Williams Magazine

Spring 2024

Inside

Connecting students with the outdoors

A new museum building

A re-imagined Davis Center
From the President

One of the most challenging and fascinating aspects of being a college president is the need to focus on long-term vision and immediate needs at the same time. As one example, I originally planned to publish an essay here, summarizing our great progress on strategic priorities, from All-Grant financial aid and the opening of the new Davis Center to a design for the future Williams College Museum of Art and a fresh program study on athletics and wellness.

And we’re doing all that work. You’ll see coverage throughout this issue. But devoting the column to it would have meant glossing over the current realities of nationwide campus protests. So I’d like to explain what we’re doing at Williams. Not details of recent activism or actions—information that would be outdated before this magazine reached you—but a set of four principles we’re using to maintain our educational focus and excellence amid stormy seas.

First, the decision last fall not to issue an institutional statement about the events of October 7, while disappointing to some, has enabled us to reassess Williams’ core principles, as a place where we teach students how to think, not what to think.

Second, we’re working to introduce students to diverse views and teach them how to analyze and debate. Since October we’ve hosted Zionist historians, Palestinian scholars and poets, and Beltway policy analysts and grassroots organizers. If we’ve been doing our job well—and I think have—all students have the option to engage with some programming they relate to and some they can constructively disagree with.

Third, we’ve defined broad room for expression of those views—including protest. To quote one of my recent messages to the campus community, “I see the president’s primary job as ensuring educational opportunities amid stormy seas. Unfortunately, given the geopolitical realities of nationwide campus protests, I don’t think we’ll be done discussing these challenges anytime soon.”

Finally, we’re requiring any protesters to operate within the guardrails of our Code of Conduct. We’ve been clear that we’ll enforce those rules, reliably and evenhandedly, to ensure student safety and prevent harassment.

There have been moments when we haven’t lived these principles as neatly as I’ve described them here. But, as a framework, they’re helping us sustain our educational focus and our sense of community at a time when many campuses are deeply torn. We’ve been clear that we’ll enforce those rules, reliably and evenhandedly, to ensure student safety and prevent harassment. There has been room for expression of those views—including protest. To quote one of my recent messages to the campus community, “I see the president’s primary job as ensuring educational opportunities amid stormy seas. Unfortunately, given the geopolitical realities of nationwide campus protests, I don’t think we’ll be done discussing these challenges anytime soon.”

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Maud S. Mandel
“In its new location ... WCMA will also be an inviting gateway to Williams.”

Read more from Pamela Franks, director of the Williams College Museum of Art, opposite and on page 22.

**Provoking Thought**

During a visit to the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) in 2017, Anne Rockeston Avis ’71 and Gregory M. Avis ’80 were taken with an exhibition featuring Lex I, a massive work by the Botswana-born artist Meleko Mokgosi ’07.

“We were awed by Lex F’s beauty and scale and, moreover, how it presented and provoked thought about issues including but not limited to race, gender and democracy,” Greg Avis recalls. “It seemed that the work’s destiny was to be permanently housed at WCMA.”

Thanks to the Avis’ generosity, that destiny has been fulfilled. Lex I (2016–2017) is now part of WCMA’s permanent collection.

A chapter of Mokgosi’s series Democratic Intuition, completed between 2017 and 2020, Lex I consists of seven large-scale panels that consider the complexities of democracy and the daily experiences of diverse populations in southern Africa.

In addition to gaining attention worldwide for his artwork, Mokgosi is co-director of graduate studies in painting and printmaking at the Yale School of Art, New Haven, Conn., and co-founder of New York’s Interdisciplinary Art and Theory Program. He was recently commissioned to create large-scale murals for the walls of Williams’ newly re-opened Davis Center, including a series that pays tribute to murals painted by the artist Jerome Meadows that once graced the walls of the Black Student Union when its home was in the lower level of Mears House.

Lex I is the latest in a number of recent acquisitions, including the paintings Just a Dream (In America) by Vincent Valdez and Women of Color by Hung Liu.

“These additions to the collection strengthen the museum’s representation of work by Black, Asian American and Latinx artists,” says the museum’s Class of 1956 Director Pamela Franks. “We are thrilled to feature these works in our collection, where they will support teaching across disciplines and provide opportunities for students, faculty and other museum visitors to engage with global issues of social and racial justice.”

**Contributors**

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

Nicola Ortega is an award-winning graphic designer, illustrator and art director from Colombia, based in New York. His illustrations have been published in The New York Times, The Guardian, The New Yorker and more. In 2021, he was named one of NBC’s Top 20 Latino Artists to Watch.

Kris Qua is a photographer based in Albany, N.Y., who has more than 20 years’ experience working with clients in education, health care, sports and beyond.

Maya Chung Singh ’22 is a first-year student at Williams and an award-winning photographer. In addition to doing photography for the departments of sports information and communications at Williams, she has worked for the NCAA during March Madness and the New York Mets creating visual content.

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

Tomas Webor is a London-based writer whose work has been published in The Economist’s “1843” magazine, Wired, Smithsonian Magazine, The Guardian, Artforum, ArtReview and frieze.

Williams Magazine welcomes letters about articles or items published in recent issues. Please send comments to magazine@williams.edu or to Williams Magazine, Office of Communications, PO Box 675, Williamstown, MA 01267-0675. Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

**Front Cover:** Photographs by Kris Qua of Ryan Graham ’22 (fishing); Ethan Pipes ’22 (sleeping bag); Stella Chen ’25 (hercampus document dog); and Carlton Roe ’27 (camp chair).

**On Campus**

Lox 1 on view during the Lex and Love: Meleko Mokgosi exhibition at the Williams College Museum of Art in March 2023. Photograph by Arthur Evans.
A New Boathouse

This fall, Williams crew teams will take to the water from the dock of a new $7 million boathouse. Nestled on the shore of Onota Lake in Pittsfield, the nearly 7,500 square-foot facility includes numerous upgrades compared to its predecessor, which dates to the 1920s and underwent renovation. Instead of a single, shared boat bay, the new building features individual bays for the men’s and women’s teams. There is increased storage space for equipment and supplies, a team room with cubbies, an office area for coaches, modernized bathrooms and a new, reoriented dock that makes it easier to get boats into the water.

Meanwhile, a new boat has joined the women’s fleet, named in honor of the late Nancy Storey ’73—one of the college’s and the world’s greatest rowers. A pioneer in Williams coeducation and in women’s rowing, Storrs died in September of 2023.

Aiding All-Grant

Williams is launching a fundraising initiative to support its innovative All-Grant financial aid program. Established in 2022, the program eliminated loans and campus and summer job requirements from all financial aid packages, replacing them with equivalent grant funds.

