Performing Race & Masculinity in Brazil's Sexual Economy* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), and he has contributed to four edited volumes. His courses address the intersections of gender, sexuality and race and include Sexual Economics and Performing Masculinity in Global Popular Culture. He serves on the Faculty Steering Committee.

## WILLIAMS-MYSTIC NAMES FIRST FACULTY FELLOW

A NEW PROGRAM ALLOWS WILLIAMS FACULTY to spend a semester at the Williams-Mystic Program in Mystic, Conn. Shawn Rosenheim, professor of English, is serving as the first resident faculty fellow.

At Mystic this semester, Rosenheim is participating in field seminars and contributing guest lectures and seminars. He is particularly interested in exploring the links between the town of Mystic, maritime studies and indigenous peoples. He is also creating a podcast that includes interviews with Mystic students and faculty to provide an in-depth look at the program. When he returns to Williams, he plans to incorporate aspects of the Mystic pedagogy into his own teaching.

A scholar of American Renaissance literature, Rosenheim has expertise in many of the works of maritime literature taught



Shawn Rosenheim

at Williams-Mystic, including Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. As a professor for the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Program, he has taken students to Mystic for the past three summers to experience the museum's interpretation of Melville's world, discuss the influence of the coastal environment on American literature and visit the world's last surviving wooden whaleship, the *Charles W. Morgan*.

The Williams-Mystic program offers an interdisciplinary curriculum focused on the sea. It is based at the Mystic Seaport museum. Students from Williams and many other colleges and universities spend an intensive, immersive semester taking courses, pursuing independent projects and participating in three extended field seminars.

### IN MEMORIAM

Thomas McGill, Hales Professor of Psychology, emeritus, died on Nov. 26, 2017, at the age of 87.

McGill began his career at Williams immediately after receiving his Ph.D. in psychology at Princeton in 1958. At Williams, he was noted for his ability to secure federal grants that typically went to larger research universities. He received National Institutes of Health funding for 20 consecutive years for his studies of the relationship between hormones, genes and behavior. He was elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1968. He is survived by two sons and their families.



Thomas McGill



# ELECTION RESULTS

BY JOSH FISCHER





For four members of the Class of 2004, the 2016 presidential election was a turning point that led to profound changes in their work. Cortney Tunis '04 left an executive search firm to become executive director of the nonprofit Pantsuit Nation. Michael Needham '04, CEO of Heritage Action, is shepherding the lobbying arm of the Heritage Foundation through an unprecedented rise in influence. Hannah Fried '04, who worked on voter protection for Hillary Clinton's campaign, founded the nonprofit Access Democracy to address issues that impede voter participation. And Jon Lovett '04 left TV writing and production to help launch Crooked Media, a news outlet that includes his podcasts "Pod Save America" and "Lovett or Leave It." In nearly a year and a half since the election, all four are influencing the landscapes in their respective fields.

**Cortney Tunis '04 is the CEO of the nonprofit Pantsuit Nation, which has 3.8 million Facebook members, a book, a weekly podcast and a channel on Medium.**



#### **MAKING THE POLITICAL PERSONAL**

Cortney Tunis '04 joined the Facebook group Pantsuit Nation shortly after it formed in late October 2016. By election day, its membership—supporters of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign—had grown from a few dozen to 3 million.

Tunis says the community made her feel "excited and supported." As the mass of content generated by members grew, she joined a team of volunteer moderators. Then, last summer, she was offered a job as executive director. She has since helped develop Pantsuit Nation into an action-oriented nonprofit with a book in print, a weekly podcast and a channel on the storytelling website Medium.

Tunis jokes that her career path "never once had a logical progression." After majoring in English at Williams, she taught for a year at Noble and Greenough School in Dedham, Mass., and then earned an M.A. in humanities at the University of Chicago. She returned to the Berkshires to work as an education coordinator at MASS MoCA.

In North Adams she got a taste of activism, volunteering for Massachusetts District Attorney Martha Coakley '75, a Democrat running for the open seat left by the death of U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy. Coakley's Republican challenger, Massachusetts State Sen. Scott Brown, won the special election in 2010. Tunis says she "got really into holding him accountable. That was the first time I saved one of my elected officials' numbers in my phone."

She moved back to her hometown of Boston in 2011 to work as an administrator at Wheelock College and then completed an M.B.A. at Boston University. In 2015 she joined the search firm Isaacson, Miller, where she focused on recruitment in nonprofit leadership.

Tunis spent the weeks before Election Day 2016 canvassing for Clinton. She says she found Pantsuit Nation to be "a place to focus my energy" at a time when the presidential race was becoming increasingly contentious. "This was something positive I could do."

After the election, people turned to Pantsuit Nation to seek support from and encourage one another—and to figure out "What's next?" The same question was on



# "IT'S ABOUT BUILDING CONSENSUS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND HELP PEOPLE ACTUALIZE THEIR POTENTIAL."

— MICHAEL NEEDHAM '04

the minds of founder Libby Chamberlain, Tunis and other group administrators. Once the decision was made to launch a nonprofit, Chamberlain says Tunis was the obvious choice to lead it.

"She has a capacity to connect with people really quickly and a really strong set of values that's hard to find in digital organizing," Chamberlain says. "She brought a competence and a way to cut through the incredible amount of frustration, anger and confusion."

Now Tunis is one of four paid staff members working remotely from both coasts. She hosts *Pantsuit Nation's* weekly podcast, writes posts for Medium and raises money to support the nonprofit. She also continues to moderate the Facebook group and is part of conversations with Facebook and 270 Strategies, a firm focused on grassroots campaigns that uses online strategies to create action offline. To that end, recent posts have included asking members to support hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico and to contact their representatives about fighting for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and the Affordable Care Act.

Whatever the platform or project, storytelling remains at *Pantsuit Nation's* core. The words "Your Voice Matters" greet visitors on the home page of the organization's website, and its vision statement begins: "We believe that stories are an essential part of activism."

First-person narrative can create social change and empower people in ways that abstract policy discussions or data-driven approaches can't, Tunis says, adding that her favorite posts on *Pantsuit Nation* are from women running for office. "Storytelling," she says, "is one of the oldest communications tactics we have."

In politics, storytelling traditionally has been limited to candidates or elected officials speaking on behalf of everyday people whose experiences illustrate a particular point or narrative, Tunis says. "It's Joe in Minnesota fits exactly into the point I'm trying to make," she says. "Joe" may even be recognized at a political rally or a State of the Union address, but he rarely has a voice of his own.

In *Pantsuit Nation*, though, members have the microphone and can post about the impact policy proposals and changes will have on them personally. But just as often, Tunis says, the stories members share with each other are "about celebrating the diversity of a progressive community, centering on narratives of people who have not been centered previously."



## TRANSLATING ANGER INTO ACTION

Michael Needham '04 was heading for a career in international relations when an introduction his senior year at Williams changed his trajectory. Just before commencement, then President Morton Owen Schapiro invited him and Grace Smith '04—both Garfield Republican Club members and political science majors—to have lunch with Bill Simon '73, a conservative politician and trustee of the college.

Simon was impressed with the students. A trustee of the Heritage Foundation, he contacted longtime president Edwin Feulner, who invited them to Washington, D.C., and offered them each a job—Needham as an entry-level researcher with the conservative think tank.

Within a year, Needham became the chief of staff and then head of Heritage's international studies center. Today, Feulner calls him "one of the best hires I ever made," adding that Needham had "an instant grasp not only of the immediate implications but the secondary consequences of any policy."

In 2008 Needham returned to New York City, his hometown, to work as a special assistant to Simon, then policy director for former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in his run for president. After the campaign fizzled, Needham headed to Stanford Graduate School of Business and earned an M.B.A. in 2010.

He returned to Heritage, where conversations were focused on how to bring about real policy change. Conservative frustration with the Obama administration and entrenched Republican leadership stretching back to the Bush years was palpable. The think tank model, even for a think tank as well funded and influential as Heritage Foundation, wasn't working. Says Needham: "If we could have gotten access to power simply by publishing white papers, we would have won by now."

The solution was Heritage Action for America, of which Needham is now CEO. In an April 2010 *Wall Street Journal* essay, he and Feulner called the initiative "new fangs" for "the beast of all think tanks."





**Michael Needham '04 is the CEO of Heritage Action, the lobbying arm of the Heritage Foundation.**

This institution ... will be able to spend money to push legislation we think the country needs without the obstacles faced by a nonprofit like the Heritage Foundation. Heritage Action, in other words, is poised to influence public policy debates in a way that no other institution in this country can."

Heritage Action puts pressure on lawmakers by ranking them based on how often they support conservative principles in "key votes." These include voting in favor of the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act and the Tax Cut and Jobs Act, and voting against a disaster recovery package for hurricane and wildfire victims. Based on the resulting scorecard, the

organization encourages its hundreds of thousands of members to contact their congressional representatives and support or oppose legislation.

The 2016 election amplified another aspect of Heritage Action's—and Needham's—work: providing people who have long felt voiceless a way to translate their frustration and even rage into productive dialogue. Or, as Needham puts it, "statesmanlike solutions instead of demagoguery."

As an example, he calls birtherism—the theory that Barack Obama wasn't a natural-born U.S. citizen and therefore was ineligible to serve as president—"nonsense." But instead of rejecting birthers' claims outright, he subtly refocuses them not on conspiracy but on a discussion of whether Obama's first priority was to the global community or to American interests. "Obama is the first cosmopolitan president we've had—a citizen of the world," Needham says. "So what's the role of the nation-state and patriotic nationalism?"

While he says he's pleased with the access Heritage Action has had to Trump and with the administration's policies and appointments, "You have to bracket that with his Twitter account." Needham is also troubled by what he calls the "civic coming apart of our nation."

His level-headed, clear-eyed approach makes him a refreshing guest on shows such as *Fox News Sunday*, NBC's *Meet the Press* and MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, of which Williams alumna Mika Brzezinski '89 is a host.

Needham himself provides an alternative to the incendiary politics and punditry that make dialogue difficult. Says Simon, "The most predominant characteristic that I saw continuously from my first meeting with Mike was his intellectual curiosity. He likes to understand all sides of an issue before he figures out where he stands."

Says Needham: "The world is highly fragmented. So the responsibility falls on people with platforms to try and refine the impulses of our audiences. It's about building consensus to solve problems and help people actualize their potential."



**"THE PROCESS HAS A PROFOUND IMPACT ON  
AN INDIVIDUAL VOTER'S EXPERIENCE.  
IT SHAPES THE ELECTORATE."**

—HANNAH FRIED '04



S

#### **HAPING THE ELECTORATE**

Hannah Fried '04 was in her third year at Harvard Law School when she traveled to Dover, N.H., to volunteer as a poll watcher in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary. As she watched voters cast their ballots that January, she had a realization.

"I saw that day how elections are not only about issues or who's the most dynamic and interesting candidate," says Fried, who majored in American studies and political science at Williams. "The process has a profound impact on an individual voter's experience. It shapes the electorate."

She spent that spring working on voter protection as a volunteer for Barack Obama's campaign and witnessed the impact of election administration issues, especially on disenfranchised communities. College students were given misinformation about whether to vote at home or school. People with disabilities had trouble navigating polling places. Voters of color, who are far more likely than whites to be asked to show photo ID, were turned away when they couldn't produce one, even in states that didn't require photo IDs.

After law school, Fried returned to her native Washington, D.C., to join the Democratic National Committee as deputy director and deputy counsel for voter protection. Obama's campaign recruited her in 2012 to run

a statewide voter protection program in Florida. She and a team of volunteers worked with local election officials to broaden access to early voting and relocate staff and equipment—including machines and privacy booths—to under-resourced polling places. Despite the efforts, the *Orlando Sentinel* estimated that 200,000 people walked away from their polling places as a result of long lines.

Fried saw many of the same problems during the 2016 presidential election as Hillary Clinton's national director and deputy general counsel for voter protection. Nationally, an estimated 955,000 registered voters who tried to vote couldn't because of election administration problems, including lack of voter identification, inability to find their polling places, long lines and registration problems, according to the "2016 Survey of the Performance of American Elections," published in June 2017 by Massachusetts Institute of Technology political scientist Charles Stewart III. In an election decided by just 80,000 votes in three states, Fried knew much more was needed than what she calls Election Day "triage."

So, in January 2017, she and Alexis Prieur LHeureux, whom she met during that first presidential primary in Dover, launched the nonprofit Access Democracy. Their mission: to use the time between major elections to improve practices and procedures strategically rather than reactively.

**Hannah Fried '04 is co-founder of Access Democracy, aimed at improving electoral practices and procedures at the local level.**



“When you work on a campaign, your ability to change these issues is limited by time,” Fried says. “That makes it harder to make the systemic change that is necessary.”

Access Democracy has set up pilot programs in Florida, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—states with significant gubernatorial and U.S. Senate contests in 2018 or 2020—and is measuring the impacts of their interventions. In Florida, Fried and L’Heureux are advocating for secure and effective implementation of a new online voter registration system, paying particular attention to accessibility for voters with disabilities and those who don’t speak English. In Pennsylvania, Fried says, they’re analyzing voting machine logs and voter wait times recorded in 2016 “to demonstrate the connection between old machines and long lines and lost voters.” In Wisconsin, they’re looking at whether placing early voting sites near public transit, for instance, improves access and increases turnout. They plan to share the data they collect with local election officials in all three states, with the aim of increasing efficiency and equity.

Robby Mook, Clinton’s campaign manager in 2016, says of Fried, “It’s rare to find anyone in politics who really understands voter protection law, but it’s especially rare to find someone who has the organizational prowess to pull off a successful program.”

While many Democrats and progressives belong to Access Democracy’s advisory board, Fried says voting administration is and should be a nonpartisan issue.

“These are good governance principles,” she says. “If you are a person who cares that your elected officials be accountable to voters and that your government runs efficiently and effectively—and that everyone has equal access to the ballot—we should all agree.

“You want to make sure you instill confidence in the election—that people’s votes will count.” **W**

*Josh Fischel is based in Cambridge, Mass. His writing has appeared in The New York Times, The Believer and Bean Soup.*

## MODELING NEW MEDIA

Jon Lovett ’04 may be more politically influential today than he was in the White House, where he served as a speechwriter for Barack Obama.