To provide the approximately $6.75 million per year needed to run the All-Grant program, the college’s unrestricted endowment will match one-to-one any gifts of $125,000 or more made or pledged over five years to the financial aid program.

The donors, who wish to remain anonymous, say the gift reflects their desire to support Williams and President Maud S. Mandel’s strategic vision and plan for the college.

Describing the program’s impact on the lives of students, Chris Flores ’26, who spent last summer as a congressional intern, says All-Grant gave him “the freedom and power to be intentional with my time.”

Awards and Honors

Sam Bishop ’25 and Luke Young-Xu ’25 are among the select college sophomores and juniors named as Goldwater Scholars for the 2024-25 academic year. The award goes to students who intend to pursue research careers in the natural sciences, mathematics and engineering. Bishop plans to earn a Ph.D. in atomic, molecular and optical physics. Young Xu, meanwhile, intends to pursue genetics and molecular biology.

In other award news, Ben Thorp Brown ’06, a New York-based artist who works in sculpture, video, sound and installation, has been named a Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Arts for 2024. He also teaches in the fine arts department of Parsons School of Design, The New School.

$25M Gift Supports Priorities

Williams has received a $25 million gift commitment in support of three major initiatives currently underway on campus: constructing a new museum building, developing a comprehensive plan for athletics and well-being facilities, and endowing the All-Grant financial aid program.

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Promoting Well-Being

Williams is expected to break ground on a new Multipurpose Recreation Center (MRC) in late spring. The building will serve as the temporary home for Williams’ indoor athletic practices, intramural sports and other recreational activities, all of which were displaced after Tenney Field House closed unexpectedly in the spring of 2023.

A pre-engineered metal structure, the MRC will be situated on the north side of campus, adjacent to the tennis courts near Stetson Road. It will feature a three-lane, 200-meter track, three tennis courts and practice space for the baseball and softball teams, as well as a 40-foot climbing wall. The facility will also include restrooms, storage space, a small athletic training room and changing rooms for teams.

Completion of the building is planned for late 2025, with design by the Boston office of the global architectural firm CannonDesign and construction by Suffolk Construction. Concurrent with the MRC project, the college has begun a comprehensive programming study to explore athletics, recreation and well-being campuswide.
On Campus

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Spring

10 Years, WALLS

The artwork Glacial Termination, from the series Glacial Reformation by Daniel Bukia, is selected by a student during WALLS pickup in spring 2023. Photograph by Bradley Wakoff

WALLS is supported by the Fulkerson Fund for Leadership in the Arts, with additional background on the work and the artist, they also receive a journal to share with the collection of artworks that students can borrow for the semester. In addition to in its 10th year, WALLS, which stands for Williams Art Loan for Living Spaces, is a the Williams College Museum of Art’s (WCMA) innovative WALLS program. Now That’s been the experience of more than 1,200 students who have participated in artwork hanging in your dorm room.

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WALLS is supported by the Fullerton Fund for Leadership in the Arts, with additional funding provided by Fountain Milton ’62. Facts and figures courtesy of WCMA

HIGHLIGHTS OF WALLS’ FIRST DECADE:

1,257 students have borrowed artworks, some multiple times

90 works initially available

125 works currently available

1518 date of the oldest work, Saint Sebastian in a Niche by Albrecht Dürer

2015 date of the newest works, Lily by Claire Sherman and Game Changing (Queen) by Derrick Adams

34” x 44” size of largest work: Yellow River by Zhang Kechun

6.5” x 6.5” size of smallest work: Char. Chain’s Geta 13 by Junia Kanssku

TOP 5 PICKS

La creation (The Creation) by Marc Chagall

Yellow River by Zhang Kechun

Elissa I by Ul Nilsen

Inferno Metafisico (Metaphysical Hall) by Giorgio de Chirico

Grand Canyon of Arizona from Hermit Rim Road by Thomas Moran

In Memoriam

President Saul B. Mandel and members of the Williams community paid tribute to nine retired and current faculty and staff members who have died in recent months. They are: Kurt Tauber, the Class of 1984 Professor of Political Science, Emeritus, who died on Jan. 29; Jean-Bernard “Barnie” Bucky, the William Dwight Whitney Professor of Arts and Theatre, Emeritus, Feb. 17; Stephen Shappard, the Class of 2012 Professor of Economics, March 2, the 68 Center Professor of History, Emeritus, March 26; John Hyde ’52, the Brown Professor of History, Emeritus, March 28; Frances Peteresen, Jr., the Washington Gladden 1879 Professor of Religion, Emeritus, April 2; Stephen Fix, the Robert G. Scott ’68 Professor of English, April 4; and Tonio Palmer, director of entrepreneurship at the ’68 Center for Career Exploration, April 28.

A Hall of Fame Coach

Former coach Carl Samuelson has been named to the inaugural class of the College Swimming and Diving Coaches Association of America’s (CSCAA) Division III Hall of Fame. Announced in January, the recognition honors “the exceptional contributions of swimmers, divers and coaches within the NCAA Division III realm,” according to the CSCAA website. Founded in 1922, CSCAA is the nation’s first organization of college coaches.

At Williams for more than 70 years, Samuelson made history when his team won the first two NCAA Division III women’s championships in 1982 and 1983, earning him his first two of three CSCAA Coach-of-the-Year honors. In addition, his swimmers achieved All-America status 50 times, won a combined 64 NCAA titles, 27 New England Championships and multiple NCAA records. In 2021, Samuelson and current head swim coach Steven Kuster were included on the organization’s list of 10 greatest College Swimming and Diving Coaches of the past century.

In Visible Presence: Soviet Affairs Revealed in Family Photos, published by the MIT Press last fall, Shchervenkov, the college’s Paul H. Hunn ’55 Professor in Social Studies, teaches courses including Thinking the Family Album, Images and Society, and Invitation to Sociology.

On the Bookshelf

Building upon her extensive research on memory, photography, culture and consumption in post-Soviet Russia, anthropology and sociology professor Olga Shchervenkov has co-authored a new book.

Photograph featured on the cover of La Visita Presente: La creación (The Creation) by Marc Chagall

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In Visible Presence, Shchervenkov’s third book and her first with Oliana Sarkisova of the Vera and Donald Kikkikam Open Society Archives, pairs more than 50 Soviet-era family photo collections with extensive interviews of their owners. In a review of the book, Laura Weider of Yale University calls it “a brilliant study of the powerful ways in which family photographs work, both privately and publicly, to manifest and sacralize the nation. “ Donna West Kvit on the University of Wisconsin says the book is “a powerful, materially rich analysis of Soviet-era family photographs as affective touchstones for memory, loss and absence.” Its poignant timeliness in a new era of conflict is a reminder of the power of photography to shape—and be shaped by—the social, cultural and political landscape.”