As co-founder of the online platform Crooked Media in January 2017, Lovett hosts two podcasts. “Pod Save America” is an informal, weekly political review with fellow Obama administration alumni Jon Favreau and Tommy Vietor. “Lovett or Leave It” was tagged by comedian Aparna Nancherla as “a cozy salon for discussing the apocalypse as it happens.”

After Williams, where he was a philosophy and math major, Lovett spent a year doing “some average standup” comedy before “falling into politics” by applying to write for then U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton. When she entered the presidential race in 2008, he wrote for her campaign. After the election, he joined the Obama administration, where he and Favreau collaborated on speeches including discourses on fiscal policy and sweeping State of the Union addresses. They and Vietor helped write Obama’s roast of Donald Trump at the now-famous 2011 White House Correspondents’ Association dinner.

Lovett departed the White House in 2011 to write for HBO’s *The Newsroom* and develop a short-lived White House comedy called *1600 Penn.* A column in *The Atlantic* that year described him as “Barack Obama’s funniest speechwriter.”

But to label him as purely comic relief belies his policy chops. When health care came up during an April 2017 episode of “Lovett or Leave It,” he described “this divide inside the Republican party. You have the House Freedom Caucus that says, ‘We don’t want any requirements; we want Thunderdome out there, healthcare-wise.’ And then you have



the moderates in the Republican caucus saying, ‘We don’t want to lose re-election.’”

Crooked Media’s influence extends beyond podcasts into politics. It has partnered with Swing Left to raise more than \$1 million for challengers to House Republicans in the fall and with Indivisible to flood GOP lawmakers’ offices with calls to preserve the Affordable Care Act.

Lovett says he was influenced by longtime Williams math professor Frank Morgan. “He was a big advocate for positivity, hard work and taking joy in solving tough problems,” he says, adding that math—which required him to “take complicated issues and explain them in a linear, digestible way”—was a great foundation for his career.

—JOSH FISHEL

**Jon Lovett ’04 hosts the podcasts “Lovett or Leave It” and “Pod Save America” as a founder of Crooked Media.**







# 50 YEARS OF LESSONS



## Notes from half a century of Winter Study

A singular Williams experience, Winter Study is a time for students and professors alike to stretch their intellectual and creative muscles, free from the distraction of other courses or the pressure of being graded. They can use the time to focus on an interest cultivated during the regular academic year, or they can pursue something entirely new. In celebration of the program's 50th anniversary, we're featuring highlights of Winter Study past and present. As you'll see on the following pages, the experience can be transformative. You can share your own experiences via social media using #WilliamsWinterStudy.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DRUE WAGNER



## THEN & NOW

1



The course Glass and Glassblowing has been a staple of the Winter Study curriculum since the 1970s (above, left). Though Jay Thoman '82, Williams' J. Hodge Markgraf Professor of Chemistry, never took the course himself, he has taught it nearly every January for the past 20 years, including in 2013 (right). Students learn the chemistry behind the process and proper techniques before they don didymium glasses and fire up their torches. They also write papers on topics such as fiber optics and uses for glass during the Roman Empire.



**2** Over the decades, the course Composing a Life and variations of it have helped students get a sense of how to mesh their career and family aspirations.

**3** For the 1977 course The Future of Mount Hope Farm, students assessed the property's potential and presented a plan to the college.

4

Winter Study is the perfect time for an immersive, collective reading experience, with courses over the years including Reading *War and Peace* Together, Finishing *Gravity's Rainbow* and Reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

**5** An airy space in Spencer Studio Art Building was home to How to Be a Medieval Stone Mason, taught in 2014 by Marcel Müller, who has worked on some of Europe's most important Gothic churches. Student apprentices spent three weeks chipping away at large blocks that would form the pieces of a Gothic rose window.

**6** Science on the Road involved teaching in local high schools—"My first foray into science teaching and ... independent schools," says Maureen Harrison '93, now learning support coordinator at Emma Willard School in Troy, N.Y.

**7** In 1968, The Economic Impact of Technology took a page from Williams' tutorial system, with students teaching and learning from each other about the relationships between man and machine.





**8** Students spent 10 days in Paris in January 2018, observing African diasporic performances for the course *Paris Noir: Performances in the City of Light*.

**9** No money changed hands, but students learned about games of chance through lectures, problem sets and lab practices on roulette and slot machines in the 1976 course *How to Gamble if You Must*.

**10**

“I was able to step outside my major (chemistry and pre-med) and take a course on music. This led to my taking *Introduction to Music* and, later, a course called *Symphony*.”

CHRISTOPHER C. BAKER '70,  
WHO IN JANUARY 2017 TAUGHT  
ETHICS IN CLINICAL MEDICINE



**11** Working with a five-octave set of English handbells, an ensemble of novice students learns and performs a repertoire ranging from the classics to pop music in the frequently taught *Handbell Choir*.

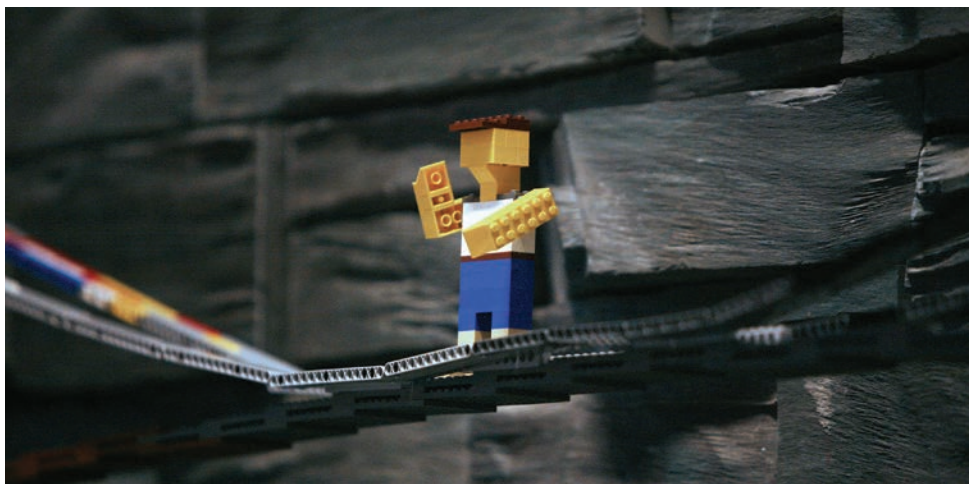
**12** Finding an alternate energy source—in this case, continuously weighing a variety of woods as they burned in a stove—was the subject of the 1975 geology/physics course *Energy and the Environment*.



**14** With math professor and baker Alison Pacelli, students in recent years have learned *The Art and Science of Baking* while blogging about—and eating—their creations.

**15** For many years, the Berkshire Farm Center Internship has connected Williams students with at-risk teenage boys living in a residential facility in New Canaan, N.Y.

**16** A precursor to the Williams-Mystic Program was *American Maritime History*, held in 1977 aboard the *Joseph Conrad* at Mystic, Conn.



**13**

Students in Steven Miller's *The Mathematics of LEGO Bricks* learn mathematical concepts and apply them to building a variety of structures, including a 3,152-piece *Star Wars* Super Star Destroyer in 2014 and, more recently, a large suspension bridge across the Great Hall in the Paresky Center.

**17** For *Re-Editing The New York Times*, students in 1980 re-wrote the previous day's front pages as if historians would be reading the news a century later.