Find the latest titles by and about members of the Williams Community at president.williams.edu/in-memoriam.
End of a Jazz Era

In 1954, a group of Williams students formed a Dixieland jazz band called Phinney’s Favorite Five—Phinney being a reference to James Phinney Baxter III, Class of 1914, Williams’ president at the time. Founding members Fred Clifford ’58 on tuba and Bob Kingsbury ’58 on clarinet were later joined by John Halsey ’59 on piano and Tom Hayne ’59 on drums. The four performed for the first time as the Williams Reunion Jazz Band during Reunion Weekend in 1983. With guest performers on cornet, banjo, vocals and trombone, they’ve brought their tunes to the reunion each year since. They also have sold out gigs on the East Coast, entertaining alumni on a riverboat cruise and jamming alongside the Boston Pops at Symphony Hall. Now, after 41 years, the four alumni will play their final gig at reunion in June before packing away their instruments.

125 Years of Cap and Bells

Williams’ student theater troupe Cap and Bells marked its 125th anniversary this season, with performances and a Special Collections exhibition of archival photos, playbills, posters and other ephemera. Founded in the fall of 1898, Cap and Bells mounts six to eight productions a year involving student directors, designers, actors and stage managers. Shows take place all around campus and run the gamut from original student-written work (Steven Sondheim ’50 debuted Phinney’s Rainbow in 1948) to Shakespeare, Stoppard and, yes, Sondheim. Many notable alumni in theater have trod the boards with Cap and Bells.

Casey Muntzio ’24, a thespian who also served on the group’s board this year, says she’s excited “to be a part of a long-standing legacy and robust history in this organization and to build on the works of theater makers who came before us.”

Together at Williams

Students take center stage in an April performance of the "electropop opera" Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812 at the ’62 Center for Theatre and Dance. Photograph by Keith Ferriman

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On Campus

Spring 2024

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Student performances draw large crowds at Spring Fling in April. Photographs by Maya Chugh Singh ’27.

Students hang out on a sunny spring day in April. Photograph by Jay Corey.
Several dozen people gather outside Hopkins Observatory to witness 96% totality during the solar eclipse on April 8. Photograph by Eileen Bellamy

Men’s basketball beats Hamilton College in the NESCAC quarterfinals in February on the way to the NCAA tournament Sweet 16. Photograph by Maya Chugh Singh ’27

Women’s softball players cheer on their teammates during the Eph Alumni and Senior Day Celebration game in April. Photograph by Maya Chugh Singh ’27
The Davis Center Reopens

Williams students, faculty, staff and nearly 200 alumni and guests gathered on campus April 12-14 to mark the reopening of the Davis Center. The jam-packed schedule of events, held in conjunction with the Bolin Legacy Mentorship Weekend, included student performances, a drum circle and block party, speeches, panel discussions and career mentoring workshops. Among the performers were the R&B a capella group Purple Rain, Nothing But Cuties hip-hop dance group, Casey Cai ’27, who performed a traditional Chinese dance, and Misty Blues, led by Gina Coleman ’90.

Among the highlights, President Maud S. Mandel and Professor of Africana Studies Neil Roberts presented the Ephraim Williams Medal to Joseph E. Harris, who served from 1969 to 1975 as Williams’ first Black professor with tenure and as the first chair of the then Afro-American Studies Program. Harris is the 15th person to receive the medal, awarded to a member of the Williams community who is not an alum and who “has demonstrated exceptional service and loyalty.”

William “Billy” Green ’03, winner of several prominent teaching awards, gave the Bolin Weekend keynote address on “The Power of Creating Learning Spaces Filled With Love, Access and Belonging.” He told the audience how his Williams experience inspired his teaching, adding, “I show up with [my students] because my professors came with me. And I wanted my New York City students to have that joy that I found.”

The weekend wrapped up with a conversation between artist Meleko Mokgosi ’07 and Laylah Ali ’90, professor and chair of studio art and faculty fellow of the Davis Center and the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, about the center’s array of artwork, including a newly painted mural by Mokgosi, whose work is also featured in the Williams College Museum of Art’s collection.

The Davis Center traces its founding to the spring of 1988, when the student-led Coalition Against Racist Education took over Jenness House and included among its demands the creation of a multicultural center. Echoes of the Davis Center’s activist roots were apparent during the opening weekend, with student protests and a sit-in in the center held by Students for Justice in Palestine and Williams College Jews for Justice.

As a dedicated space that symbolizes the college’s commitment to and progress toward a fully inclusive community, the Davis Center is designed with an eye toward creating inclusive, accessible and sustainable spaces that take into account the histories of Williams’ many communities and the surrounding region. The $31.5 million project, developed with extensive input from the nearly two dozen student groups that call the center home and supported significantly by alumni gifts, included renovations to Jenness House and Rice House, plus a new building with a bridge connected to Rice. A hub of programs and spaces supporting historically underrepresented communities within the larger Williams family, the center advances broad campus engagement with complex issues of identity, history and cultures as they affect intellectual, creative and social life.

Learn more about the Davis Center project and watch a video of the reopening celebration at bit.ly/DCopening.

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The Davis Center Reopens
From slacklining to swimming, camping to collecting clover, students are connecting with the outdoors—and each other—through the Williams Outing Club.

Fiona Seibert ‘24 is no stranger to the outdoors. A coxswain for the men’s crew team and an avid Nordic skier, the Arcata, Calif., native says getting outside is a great balance to her lab-intensive biology major and neuroscience concentration.

She’s also deeply involved with the Williams Outing Club (WOC), one of the college’s oldest and largest student organizations. With a stated mission “to support outdoor activities at Williams and to make the outdoors accessible to everyone, regardless of level of experience,” WOC has encouraged countless students to pause from their studies, breathe fresh air, move their bodies and deepen their connections with nature and each other through a robust and varied collection of activities, classes, events and experiences.

Seibert works in WOC’s equipment room, washing climbing gear, waxing skis and helping outfit students for their next adventure. And she’s a regular on the weekly Friday sunrise hikes up Pine Cobble.

But the experience that stands out most to her after three years of involvement with WOC? Collecting four-leaf clovers with friends in a grassy area off Walden Street. “That was really an easy little activity,” Seibert says. “But it was so not something you would do on your own.”

First Experience

For many students, WOOLF—Williams Outdoor Orientation for Living as First-Years—is their first experience of the natural beauty on campus and in the surrounding Berkshires. Founded in 1978 and sponsored by WOC, which provides much of the gear, WOOLF seeks to help students navigate the transition from high school to college and form meaningful friendships on campus before their first semester begins. A natural draw for those who grew up involved in outdoor activities, the program has expanded its offerings over the years to entice those with little to no experience.