**18** Designed for students with little or no experience in theater, 1978's *The Making of a Production: Chekhov's Three Sisters* was a crash course in backstage and front office work.

**19** Yes, there was basket weaving! The 1980s course *New Basketry* sent students out into the frosty woods to gather materials for use in traditional containers and modern sculptures.

**20** Donald Gregg '51, an expert in Korean affairs and 30-year veteran of the CIA, shares his expertise and experience with Williams students in the course *The CIA and the Politics of Intelligence*.



# 21

Back in the U.S.S.R., a three-week tour of Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, included meetings with Soviet students, theater performances, a troika ride and a New Year's party to ring in 1980.



## 22

Botany, tracking and viewing wildlife, and looking at how winter has shaped natural and human environments were all part of the '90s course Winter?!

## 23

Now in its 30th year, Williams in Georgia is a unique partnership with the Republic of Georgia in which students live with English-speaking families and engage in three-week internships in fields of their choosing.

## 24

In addition to studying the resurgence of the left in the U.S., students in the 2018 course Our Movement Moment took part in their own activist work.

# 25

The Williams College Museum of Art's Rotunda has been home during Winter Study to everything from a Moroccan-style riad (for the 2017 course Public Art and Climate Change: Ghana ThinkTank and the Making of a Museum Installation, below, left) to a Rube Goldberg-esque sculpture (for 1972's Rube Goldberg Extravaganza, right).





## THEN & NOW

Robert Kent '84 wanted to take Aikido: The Discipline of Moving Zen (left), taught by religion professor John Eusden during Winter Study in 1981. But “78 students signed up for 20 spots, and I didn’t make the cut,” Kent says. He went on to study aikido in Japan and now returns to Williamstown each January to teach the practice himself (right).



26



27

For 2017’s Humans of the Berkshires, students ventured into the community to conduct interviews with and take photographs of people (and cows).



**28** Is the set of all sets that do not contain themselves a member of itself or not? And why do philosophers love that question? Those and other head scratchers were the focus of the 2000 course Philosophical Puzzles.

**29** The 1975 journal *Black Sun* was an independent project by four seniors to “articulate, define and disseminate their realizations of the Black experience.”

**30** Mars! A Passion for the Red Planet introduces students to “Earthbound explorers and their robotic surrogates caught in the ... planet’s irresistible pull.”

**31** In The Fun of Formulating a National Energy Policy, students in the '80s developed two national energy plans: an ideal one and a politically practical one.

**33** In the '70s, students took Scuba Diving at Muir Pool, a respite from frigid temperatures—unless they left with wet heads.

34

“The experience of working with primary documents from the Chapin rare books library ... seduced me into pursuing a professional career as a historian.”

SARAH BARNES '84, ON THE HISTORIAN AS DETECTIVE, TAUGHT BY HISTORY PROFESSOR CHARLES DEW '58



**32** For Development of the Printed Book, taught by Chapin Librarian Richard Archer in the late '70s, each student had to analyze a book from the collection. It recently surprised Guy Creese '75 to learn that a French edition of *Lancelot* that he studied as a student is worth \$80,000 today.

## THEN & NOW

A longtime staple of the physics curriculum, Automotive Mechanics—shown in 1975 (left) and the late '90s (right)—involves lectures, demonstrations and hands-on auto repair at Flamingo Motors in Williamstown. Students studied major systems in depth—including fuel injection, power trains, lubrication and cooling, and brakes and suspension.



## 36

North Adams Hospital was a training ground for Williams students, who assisted in the operating room, learned radiology techniques and shadowed doctors during the early years of Winter Study.

**37** Artists and scientists alike are drawn to Wood and Woodturning, in which students learn the craft—making bowls, pens and toy tops—and delve into topics such as metallurgy, moisture, wood movement and forestry.

**38** From the Classical to the Islamic Worlds in Jordan and Syria, taught in 1998, was an investigation into the archaeological and architectural remains of the classical, late antique and Islamic periods in the area of the greater Levant.



## 39

WCMA offers time and space for close work with objects, whether students are helping to put together an exhibition in Mapping the Museum (2016, left) or taking part in Studies in Chinese Painting (1968, right).





**40** Ethnographic Field Research involved a trip to Roatán, Honduras, in 1968 to study culture, anthropology and public health. To participate, students had to take a non-credit seminar in the fall.

**41** The 1998 course Broken Symmetry and Modernistic Despair asked, “How do we know anything?” Students answered by applying physics, math and computer science theory to issues in art, literature and the humanities.

**42**

After experimenting with scenes from Jean Genet and Mandell Weiss and improvising with original and nontheatrical material, students made a film on the subject of cruelty as part of 1968’s *The Theatre of Cruelty*.



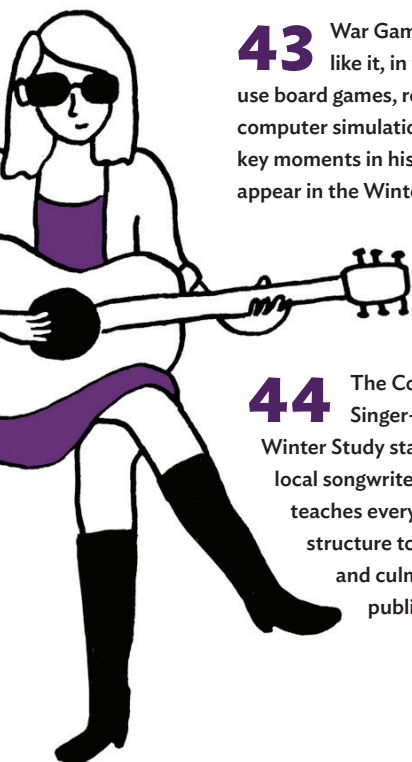
**45** After teaching the hands-on Physics of Musical Instruments during Winter Study, physics professor Tiku Majumder, now interim president, developed it into a semester-long interdisciplinary course.

**46** Students teamed up with ’76 presidential primary candidates to handle publicity and organize rallies for *The Theory and Practice of Campaigning: The Massachusetts Presidential Primary*, taught by James MacGregor Burns ’39.

**48** Students took turns as models and photographers, using a 4x5 view camera, in 2018’s *Creative Portraiture in the Darkroom*.



**49** In *Principles of Effective Leadership*, taught for years by Bill Simon ’73, students get to know their guest speakers over breakfast or dinner before introducing them to the class.



**43** War Games and courses like it, in which students use board games, role playing and computer simulation to re-enact key moments in history, frequently appear in the Winter Study catalog.

**44** The Contemporary Singer-Songwriter, a Winter Study staple taught by local songwriter Bernice Lewis, teaches everything from song structure to concert publicity and culminates with a public performance.