Each year before classes start, some 350 first-years gather their gear and divide into groups of 10 to 12. Some head off on overnight backpacking trips, covering anywhere between five and 15 miles per day, depending on their level of experience. Others camp out and climb rocks, paddle canoes or clear trails. Some sample all these activities in smaller, less-intensive bites, meeting up for lawn games, campfires and s’mores back at the dorms at night. And yet another cohort wanders nearby trails with tools for drawing, sculpting, writing and reading inspired by nature. The activities are led by experienced students who share lessons about life at and around Williams.

Charlotte Jones ’22 says she had done just a little hiking and canoeing before coming to Williams from her hometown in Clinton, N.Y. Her first-year WOOLF trip led her to join WOC’s student board and become a WOOLF director her senior year. A physics major, she now works as a laser engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass., and continues to get outside by running and walking with friends in nature preserves.

Through WOC, Jones says she came to love snowshoeing. “There’s something really special about being bundled up under a quiet canopy of snow,” she says. “You have to slow down and enjoy the world as it is.”

Amir Jeudy ’26 says he wasn’t interested in the outdoors growing up in Huntington, N.Y. He joined a WOOLF trip during orientation and now enjoys hiking and playing Ultimate Frisbee in addition to working in WOC’s equipment room. “My career aspiration is somewhere in climate policy,” he says. “I’m not exactly sure of the path I’ll take, but I’m sure it will involve outdoor activities to some capacity.”

Even students who select a different orientation experience—Williams also offers programs for varsity athletes playing fall sports and for first-years interested in the arts, social justice or community service—will encounter WOC in other ways.
The club hosts Mountain Day in October and Winter Carnival in February. WOC also offers a variety of physical education classes that students can take for academic credit.

“The college, as a liberal arts institution, believes that physical education is an integral part of one’s learning,” says Carolyn Miles, who oversees physical education classes as associate athletic director for student-athlete services. “In mind and body together, thinking about the individual in a holistic sense. “The Outing Club does a really good job of bringing opportunities to our students at all levels,” she adds. “Our philosophy is: How do we help you find the thing that you feel like you can do for the long term?”

Widening the Tent
WOC’s student board meets weekly to answer that very question. The students focus on community building, accessibility and inclusion as they plan out programming and classes to attract a wide swath of students.

In 2022, the board voted to eliminate the club’s $10 membership fee, citing it as a financial impediment. Now, students need only fill out a form to join the organization, which has reached 750 members. Nearly all of WOC’s programming is free, and students can borrow equipment at no cost. Financial aid is available for the few activities with fees.

The types of activities, too, are becoming more inclusive. In addition to clover-gathering, this year WOC offered apple picking, slack-lining, toffee-making in the snow and visits to a stable to pet horses in addition to the usual outdoor programs the board promotes in its weekly newsletter.

The focus on inclusion and accessibility is no surprise, says Ben Oliver, who became director of WOC this year, when longtime director Scott Lewis announced his retirement after nearly 40 years of service. Lewis and Dave Ackerson, who is retiring as assistant director after 12 years, remained on staff through the end of the spring semester.

Oliver, who worked at the Sierra Club and was Colby College’s Outing Club director, calls Williams’ board “notably diverse.” Board member Nasida Meher ’25 says she didn’t spend a lot of time outdoors as a child growing up in New York City. As a first-year, she joined a sunrise hike that kindled a passion to “get more involved in bringing the larger Williams community to get outside.”

“Get Out and Play”

Abraham Paik ’25, Aidan Tartarelli ’27 and Amir Jeudy ’26

Yaroslava Yashchuk ’26, Emerald Dar ’25 and Katie Maier ’26

“The Outing Club does a really good job of bringing opportunities to our students at all levels.”
Along with some peers, she organized a hike on Mount Prospect for women of color. “It was swarmed with work and dread going on the three-plus-hour hike,” she recalls. “Ultimately, the hike was breathtaking, and I still remember all the beautiful colors and smells from that day.”

WOC also organized a downhill ski outing to Jiminy Peak this past winter for members of the Minority Coalition, hoping to reach traditionally underrepresented students. Oliver recalls hearing from a participant afterward who told him, “This was the most amazing thing I’ve ever done. Is there any way you can help me go again?”

Carabiners and Camp Stores

Having access to an array of gear—much of which WOC members can borrow for free—helps novice and expert students alike get involved and stay involved in outdoor activities at Williams.

On a spring afternoon, Maddy Andersen ’27 takes visitors through the equipment room, where she works. Located on the lower level of the Paresky Center, it’s packed with newly organized racks containing hiking boots, winter coats and raingear jackets of all sizes. There are walls, boots, coats, gloves and sweaters along with tents, cookstoves and sleeping bags. WOC even lends out Frisbees, bug spray, soccer balls and hula hoops.

WOC has a 12-passenger van to transport people to and from WOC each academic quarter. Over the course of six weeks, Andersen grew up in Brooklyn and often hiked with her family. She continues to hike and learned how to snowboard. WOC wants to nurture that lifelong passion for the outdoors, whether a student comes to campus with an extensive background or their first experience is the campus-wide celebration of Mountain Day.

Starting as early as mid-September, the campus buzzes with activities on which Friday in October Williams’ president will cancel classes and declare Mountain Day. The tradition has expanded from a single trek up Mount Greylock to a full day of festivities, including all-campus picnics, yoga and live music and dance performances.

WOC members lead multiple hikes for all levels and abilities, usually culminating with cider donuts and songs—including a rousing rendition of “The Mountains”—on a path through Stone Hill and Stony Ledge. Road construction last fall shifted the location to Holy Field Meadow, which has enough space for buses, bringing record numbers of people to the event.

Lea Obermüller ’24, a sociology and Spanish major with a concentration in global studies, says she has loved helping out during Mountain Day. Because it was safer to be outside, the hikes held during her second semester were a “phenomenal outlet,” says Obermüller, who also teaches alpine skiing and leads sunrise hikes. “I love the epic sunrise hike in the spring when you wake up with a forest that comes back from winter with all its fresh green shades and smells of wild garlic and trillium coming out in all its colors.”

When the pandemic restricted campus activities, WOC and the physical education department continued its winter ski programs with a gift from Felix Grosman, a WOC grad, some of whom had never seen snow before, to Jiminy Peak almost daily for four weeks. It was a chance to leave their rooms, not take any virtual classes and engage with one another socially.

That sense of connection continues to be important at a time when people are often distracted by their smartphones. “Students are missing so many opportunities to get to know somebody,” Lewis says.

Addis Miles. “It’s really hard to be on a hike and scrolling through your socials. You can’t play a game of pickleball while you’re on your phone. And that, in turn, allows you to talk to the people who are next to you.”

Anyone who checks Williams’ social media on Mountain Day can see the lifelong impact WOC can have. Atoms the world over participate from afar, individually and in groups, tagging the college in their photographs.

While it’s heartening, it’s no surprise, says Lewis, who has celebrated 23 Mountain Days. “When you’re outdoors, you’re giving yourself a gift,” he says. “Just be present, and take in not only your surroundings but the people around you.”

### Cider Donuts and Connection

WOC wants to nurture that lifelong passion for the outdoors, whether a student comes to campus with an extensive back- ground or their first experience is the campus-wide celebration of Mountain Day.

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ON THE HORIZON

A new home for the Williams College Museum of Art

ARCHITECTURAL RENDERINGS BY JEUDI.WANG, COURTESY OF SO-IL

“A welcoming beacon.”

THE NEW DESIGNS for the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) evoke the word “permeable.” The tent-like roof line ebbs and flows along with the rise and fall of the mountains. Oversized windows provide views of the light-filled interiors as well as the courtyard at the building’s center. Gentle paths lead to and through the galleries, academic spaces, formal and informal gathering areas, and café. One gets the sense that they are not only looking at the museum of the future but also the future of museums.

The architectural renderings, released to the public in March, bring to life the guiding principles of WCMA’s first purpose-built museum building. In announcing the plans, SO-IL architecture firm founding directors Jing Liu and Florian Idenburg called it “a welcoming beacon, situated sensitively between campus and the world beyond....Walls do not confine the concept of this museum.”

Its design also reflects the goal of “engaging the entire campus around art while bringing the Williams College experience into dynamic interaction with the wider world,” says Pamela Franks, the museum’s Class of 1956 director.

“It will be a sustainable building in dialogue with the beautiful natural surroundings, where people can linger, converse, participate in wide-ranging programs and enjoy art from ancient Assyrian reliefs to contemporary media.”

Williams Magazine asked Franks to walk readers through the designs of the 76,800-square-foot building, which is scheduled to open in 2027 to inaugurate the museum’s second century. She shares her thoughts on form and function on the following pages.
“... an inviting gateway to Williams”

33 different academic departments taught more than 200 class sessions at the museum using WCMA’s collections during 2023-24.

The Williams College Museum of Art is a campus hub. Not only are studio art and art history among the top 10 majors at Williams, but thousands of students in courses from computer science to women’s, gender and sexuality studies visit each year to use the Object Lab and Rose Study Gallery—hybrid teaching, research and gallery spaces.

01 - ENTRY (PREVIOUS PAGE)
In its new location, at the western edge of campus opposite Field Park, WCMA will also be an inviting gateway to Williams. On the previous spread, the entry communicates so much of what WCMA aspires to be—easy to find, inclusive, bright, filled with art, brimming with potential for learning and creativity. The top roofline dips just above the doors, creating a sense that the energy of the museum is concentrated and compressed at this key moment, ready to expand in every direction to make room for all the experiences that can open up within. Directly through the entrance, the courtyard draws you in and evokes the synergies among art, nature and architecture. Art is the first thing you see in every direction.

02 - SOUTHEAST VIEW
Approaching the new building from campus, a broad path leads through the changing colors of the surrounding flowering meadow. From this path, the first view of the interior is into the study center lounge, where, through the glass wall, students, faculty and museum staff come together for classes and research focusing on the collection. Continue along, and there’s an enticing café that opens onto the porch at the other end of the building.

“Art is the first thing you see in every direction.”

03 - LOBBY
From the moment visitors enter the central lobby, there is a shared experience and sense of community. The angled, gentle curve of the timber ceiling reveals the very structure of the building. Masonry walls skin the exterior of gallery, classroom and research spaces, and public pavilions, unifying the distinct and purposeful spaces that contribute to the larger, shared mission of the museum.
Engagement with our world-class collection is central to WCMA’s mission. People come not just to look at art from around the globe but also to think deeply about the circumstances in which it was created, how the artists see the world and what those insights might mean for humanity. In doing so, visitors become partners in activating our growing collection of more than 15,000 works.

4A+B — GALLERY SPACES
The new museum’s formal display spaces will consist of 11 galleries of different sizes, all featuring wood floors and wood-clad ceilings of different heights, with acoustic technology. Two of the galleries are designed to display art that looks best in natural light, with wood-edged central skylights and floor-to-ceiling corner windows facing north.

The variety of spaces allows us to explore innovative ways to show our collection, which ranges from intimate scale, as in our exceptional collection of South Asian painting, or very contemporary works, like Sam Gilliam’s drape painting *Situation VI Pieces 4* (1972). The galleries are designed to be inviting and warm—to encourage discovery, close looking and engaging discussion. Carefully calibrated views to the outside provide regular reminders of where we are on campus and in the Berkshires.

05 — NORTH BREAK SPACE
The new building is also infused with spaces for students and other visitors to make their own—whether pausing to reflect on the art they’ve just seen, meeting a friend for a casual conversation, settling in to study or some use we haven’t even imagined yet. Interspersed among the galleries are three of these “break spaces,” including this one at the north end of the museum, joining the east and west wings of the galleries. Differently sized and configured, the break spaces can each spotlight a work of art and feature exposed timber construction, masonry-clad walls, stone flooring and views out to nature.

15,000 works in WCMA’s extensive collection will be readily accessible for study and teaching in any of four class-rooms, a dedicated research space and ample onsite storage.

11 galleries make up the new museum’s formal display spaces.

“Engagement with our world-class collection is central to WCMA’s mission.”
On the Horizon

77% of first-years reported that All-Grant was one of the main reasons they chose to attend Williams.

94% of students reported that All-Grant had a positive effect on their experience.

Every part of WCMA’s new building aspires to be an educational opportunity, from its gallery, classroom and research spaces to back-of-house functions.

06 – STUDY CENTER LOUNGE

The study center is the nerve center for the entire museum. It consists of two object study classrooms, a digital humanities classroom, a seminar room and a research room for works on paper—all connected by a dedicated lounge. The center will expand exponentially our capacity for teaching with art and direct research of the collection. And the lounge is the connective tissue between informal and formal learning, it’s a place to pause to say hello to a friend or review notes before a class session, to grab a few minutes after class with the professor or just to relax and gather one’s thoughts.

07 – PORCH

The lessons the new museum will impart about sustainability are equally important. The museum is seeking the International Future Living Institute’s Living Building Challenge Core 4.0 certification, among the most ambitious sustainability goals in the industry. With a focus on renewable materials and innovative climate-control techniques, the building aims to require as little as 35% of the current baseline energy usage for typical art museums.

The generous roof overhanging the porch says “welcome” and creates natural outdoor spaces for both the café and classes. It also helps regulate the temperature inside, providing shade for the expanses of glass in the facade, and it will function as a rainwater retention system.