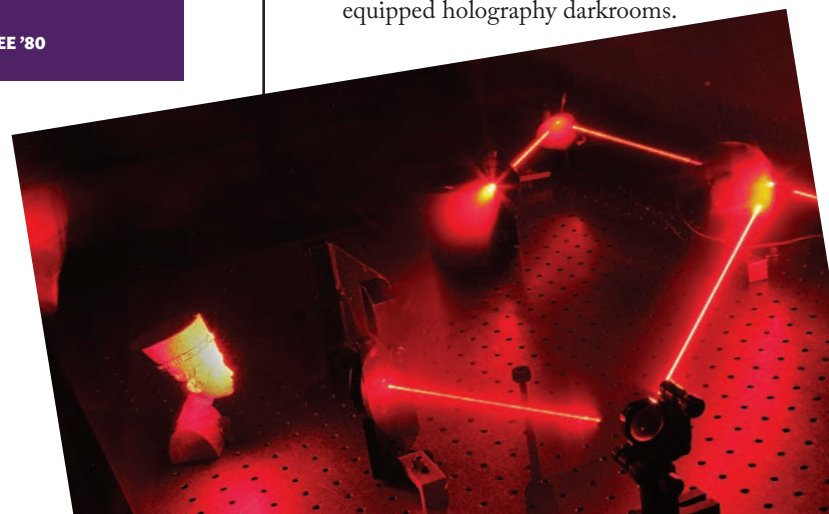
**47**

“I took *Sexual Politics* as a freshman in 1977, thinking I would hear about women in politics—nope. *Rubyfruit Jungle* and more! It was great.”

JULIA MCNAMEE ’80

**50**

The perennial *Light and Holography*, which has evolved since its introduction in the 1970s, makes use of seven well-equipped holography darkrooms.



A new book by historian  
Kendra Taira Field '99 explores  
family, race and nation after  
the U.S. Civil War.

# THE LANGUAGE OF FAMILY

BETWEEN 1865 AND 1915, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF FORMERLY enslaved people journeyed out of the South and into the West and beyond. Among them were the ancestors of Kendra Taira Field '99, who made their way to Indian Territory and what would become Oklahoma. There they developed black and, as families merged, black Indian towns and settlements. They owned land and built churches and schools. They were, Field says, "freedom's first generation."

When their lives and livelihoods were threatened by statehood, Jim Crow segregation and oil speculation, some of Field's family members joined a powerful back-to-Africa movement, while others emigrated to Canada or Mexico. Over the course of their lifetimes, they experienced what she calls "a constant shifting of racial categories over both time and space."

Field, now a history professor at Tufts University, initially collected their stories "on the side," she says, until she was encouraged "to consider creating scholarship out of them." The result is *Growing Up with the Country: Family, Race and Nation after the Civil War*. Published in January by Yale University Press, the book chronicles the epic journeys of three branches of Field's family tree over the course of half a century. Their lives and choices "deepen and widen the roots of the Great Migration" and—as the following excerpt from the preface shows—demonstrate how "ideas about race and color powerfully shaped the pursuit of freedom."

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX NABAUM





**I**N NEW JERSEY, OUR FAMILY WAS BLACK, WHILE BACK home in rural Oklahoma we were Creek Indian, too. As a child in the 1970s and 1980s, I loved nothing more than listening to my grandmother's stories about growing up African-American and Creek Indian in 1920s Oklahoma. In the long wake of the Newark riots, watching Odevia Brown Field plant tomatoes in the patch behind her house, I learned about a time when our family had owned hundreds of acres of land, alongside our Indian and African-descended kin. Grandpa Brown had a place they called Brownsville, she said, where they built a school and a church. I learned, too, about the oil speculators who gradually came to see my (African-American and Creek) great-grandfather; for the occasional lump sum, he worked as a *Mvskoke* translator across Oklahoma, telling them "just where to look for oil." Through my grandmother's stories, I learned about Indian and African-American land loss.

About once a year, my grandmother would pull out the \$25 check she had received from Sun Oil Corp., insisting that I look at it, too. I remember how she stared at that check, asking questions, already knowing the answers. In grade school, I memorized occasional facts about slavery and the Trail of Tears, but it was through my grandmother that I learned about the intersection of the two: that some Native Americans had held slaves, that African-Americans had participated in Indian "land runs" and that the North American "frontier" was far more complicated than my textbooks let on. During summertime visits to Oklahoma, I began collecting evidence. Uncle Thurman would take us out to Brownsville, driving red dirt roads for hours, following the perfectly rectangular perimeter of the 1,000-acre homeplace. There was no longer a house, but we found the steps to the school, amid a landscape of tall grass, Indian paintbrushes, and oil wells. One year at a YMCA summer camp in the Catskills, when I stumbled across a collection of Indian creation myths nearly identical to the Brer Rabbit folk tales my father occasionally told me as a child, I ran to a pay phone to call him. Was Brer Rabbit Indian, black or both? These were the wrong questions, but at the time, back east, there was barely language for what I wanted to know. There was, thankfully, the language of family. When I moved away to college, my family's stories stayed with me, quietly highlighting the incompleteness of other historical narratives.

Long before I cared for the discipline of history, my grandmother's stories made me whole, pointing to things I sensed, but for which I had no words. Author Ronne Hartfield writes, "Our mother's stories have given us the maps by which our tribe locates its journeying, its streams and rivers, its stony places, its sometimes astonishing, more often incredibly affirming twists and turns." Historian E. Frances White attests that her own grandfather's

stories were "so wonderful that I began to believe that they could not be true." As she grew older, however, she stopped worrying about whether they were true. "What is important here is that my grandfather told me the stories; the stories made sense to me; and, most important, the stories made sense of the world for me."

In recent years, psychologists have begun to examine what human beings have long understood, the importance of a strong "intergenerational self": children knowing they "belong to something bigger than themselves." One study revealed that in the face of conflict and uncertainty, "the more children know about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self esteem." Such findings have particular implications, both urgent and hopeful, for African-American communities.

Forcibly separated from our family members by the first and second Middle Passage, by slavery and the slave trade, we were also separated, in large part, from our family histories. Frederick Douglass opened his 1892 *Life and Times* this way: "The reader must not expect me to say much of my family. Genealogical trees did not flourish among slaves." Rooted in the repetitive social trauma of family separation and "haunted by the need to know," historian Heather Williams writes, in the post-emancipation era, descendants searched for "those who were lost through sale or through the negligence of history." When the African-American search extended beyond the history of individuals or individual families, it began "to help construct the history of a people." Just as "enslaved children were stunned when they found out they could be sold," "some people are still stunned by the blow," including the deprivation of family members and family history: "People cannot fathom it, and they want to reestablish and reclaim that history."

And so we have. Dorothy Redford, descendant and genealogist of the North Carolina Somerset Plantation, recalled, "I began as a woman alone, drifting in both time and space," and by the end, she had "a past peopled with links as strong and solid as any family in this nation." As she pieced together the lives of their ancestors and organized a reunion on the grounds, Williams reflects, "All the slaves on the plantation became her people." E. Frances White's family "worked hard to develop strong black egos in its children" and thus sent her to spend a week with her grandfather each summer. He was a follower of Marcus Garvey and "had an impressive library filled with everything he could find on Africa and its diaspora. It did not matter to him whether a book was racist or uplifting; if it was about black people, he would buy it." There White encountered "both a history of the Ku Klux Klan, written by a klansman, and C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*."