Outside the building, bio-retention basins will catch and treat rainwater, and a cistern beneath the parking lot will hold water back until the brook running north of the site can handle the runoff. The landscape around the building will be renewed and reforested, with a flowering meadow and gardens featuring native plants.

08 – WEST ENTRANCE

WCMA’s new building will also be accessible in ways unimaginable in our current home, Lawrence Hall. The west entrance (which, like the pedestrian-focused south entrance, opens to the central lobby) offers a convenient drop-off point and accessible parking. It leads right to the café and auditorium, where large classes, public programs and social gatherings will have a beautiful and acoustically sophisticated new home.

There are many ways into and through the new museum, both structurally and also as a reflection of WCMA’s longstanding, guiding principle of offering many points of entry into the study and appreciation of art. We are always asking questions like: How does a work of art’s meaning change when seen through the lens of chemistry or math as compared to art history? How does being a faculty member, or the parent of a young child, or both, shift the experience of a visit? How do different backgrounds and perspectives add to the story of our collection and make new knowledge possible? These questions and many more informed our vision for the new home of the Williams College Museum of Art.

“Every part of WCMA’s new building aspires to be an educational opportunity.”
Most Tuesday mornings find Benjamin Twagira working in an office inside a stately white house on the southern edge of campus. Twagira, an assistant professor of history currently on sabbatical, calls the house a “hideaway,” where he can dedicate time to working on his book manuscript. But it’s the lively afternoons he looks forward to the most, when he joins other scholars for seminars about their research. A historian of Africa, Twagira engages in wide-ranging discussions with researchers in fields spanning the humanities and social sciences. The experience, he says, is unlike any other he’s had in academia.

“It’s such an important resource,” he says. “It’s an opportunity to have an ongoing conversation with colleagues, all of whom are doing diverse and interesting research, sustained throughout the academic year.”

The house is home to the Oakley Center, which supports research in the humanities and social sciences and provides a forum for interdisciplinary exchange. This academic year, Twagira is one of 10 professors and two students serving as Oakley Fellows, conducting independent research on subjects such as caste in India, racial disparities in the American judicial system and Soviet-era family photography.

Two or three times a week, the center hosts guest speakers, colloquia, reading groups and other events. And every Tuesday, after eating lunch together in the building’s cozy dining room, the fellows take their seats around a large wooden table for an in-depth discussion about the work of one of their peers. In February, it was Twagira’s turn.

Twagira had circulated a draft of his book chapter in advance. The sole Africanist among this year’s fellows, his project is a history of Kampala, the capital of Uganda, during the militarized period between 1966 and 1986. The fact that the other fellows do not share his expertise in the social history of modern Africa is, for Twagira, a benefit. It means they can approach his work with fresh eyes, uncovering issues he hadn’t considered, while helping him present his research to readers outside of his field.
During the roundtable, political science professor Thomas Koné, a spring 2024 Oakley Fellow, raised a point that caused Twagira to think more deeply about how his ideas of class and capitalism into his work. And exchanges with Erica Mohaj James, professor of African, Black and Caribbean art at the University of Miami, who holds a joint fellowship with the Oakley Center and the Clark Art Institute, led Twagira to draw a fertile comparison between Kampala and Cuba during the 1970s around the economics of sex work. "I'm learning intensely from the other fellows," Twagira says. "I'm also learning from them about my own work. If you want to understand how to write for a broader audience, the Oakley Center is the perfect place. It's something you don't get anywhere else."

What makes the center special? Amid the frenzy of an academic semester, it can be difficult to sustain in-depth conversations over any significant duration. The center provides the opportunity for ongoing dialogue throughout the year. Those conversations help scholars—who can sometimes end up working in relative isolation—discover how their work might connect with other fields and disciplines.

German professor Christophe Koné has experienced the interdisciplinary ethos of the Oakley Center firsthand. A fellow during the 2019-20 academic year, he worked on his book Dreaming Creatures: Doll Thinking in Modern German Culture, due out this summer. The experience led him to apply to become the center's director.

Now midway through his three-year term, Koné says he wants to ensure that the center is accessible and welcoming to faculty and staff. To that end, he's developing a variety of programs and events, including a regular movie night with films screened from around the world, "bringing directors we might not usually encounter into the limelight," he says. "At Williams, we have a very international community. My goal is to take advantage of it."

The humanities and social sciences “teach people how to think, how to critically assess information and how to engage with an argument. At the Oakley Center, we bring people together and start a conversation.”

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The idea of a dedicated center to support interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences first germinated among a group of Williams faculty in the early 1980s. The college has always placed the humanities at the heart of liberal arts education. But at the time, humanistic scholarship was coming under scrutiny, with the Reagan administration intent on slashing the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). “The humanities and the social sciences were under fire,” says Krista Andrews, the Oakley Center’s associate director. For humanists, it was a time of great uncertainty. “The idea was to find a way to underpin the humanities and social sciences, to bolster and support them in perpetuity,” she adds.

Under Francis Oakley, who was Williams’ president at the time, the college led a fundraising initiative. The NEH agreed to match the raised sum of $875,000. An endowment was created, and in 1985, the Oakley Center was born. Today, Oakley, for whom the center is named, is the Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas, Emeritus, and a Senior Oakley Fellow. The center moved into its elegant premises, a home that the family of Charles Makepeace, Class of 1900, had recently gifted to Williams.

Makepeace was the college’s treasurer in the early 20th century, and the official name of the building remains Makepeace House in this day, “which we like,” Andrews says. “Because the house feels like a calm retreat.”

Of the Oakley Center’s many resources for faculty and scholars, Andrews, who joined the center more than 15 years ago, is most proud of the manuscript review program. Faculty across the college who are coming to the end of a large project—a book, a series of articles or even a play—can invite several internal and external reviewers for a daylong session in which they all go through the manuscript with a fine-tooth comb. “It’s like having all the people you’d want to talk to over for a party,” Andrews says. “You get together and discuss the thing that is most interesting to you in a beautiful place, where you’re all well fed, wonderfully supported and welcomed. Faculty describe feeling exhilarated and energized afterward, too. It’s a great way to accomplish serious and high-stakes work that under other circumstances could feel deeply distressing.”

Although the Oakley Center is faculty focused, each spring its senior year can join as a Ruchman Fellow, which includes a $2,000 stipend for research-associated expenses.

Since the center’s founding, criticism of the humanities and social sciences has only intensified, making the opportunities offered by the Oakley Center more important than ever. Koné points out that this is happening at a moment when Americans, divided into conflicting political and cultural camps, are struggling to hear one another across partisan lines fortified by social media. At a time like this, he believes, society most desperately needs what the humanities and social sciences are best placed to provide. “Our disciplines are the ones that teach people how to think, how to critically assess information and how to engage with an argument,” he says. “At the Oakley Center, we bring people together and start a conversation.”

Koné adds that in much of the world today, “there is a lot of arguing happening but not much listening. With people hiding behind their screens, it feels important to bring people into a room to have face-to-face conversations where they engage, listen, ask questions and think with care.”
From its anti-gay propaganda laws to images of Vladimir Putin flexing his biceps in the Kremlin gym, Russia, under his presidency, seems to have an obsession with gender and sexuality. Understanding why is the premise of Russian professor Julie Cassiday’s latest book, which was recently named a finalist for the Pushkin House Book Prize.

In *Russian Style: Performing Gender, Power and Putinism*, published by the University of Wisconsin Press in the fall, Cassiday explores the ways national identity has been shaped by heteronormativity and homophobia under Putin’s regime—and the counterculture that has emerged in response. Instead of quashing queer culture, she argues, the president’s laws and pronouncements have served to strengthen it.

Putin’s rise to power took root during “a time of immense political, economic and social change in the Russian Federation,” Cassiday says. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 was perceived by most as “a crisis, a tragedy and total chaos. Putin was very much—and has been defining himself—in juxtaposition to that chaos of the 1990s as a strong man. And he’s been very successful.”

With birthrates falling and Russia attempting to reassert its global power, Putin has tried to capitalize on stereotypes that Russian men are manlier and women more feminine than those in the West, says Cassiday, the Willcox B. and Harriet M. Adsit Professor of Russian. The president has famously appeared shirtless in photo ops, posing on horseback, hunting or fishing. Idealized women are depicted as young, sexy, sexually available Putin cheerleaders. All are performing sexuality through what Cassiday calls “cisgender drag.”

Homophobia and transphobia, meanwhile, have become a “state-sanctioned duty,” Cassiday says. Yet the irony is that legislation such as Article 6.21, a ban on so-called gay propaganda that was enacted in 2013 and strengthened in 2022, “posits that a simple slogan like ‘Gay is OK’ has the power to turn anyone who hears it into a homosexual,” she said during a Faculty Lecture Series presentation of her book in the spring of 2023. And Putin’s public efforts to crack down on groups such as Children 404, an online support group for LGBTQ teens, or a video of cadets twerking in sexually suggestive clothing and poses, Cassiday says, have only served to make the counterculture more visible and give rise to a new generation of activists. Called “an important book” and “well conceived, researched and executed,” *Russian Style* has also been hailed by reviewers as “a lot of fun.”

Some of the content, Cassiday says, came from classroom discussions that yielded fresh insights and perspectives. Students’ knack for searching the internet and following pop culture provided “whole new avenues of thought,” she says. “A student from China taking this course told me that the Russian media we were studying contained messaging about appropriate femininity almost identical to that in the Chinese media she encountered on a daily basis back home. It made me realize the global reach of what I originally thought was a specifically post-Soviet brand of post-feminism.”

At Williams since 1994, Cassiday’s research interests include performance studies and gender and sexuality studies in Russian culture. She teaches courses on Russian language, Russian and Soviet culture, and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. She has published extensively on topics ranging from Putin’s love of expensive kitsch to pop culture critiques of contemporary Russian gender roles. She is the author of *The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen* (2017) and co-editor of *Russian Performances: Word, Object, Action* (2018).

As an undergraduate at Grinnell College, Cassiday spent three weeks and then a semester in the Soviet Union, sparking a lifelong interest. Her most recent trip was in 2019, for research, a presentation at the European University of St. Petersburg and to accompany a Williams alumni trip to the Baltic Sea.

While Cassiday, who identifies as queer, would like to return, she acknowledges that the time likely won’t come soon. “I have many colleagues who, for very good reasons, feel the same way, simply because of what we study or how we feel about the war in Ukraine,” she says, adding that she hopes “actual democracy can someday flourish in Russia.”
In two award-winning sociology seminars, faculty and staff collaborate to deliver learning beyond the classroom.

What can students learn from places that don’t exist on the world map? According to Phi Hong Su, a surprisingly large amount.

“Places that want to be states—but aren’t—are a great way to think about nationalism,” says Su, assistant professor of sociology, who designed two award-winning courses on that very topic with colleagues from Williams’ library and museum.

Su’s scholarship focuses on borders and the people who cross them. Her courses include an introduction to sociology and a seminar on the sociological dimensions of American settlement in the South Caucasus.

Su began thinking about ways to delve into non-places. Whether unrecognized breakthrough republics, such as Somaliland in East Africa, or disputed pockets of land, like Abkhazia in the South Caucasus, Su imagined using these sites to invite students to think about nationalism and state formation. She also wanted to explore the connections between systemic violence and practices of documentation, such as surveillance or recordkeeping.

Su reached out to Christine Ménard, the head of research services and library outreach at Williams Libraries, and Elizabeth Gallerani, the curator of academic programs at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), to tap into their expertise and resources. Their planning and ideas, often discussed during strolls around campus, evolved into two wide-ranging and interdisciplinary courses: Nowheres and Paper Trails, now in their third and second years, respectively. Both seminars are cross-listed with global studies, and Paper Trails is also listed with science and technology studies.

In Nowheres, students “tease out what it means to be a country” and “probe the social, political and human costs of the exceptions to this general rule,” as the course description states. Students attend library workshops with Ménard, exploring a question that she says connects directly to pressing issues in librarianship: “How do we organize knowledge about nonexistent entities?”

As one example, Somaliland is an unrecognized state in East Africa. In Sawyer Library, four books about the territory are cataloged in four completely different ways. Ménard says, “Academic libraries rely on the Library of Congress classification system to describe and organize materials.

To classify territories around the world, the Library of Congress coordinates with the Board of Geographic Names, which gets its information from the U.S. State Department—which does not officially recognize Somaliland.

Information that slips outside of solid categories like these occupies an unstable position, Ménard says. Understanding how libraries categorize places in the world can open students’ eyes to the close connections between knowledge and power.

Students also spend time in WCMA’s Object Lab, a hybrid gallery-classroom space overseen by Gallerani, where they can view artworks connected to the subject matter. One piece Gallerani and Su chose for Nowheres was a painting by the San Francisco-based artist Lordy Rodriguez titled “Guantanamo Strait,” which at first glance appears to be a typical map of the U.S. On closer inspection, the map reveals itself to be unfamiliar: Puget Sound is on the East Coast, and a “Guantanamo Strait” runs through the middle of the country. By revealing what art and mapmaking have in common, Rodriguez’s work “perfectly encapsulates everything the course is trying to do,” says Gallerani.