My own first copy of *Black Jacobins* came from my granddad. So did W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction*



and every book Joel Augustus Rogers ever wrote. Orphaned as a child in the 1910s, my granddad, William H. Field, was taken in by an unlikely African-American entrepreneur named Charlotte Field. Aunt Charlotte, as he called her, gave him a roof over his head and a job delivering *The Crisis* in Paterson, N.J. By the 1950s, following one year at Howard University and several more in the military, he was living in East Orange, N.J., and working at the post office in Newark. Around this time, he wrote a letter to Joel Augustus Rogers, the prolific self-trained historian (and onetime Pullman porter) who combatted racist propaganda and popularized black history. In his letter to Rogers, my grandfather lamented the lack of “black books” for his children at the local library, pleading to one of his most cherished authors for help. Some weeks later, Rogers arrived at the East Orange Public Library with a box of his books. Afterward, my grandmother remembered fixing him dinner—“maybe it was lamb,” she recalled—at 74 Stockton Place. Thus while my grandmother shared countless family stories, my granddad, lacking knowledge of his own ancestors, immersed his children in other kinds of stories and another kind of family: the beauty and rigor of the black intellectual tradition. Somehow, I knew, Du Bois and Rogers were “my people,” too. How I cherished this extended family. Growing up in a household marked by the insecurities of illness and death, I borrowed their strength.


ON JULY 9, 1977, *THE NEW YORK TIMES* PUBLISHED AN article about organ transplantation with a photograph of my mother, my father, my grandmother and me. Having developed kidney failure at 19, in 1968, my father received from my grandmother an early experimental kidney transplant. When I was born, some years after the surgery, the doctors told my father that he would be lucky to live to see my fifth birthday. But with the help of my mother’s fight, my father kept living—eventually becoming a kidney doctor himself, trying to understand this illness and its prevalence within African-American communities—and he carried me well into my 20s.

Over the years, various theories emerged about my father’s kidney disease. Somehow they all led back to Okmulgee, Okla., where he spent his first five years in the 1940s. Sometimes my grandmother talked about “greasy creek,” the oil-rich creek where they would play, wondering about its effects. Other times she mentioned the day he fell into a gigantic Oklahoma anthill. The theory that registered with East Coast doctors in the 1980s amounted to untreated strep throat and a lack of antibiotics during his early years. The final, unspoken one had to do with leaving Oklahoma. My father had been raised by his grandparents those first few years of

life, in a country town where he was adored by a large extended family, black, “mulatto,” Indian and proud; amid a contentious return to his mother and father in urban Paterson, N.J., the separation was traumatic. Thereafter, he would return to Oklahoma each summer, with his younger sister Beverly, to be with his Momma and Pawpaw, but there was a longing that never quite healed. He seemed to cling to Oklahoma for life.

When my father passed away in 2004, having survived nearly four decades of illness—including a stroke that caused him to lose all of his speech—I stumbled back into history and found his intellectual curiosity and love of life waiting for me there. He loved Oklahoma, and the stories that reside there, more than the many places he had traveled in his 57 miraculous years. Making sense of our unspeakable loss together, my then 85-year-old grandmother accompanied me on nearly every research trip I made to Oklahoma, Mississippi and Alabama. She was every bit as curious as I, and far more skillful at enlisting others to come along for the ride, as we searched for missing puzzle pieces. In the 10 years that followed my father’s death and preceded my grandmother’s, Odevia Brown Field and I made the unspoken decision to dwell in the past.

I remember clearly the two of us racing back from a morning fact-finding expedition over long and winding roads, hoping to arrive to Sunday buffet at the Sirloin Stockade “in time”—before her eldest sister Marzetta scolded us. We had already missed church. We arrived just in time to find my grandmother’s cousin, Clifford Fields. We shared with Clifford what we were up to, and he immediately took me under his wing and proceeded to share with me the decades of scattered genealogy notes he had vigilantly collected. In the years since that serendipitous meeting, Clifford has driven me down hundreds of country roads, knocked on dozens of strangers’ doors and asked nearly every question that no one else dared to ask.

Like many historians, I imagine, I first learned the meaning of change over time, and space, within my own family, as I listened to mythical stories of long-lost black landownership from the vantage point of the post-civil rights era, and as I watched my father decline, a pillar of our family fall and my world ever so gradually collapse. Surrounded by secrets and the ever-present threat of separation through the passage of time and space, my job—first as a daughter, then as a historian—became putting the pieces back together. I wanted to know how one generation shaped the next, why these stories were repeated and where the shadows came from. 

*Kendra Taira Field '99 is an assistant professor of history and director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at Tufts University.*

# RE-LEARNING HOW TO WRITE

CASSANDRA CLEGHORN HAD A HUNCH: “LEARNING TO write on a computer is profoundly different from learning to write on a typewriter. When a student sits down to write at the computer, she enters a very noisy room: a swirl of information, messages from word-processing programs, notifications from this or that social media app. The typewriter has a singular purpose: to make words on the page.”

So the senior lecturer in English and American studies developed the course Typewriter!, taught for the first time during Winter Study. Cleghorn purchased seven typewriters on eBay and obtained others from community members. She taught herself basic repair and fixed up the machines for the students, who each chose one to use for the course. As they composed letters, wrote poetry on demand in the Paresky Center and completed other assignments on their typewriters, the students observed the changes in their thinking and writing.

As a surprise, they also got to keep their machines or similar ones. “The students generated an extraordinarily creative and thoughtful output of writing in just one month,” says Cleghorn. “The powerful connection they formed with their typewriters—a connection all 10 of them want to continue exploring—suggests that my hunch was right.”



“You write so differently when everything you write stays on the page. There is a permanence.”

— EMMA LARSON '21, 1965 SMITH-CORONA



“The typewriter helps the writing process. It fights writer’s block. The sounds are encouraging.”

— ARSELYNE CHERY '21,  
1973 ROYAL







“Writing poems on demand was uncomfortably revealing, and now everyone knows I’m in love with my mother.”

— ADAM CALOGERAS '18, 1931 UNDERWOOD PORTABLE



“There’s a level of care and attention to put the margins in the right place.”

— LEONEL MARTINEZ '20,  
1968-72 OLIVETTI STUDIO 45



# STUDY

A 2015 speech by Marine Le Pen, then president of France's far right Front National party.







# TEACHING RIGHT-WING POPULISM

A new political science course examines the roots of Brexit, Trump and Le Pen.

*Political science professor Darel Paul's research focuses on how class-based ideologies manifest in public policies. He applies this lens to the rise of right-wing populism in a new 300-level seminar, Right-Wing Populism. The course compares the U.S. to other countries in order to consider questions about where right-wing populism comes from and if its rise in Europe and America reflects a normal swing of the pendulum—or something else entirely.*

**WILLIAMS MAGAZINE:** *Is it easier or harder to teach a course on right-wing populism since Trump was elected?*

**DAREL PAUL:** It's easier. Students are more interested now. The topic has a higher valence. Right-wing populism isn't simply "over there" in Europe anymore.

**WILLIAMS:** *Do the students have preconceived notions about what they're encountering?*

**PAUL:** I have taught some conservative and illiberal thought for several years in my senior seminar. Most students strongly resist it at first, because they are cosmopolitans. Writers who promote particularity—especially national particularity—tend to be automatically suspect.

**WILLIAMS:** *How is the political science curriculum responsive to changes in the political climate?*

**PAUL:** By creating new electives, the department is very good at keeping our curriculum connected to current trends. I developed this course out of interest in the topic but also because Brexit, Trump and Le Pen all hit the front pages within 12 months of each other. Since there are so few right-wing populists at Williams, I thought it could be an opportunity to learn about a significant contemporary political movement from a rigorous social science perspective.