The second course, Paper Trails, focuses on how states use documentation as a means of control. During workshops with Ménard and librarian Regan Schwartz, students consider how libraries retain information and for what purposes. They also explore questions around protecting personal data, which prompted library staff to draft new guidelines for privacy protections. Gallerani helps students reflect on museums’ legal and ethical obligations regarding ancestral remains in collections.

Back in the classroom, Su asks students to consider concepts raised by the course through the lens of contemporary global events.

In March, Su’s two courses received the prestigious Deborah Corner Innovative Teaching in International Studies Award, bestowed by the International Studies Association. The award is granted annually to an instructor “who has developed effective new approaches to teaching in the discipline,” according to the association’s website.

The courses’ innovations, Su says, come from having been designed by a three-person team with diverse expertise:

“They are our courses, from beginning to end.” Su says. “They developed through our conversations.”

Adds Ménard: “There’s a wonderful culture of partnership at Williams between the library, the museum and faculty.”

Students “tease out what it means to be a country” and “probe the social, political and human costs of the exceptions to this general rule.”

Photograph provided by WCMA

The course Nowheres makes use of the Williams College Museum of Art’s Object Lab to study the work Territory State by Lordy Rodriguez.
Detecting
Dark Matter

Deep under a mountain at the Gran Sasso National Laboratory in Italy, physics professor Graham Giovanetti has been contributing to an experiment that could unlock one of the biggest mysteries of the universe.

DarkSide-20k is a collaboration of more than 400 scientists, engineers and technicians, including Giovanetti and several of his students, that seeks to understand dark matter: material that has the gravitational pull to affect and shape the cosmos yet is invisible to telescopes and other astronomical instruments.

Contributors work from labs and universities on nearly every continent. Giovanetti is the only collaborator from a liberal arts college and is partnering with two project teams. Along with U.S.-based researchers, he is constructing the innermost chamber of the dark matter detector. He is also collaborating with researchers in the U.K. and Italy who are developing custom photosensors.

Once construction is complete in 2026, the experimental phase of DarkSide-20k will begin. One of the leading theories contends that dark matter consists of weakly interacting massive particles (WIMPs) that only interact with atoms through gravity or very rare collisions. DarkSide-20k aims to observe these collisions inside the detector, which is filled with 50 tons of liquefied argon. Giovanetti says he saw “opportunities for undergrads to make meaningful contributions to world-leading experiments. In addition, working side by side with undergraduates keeps me engaged directly in day-to-day activities in the lab, which is part of experimental physics I must enjoy.”

Three of his students have traveled to the U.K. to help produce the custom photosensors using silicon chips that are sensitive enough to detect a single photon. The sensors eventually will be aggregated into larger panels that will cover the entire detector chamber.

Giovanetti says he saw “opportunities for undergrads to make meaningful contributions to world-leading experiments.”

Jason Lu ’24, a prospective physics and political science major, and Zoe Kane ’25, who is studying physics and math, spent last summer at Royal Holloway, University of London, where they tested nearly 50 silicon chips to assess their functionality, performance and quality. Kane says using cryogenics and other advanced lab equipment was an invaluable experience. “I was able to quickly pick up on how to use the equipment and not just follow instructions but use it intuitively and have a deep understanding of what I was doing,” she says. “It was a completely different experience from doing a lab in class.”

Michael Bedard ’24, a physics and math major, has spent the spring 2023 semester at the University of Oxford, where he processed image scans from the chips, looking for dust contamination. While he says it was easy to become hyper-focused on his small role, he would remind himself “the tiles I’m handling will be installed inside a giant tub of cryogenic liquid] under a mountain in Italy. Suddenly, everything falls into the proper perspective.”

In a related experiment, another team of Giovanetti’s students is working with the Majorana Demonstrator at the Sanford Underground Research Facility in Lead, S.D. Giovanetti, Alex Rouyer ’24 and William Zhang ’22 reconfigured the existing detector, located inside a clean room nearly a mile underground, to try to make the first measurement of the decay of tantalum-180m (Ta-180m). Their work was funded in 2022 by a $100,000 Cottrell Scholar Award from the Research Corporation for Science Advancement, which Giovanetti is also using to support prospective physics majors who might need additional preparation for introductory physics courses.

“Just like DarkSide-20k, the Ta-180m measurement is looking for a signal that is many, many orders of magnitude smaller than the huge particle background rate we find ourselves bathed in on Earth,” Giovanetti says. “It also turns out that the Ta-180m decay rate is sensitive to the presence of dark matter.”

Giovanetti’s exploration of dark matter will continue this summer when he returns to Italy to test the detector. Lu also plans to return to test the photosensor prototype using common electron interactions and to benefit from the guidance of DarkSide-20k collaborators and graduate students.

“My mentors showed me that graduate school isn’t just about learning more,” Lu says. “It is just as much about empowering those that come after you to learn in your footsteps.”

For a full overview of the DarkSide-20k project, visit bit.ly/darkside20k.
The Seams of the Day

In her third collection of poems, Daywork, published in March by Milkweed Editions, English professor Jessica Fisher considers the longevity of art and the brevity of human life.

The titular poem, “Daywork,” takes its name from giornata—the name in fresco painting for the section of wet plaster that can be painted in a single day, where each “day” is marked by the hidden seams in a finished painting,” Fisher says. “I was interested in trying to map the relation of art to lived time.”

Understanding what can and can’t be seen is a theme of the collection, which draws on Fisher’s experiences of being a mother, seeing her parents age, watching a dear friend die and living through the Covid-19 pandemic.

In reviewing the collection, poet and essayist Franny Choi, former Levitt Artist-in-Residence at Williams, says of her friend and former colleague’s work, “It is precisely Fisher’s masterful command over the line that allows Daywork to revel in unruliness and to confront, one frame at a time, the beauty and uncertainty of ‘what it is to be alive now.’”

“I was interested in trying to map the relation of art to lived time.”

DAYWORK

Close your eyes, he said, and took my hand. There was something he wanted to show me: the seam called the giornata, raised like a scar, running through the fresco, which marks where one day’s work ended, the next began. I wanted to trace that limit, to know where the painter had found an edge and stopped, the scaffolding descended and the brushes washed, the figure left to dry in the dark room, his one eye painted open that will never see the rearing horse he rides—

This was the drama he wanted to show, don’t you think, or think of the women holding the room up, the stonelike caryatids with their gray, empty eyes—have you ever felt like that, like you are to keep very still while the others move around you? In birth I remember the midwife took my reins, is that right, she held me here and there and reached inside, she was touching my baby, I had nothing to do but let it happen, I let it happen, so well trained really, a vehicle, you ride me or drive me, oh but if you are the head I am the neck, I will turn you to my advantage, will make you see what is wrought through me—