**WILLIAMS:** *Where do you think right-wing populism comes from?*

**PAUL:** The first half of my course is all about rival answers to this question. The major answers from the left are economic dislocation, mental disorder, xenophobia and racism, and support for authoritarian solutions to political problems. From the right, the major arguments are class struggle and a defense of the nation, national culture and democratic self-government. It's up to my students to make up their minds based on the best scholarship I can put before them. From there, a comparative analysis helps us see that the Trump phenomenon is not

unique. If right-wing populism is happening in countries like Poland and Hungary, which lack significant levels of immigration, or in countries like Sweden and Norway, which have long traditions of gender equality and social democracy, then Trump and the alt-right may not be best explained as simply the latest expressions of long-standing American white supremacy.

**WILLIAMS:** *Are we seeing a normal swing of the pendulum, or is this something else?*

**PAUL:** It's hard to say, but in this course I entertain the answer that it's something else. Right-wing populism is not just another swing to the right like we saw in the late 1970s in the U.S. and U.K. or in the 1990s in Europe. It's a revolt against political pathways, party systems and ideological boundaries dating to the aftermath of World War II. Consider the virtual demise of long-standing socialist parties in France and Germany, the rise of "new parties" to great influence in Italy and the U.K., and the resistance to the European Union throughout much of post-communist Central Europe. Think of public opinion polls showing a loss of faith in democracy among the young, or broad support for technocracy or even a military coup in light of Trump's election. Whether liberalism can survive is anybody's guess, but some interesting writers we're considering think not. —JULIA MUNEMO

*Darel Paul's third book, From Tolerance to Equality: How Elites Brought America to Same-Sex Marriage, is due out in March with Baylor University Press.*

## ON THE GUT-BRAIN AXIS

SARAH BECKER '18 HAS HAD AN INTEREST IN THE microbiome—the bacteria, fungi, viruses and other microscopic organisms that live in our guts—since she was in eighth grade. That's when she came back from a family trip to Cambodia with a bad case of intestinal parasites. The doctor put her on round after round of antibiotics, after which, she says, "My gut was just wrecked." And yet she wasn't getting better with standard treatment protocols.

"I started doing research about probiotics, supplements and the mind-body connection," she says. "I became convinced that changes in the microbiome affect the so-called 'gut-brain axis' and contribute to our overall health and well-being."

Becker began to see improvement in her health during high school. She also became an accomplished cross-country skier, which planted a question in her mind: Could there be a connection between athletic

performance and the microbiome? During Becker's time at Williams, interest in the microbiome and in the potential of fecal transplants to treat illnesses have become more widespread. So Becker decided to complete her own thesis on the microbiome.

"My project looks at how the gut mediates our tolerance for artificial sweeteners," says the art history and biology major, explaining that we have long known about a connection between diabetes and the consumption of artificial sweeteners, but we didn't know where the causality lay.

"A 2014 study shows a direct correlation from the consumption of artificial sweeteners like saccharin and aspartame to the inducement of glucose intolerance," she says, adding that the correlation was proven through the study of the microbiome. "When researchers transplanted fecal matter from mice that had been fed artificial sweeteners into mice with a sterile microbiome, glucose intolerance developed."

Becker's thesis extends the 2014 study by examining a different sweetener, Stevia. Because Stevia is derived from a plant, it's considered a more natural sugar substitute. Some researchers have hypothesized that, unlike other artificial sweeteners, Stevia could lower glucose levels. Becker hopes her research this year will help determine whether or not that's the case.

"Understanding the effect of Stevia on the microbiome will provide insight into its use as a safer alternative to other commercially available non-caloric sweeteners to help populations that struggle with weight gain and blood sugar control," she says.

Becker is also planning to look more closely at the connection between endurance sports and the microbiome. An endurance athlete for much of her life, she's captain of Williams' Nordic ski team, and she's curious about the possible connections between these sports and a person's overall well-being.

Next year, she hopes to study cross-country skiers in Sweden. "My research plans include the collection and study of fecal and blood samples taken before, during and after endurance sporting events, such as long ski races," she says. "One of my questions is: does endurance training encourage growth of certain bacteria, and, if so, how do these populations affect performance and overall health?"

Becker hopes that answering that question, and all the others she's been asking since eighth grade, will inform her future career as a physician. "I hope one day to specialize in gastroenterology and endocrinology with a focus on the gut-brain axis, nutrition and hormonal health," she says.

—JULIA MUNEMO





Assistant Professor of  
Religion Zaid Adhami



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELIEVE?

CAN FAITH AND DOUBT COEXIST? IF NOT, WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE American Muslims, for instance, who question many religious doctrines despite their commitment to religious tradition? To answer these questions and others, religion professor Zaid Adhami is combining ethnographic research on the Muslim community in Boston with the study of religious texts and contemporary theory on religion.

"Many Muslims in the U.S. are experiencing a growing disillusionment with organized religion and fundamental disagreements over what is authentic and orthodox," Adhami says. "For a group also living within a political climate of Islamophobia, the question at the root of this complicated landscape is: What does it mean to believe?"

At first glance, Adhami says, "Belief appears to be pretty straightforward. But is belief ultimately about a conviction in the truth of doctrinal claims, or is it a moral, devotional and experiential commitment?"

He tells the story of a man he met while conducting ethnographic research. The man's struggles with obsessive-compulsive disorder led him to experience psychosomatic pain every time he prayed, but daily prayers are obligatory. "This led him to question the relationship between personal experience, scripture and tradition, asking 'What do I do with the fact that my experience is in conflict with what is demanded of me?'" Adhami says. "This man's story stands in for so many people who are trying to navigate the tension between authoritative discourse—communal teachings that define Islamic norms—and their own life experiences."

Such tensions are particularly pervasive when it comes to gender norms. "Gender is one of the most hotly disputed issues in American debates about organized religion, and Muslims are no different in that regard," Adhami says. "The way people are navigating the tension between authoritative doctrine and personal experience challenges the common assumption that religious communities uncritically accept a monolithic body of religious teachings. Religious life is far more complicated than that."

Adhami's research is the basis of a book he's developing and informs his new spring-semester course, *Islam and the West*, which explores the presumed clash of cultures and asks what has given rise to the standard representations of Islam in Europe and America. "One can't understand the American Muslim experience and the kind of anxiety and tension around issues of religious belief without also asking how one can be Muslim in a world where Islam is associated with irrationality and violence," he says. "The problem of doubt emerges as a product of this presumed tension between Islam and modernity."

In both the class and his research, Adhami says, his task is to frame the project of reconciling faith and doubt within political and historical backdrops. "This may lead to a better understanding of the current crisis of faith in the Muslim community," he says.

—JULIA MUNEMO

Among the objects in the exhibition "Seeds of Divinity" is this ceramic Mayan incense burner with a male deity from the 18th-19th century, a gift from Herbert D.N. Jones, Class of 1914.





The background of the page features a photograph of three ancient clay figurines, possibly from the Zapotec civilization, displayed on a shelf in a gallery. The figurines are reddish-brown and have stylized, somewhat abstract human forms. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the clay.

## THROUGH ANCIENT EYES

STEPPING INTO THE DIMLY LIT FAISON GALLERY AT THE Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) feels like taking a step back in time. Masks, sculptures depicting animals and gods, and human-like figurines line the walls and populate the exhibition cases. As visitors follow the carefully illuminated pathway of ancient objects, a deeper understanding of Pre-Columbian civilizations is gained. The exhibition, “The Seeds of Divinity,” is informed by student research from a fall-semester course of the same name, taught by anthropology professor Antonia Foias.

“Both the class and the exhibition consider Pre-Columbian civilizations’ use of the human body as a prism for understanding and depicting the supernatural,” says Foias, the curator of the exhibition and an archeologist who studies ancient Mesoamerican civilizations. “In a typical class, I discuss the archeological process and show my students slides from my digs. But this course gave us the exciting opportunity to study ancient artifacts up close, sometimes even holding them in our hands.”

Foias’ course was held in WCMA’s Object Lab, a hybrid gallery-classroom space used each semester by faculty from a variety of academic disciplines. Professors select works of art that employ, investigate or interpret key course concepts. Students in Foias’ class also made use of the Rose Object Classroom, where materials from the museum’s collection can be handled under supervision. Both spaces give students the opportunity for what Elizabeth Gallerani, Curator of Mellon Academic Programs, calls “close looking.”

Foias’ 11 students examined 16 works from WCMA’s permanent collection and 11 objects on loan from the Worcester Art Museum in the fall. Another six objects on loan from the Yale University Art Gallery arrived in time for the exhibition, which runs through Aug. 31.

“In class, we tried to understand each object not as an aesthetic piece of art but rather as a communication

technology,” Foias says. “Through the artifacts, we could consider ideas about human souls and the relationship between humans, animals and the divine, asking why a particular object represents a god through a human shape, or why that line between humans and gods is so fluid.”

Wilson Lam ’21 studied three different Zapotec urns dating from between 200 and 700 C.E. “The urns were initially thought only to be funerary vessels,” he says. “But over the course of our research, we discovered they served as offertory vessels during the lives of rulers and only entered the tombs with their users upon their death.

“Ancient Mesoamericans’ beliefs on spirituality differ from Western tradition,” adds Lam, who plans to major in English and anthropology. “They believed multiple souls inhabited each human body, and their perception of the soul was linked to human physicality.”

Each student studied several objects, wrote multiple research papers as well as scripts for an audio tour, and collaborated with classmates to place objects in thematic context. When each object on loan returns to its home institution, it will be accompanied by the students’ research into its history, origin and possible meaning.

“I believe there will be a lasting impact for all three museums, thanks to the student research on these objects about which we didn’t know very much before,” Foias says.

In developing the exhibition “Seeds of Divinity,” she and her students worked closely with theater professor David Gurçay-Morris ’96—who designed it—and with WCMA staff, including Gallerani.

“Visitors can see the dramatic lighting that accentuates each object, hear students bring the objects to life in the audio tour and follow a pathway that leads them to a reimagined Mesoamerican pyramid,” Gallerani says.

Says Lam, “I hope the exhibition lets visitors see the mundane and divine through ancient eyes and reflect upon their own perspectives on the world.”

—JULIA MUNEMO

# NOTES FROM THE SEABIRD CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

BY ABBY McBRIDE '06

**S**KETCHBOOK IN HAND, I BRACE MYSELF IN THE STERN OF A rocking boat. The rugged profile of Little Barrier Island looms on the horizon. In front of me, a small, dark-backed seabird dashes back and forth, chasing crustaceans along the surface of New Zealand's Hauraki Gulf. It's odd to be sketching an animal that had been considered extinct for the entire 20th century.

The New Zealand storm-petrel came back from the dead while I was at Williams, but it wasn't on my radar at the time. Apart from a semester of maritime studies at Mystic Seaport, my life was centered in the forests of Williamstown. As graduation approached, I was finishing an ecology thesis with Hank Art, TA-ing field botany for Joan Edwards and completing an independent study involving a nature journal full of sketches. I didn't know that a decade later I'd be drawing seabirds from a boat on the other side of the world.

As a Fulbright-National Geographic Digital Storytelling Fellow in New Zealand, I'm writing and illustrating stories about the lives of petrels, penguins, albatrosses and other birds that make their living from the ocean. I'm telling of the staggering losses they suffer as a result of human activities and of the ways New Zealanders are working to save them and the ecosystems they inhabit.

A lot happened between Williams and now. I drove a lobster boat in Maine, camped on an uninhabited Galápagos island researching boobies, taught piano lessons and was a pastry chef. I squeezed in sketching when I could. Later, aiming to better integrate art and science, I got a science writing degree at MIT and began writing and illustrating stories for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bowdoin College. When I found a job managing communications for the American Ornithological Society, I began working remotely while traveling the world.

Meanwhile, I was applying to this storytelling fellowship—multiple times. I wanted to cover a globally urgent topic that brought together different threads of my experiences and interests. I settled on birds, the ocean and conservation.

Seabirds are among the world's most endangered animals. Many spend years at a time living within, upon and above vast oceans, showing amazing feats of athleticism and adaptations to marine life. All seabirds have to come to land to nest, so ecologically they connect land and sea. And, being highly sensitive to changes in the environment, they're coal-mine canaries for the ocean. By paying attention to seabirds, we benefit entire landscapes and livelihoods.

The country for this storytelling project had to be New Zealand. Surrounded by rich waters and isolated for 80 million years with no land mammals, it was covered with breeding seabirds until humans started showing up in recent centuries—bringing with them threats like invasive predators and, later, intensive fishing operations that kill birds accidentally. Its seabirds are the most diverse in the world as well as the most threatened.

New Zealanders are making extraordinary efforts to turn the tide of seabird decline. They navigate queasy ocean passages and all-but-impassable terrain to study and protect birds at their breeding sites. They train conservation dogs to sniff

out nests. They use homemade instruments to gather data and develop their own gear adaptations to catch fewer birds on fishing lines. They bring whole communities together to build predator-proof fences around threatened bird colonies.

When an extinct storm-petrel was reported flying around in the Hauraki Gulf in the early 2000s, it was an astounding win for Kiwi ingenuity and global conservation. This little bird managed to hang on at undetectably low numbers for well over a hundred years. As invasive predators started coming under control, it bounced back, reaching high enough numbers to be noticed.

I hope to trigger more noticing and to help people look at these overlooked animals and see that seabirds are beautiful, fascinating and valuable. So for nine months

I'm roaming New Zealand's coasts in an old station wagon named "Indy," with a tent and a foldable kayak. I'm hitching rides on motorboats and sailing ships. I'm following vest-wearing dogs in search of nest burrows, voyaging to remote subantarctic islands and rappelling down seacliffs. I'm sketching, writing, taking photos and recording vertigo-inducing GoPro video footage.

Next, I'm off to sketch the elusive storm-petrel on its breeding grounds, the jungle-covered Little Barrier Island, where researchers tracked down the first nest burrow only a few years ago. There, on steep slopes inhabited by plants and animals found nowhere else, people continue to help this miracle bird on its precarious path to recovery. And, there, my story will keep unfolding.

*See Abby McBride's '06 stories, videos, photographs and sketches on the web at <http://bit.ly/2EMeZYr> and on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter at @sketchbiologist.*

**By paying attention to seabirds, we benefit entire landscapes and livelihoods.**





**Thought to be extinct for more than a century, the New Zealand storm-petrel has since bounced back, thanks to conservation efforts.**



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as students discovered **p.28**