

# Williams

MAGAZINE SPRING 2020

## THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Students are drawn  
to serve in the local  
community **p.10**





A view from Goodrich  
Hall of Lasell Gym and  
Main Street beyond.



PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTT BARROW





## 2 Report

President Maud S. Mandel discusses strategic planning and innovation in the liberal arts.

## 3 Comment

Faculty and staff discuss pertinent issues, readers respond to magazine coverage, and the Directors' Cup is presented.

## 4 Notice

A call for alumni stories, a Rhodes Scholar, a statement on inquiry and inclusion, and more.

## 10 The Power of Presence

An increasing number of students are drawn to Pittsfield, Mass., to work in and learn from the community.

## 16 On Course

Highlights of some of the new classes being taught during the spring semester.

## 18 Complicated Collections

An exhibition raises questions about the role and responsibility of museums.

## 24 In Good Company

Stephen Sondheim '50 is the subject of a campus celebration and deep reflection on his musical theater—and Williams—legacies.

## 30 Study

Shedding light on the early atomic age, decoding drug resistance, Mughal power and art in India, and wearable tech.

## 36 Muse

UCLA Law Professor Jon D. Michaels '98 shares his thoughts on impeachment.



[facebook.com/williamscollege](https://facebook.com/williamscollege)



[@williamscollege](https://twitter.com/williamscollege)



[youtube.com/williamscollege](https://youtube.com/williamscollege)



[@williamscollege](https://instagram.com/williamscollege)

FRONT COVER PHOTO: DANA SMITH  
BACK COVER PHOTO: WILLJULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES  
WEST SIDE STORY, BERLIN, GERMANY, 1995

## Timeless and Timely

AT WILLIAMS, WE LOVE OUR TRADITIONS. WE CAN'T RESIST A CHORUS OF "the Mountains." There isn't enough purple clothing in the world to satisfy us. We cherish Mountain Day and grilled honeybuns.

The college also has a remarkable ability to innovate within our curriculum in ways relevant to each era while still being rooted in our tradition of close teacher-student relationships. You could say we have a knack for offering an education that is both timeless and timely.

Last fall, as part of the Strategic Planning process, Provost Dukes Love invited Williams faculty and staff to propose Strategic Academic Initiatives—projects that, to quote Dukes, "substantially reimagine an existing area of strength or respond to evolving definitions of a liberal arts education in the 21st century."



You could say we have a knack for offering an education that is both timeless and timely.

We received 23 proposals, from which many good ideas were channeled into one of our eight existing working groups. Other ideas warranted broader institutional consideration. With Dukes' and my support, four groups of faculty and staff have now outlined charges, conducted outreach and developed recommendations for leveraging Williams' established and emerging strengths in various areas. Here's a brief introduction to the work of each group:

**INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES:** Williams students need to understand the dynamics and consequences of our globalized world. This group is developing ideas for how the college can build on its already globally diverse campus population, its curriculum and its programs to promote what the authors call "persistent and profound engagement with the world."

**TECHNOLOGY AND THE LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCE; TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY:** We want Williams students to develop both technological skills and the capacity for critical thinking about technology's influence. One group is proposing ways to weave technology into teaching and scholarship across the whole curriculum, and a second

group is recommending ways to educate students about the social construction and ethical implications of scientific and technological knowledge.

**THE FUTURE OF THE ARTS:** This group is examining ideas on how to sustain and renew Williams' leadership in the arts during a time of interdisciplinary experimentation and increased attention to the voices and experiences of people historically excluded from artistic canons and discourse.

All of these groups have published draft reports for the community to review. I encourage you to explore them and share your thoughts at [williams.edu/strategic-planning](http://williams.edu/strategic-planning). The recommendations are just the newest expression of Williams' talent for evolving our curriculum in ways both timeless and timely.

I'm grateful to you and our whole community for this good work, and I'm proud that we're about to extend Williams' long tradition of innovation in the liberal arts.

## Williams

SPRING 2020 | VOL. 114 NO. 3

**EDITOR IN CHIEF** Amy T. Lovett  
**ASSISTANT EDITOR** Shannon O'Brien  
**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS** Julia Munemo, Greg Shook  
**STUDENT ASSISTANTS** Carolyn Kim '22, Sarah Sutton '21  
**CREATIVE DIRECTION** 2COMMUNIQUE

**EDITORIAL OFFICES**  
 P.O. Box 676, Williamstown, MA 01267-0676  
**TEL:** 413.597.4278 **FAX:** 413.597.4158  
**EMAIL:** [magazine@williams.edu](mailto:magazine@williams.edu)  
**WEB:** [magazine.williams.edu](http://magazine.williams.edu)

**ADDRESS CHANGES/UPDATES**  
 Bio Records, 75 Park St., Williamstown, MA 01267-2114  
**TEL:** 413.597.4399 **FAX:** 413.597.4178  
**EMAIL:** [alumni.office@williams.edu](mailto:alumni.office@williams.edu)  
**WEB:** [alumni.williams.edu/updatemyprofile](http://alumni.williams.edu/updatemyprofile)

*Williams Magazine* (USPS No. 684-580) is published in November, January, March, May, July and September and distributed free of charge by Williams College. Opinions expressed in this publication may not necessarily reflect those of Williams College or of the Society of Alumni.

All photography copyright © Williams College, unless noted.

Periodical postage paid at Williamstown, MA 01267 and additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:**  
 Send address changes to Williams Magazine, 75 Park St., Williamstown, MA 01267-2114

**WILLIAMS COLLEGE Board of Trustees**  
 Maud S. Mandel, *President*  
 Liz Beshel Robinson '90, *Board Chair*  
 Keli Gail, *Secretary to the Board*

Elizabeth A. Andersen '87 | Timothy A. Barrows '79  
 Thomas M. Belk '77 | Jillian E. Charles '91  
 Noriko Honda Chen '89 | Valerie A. DiFebo '84  
 William C. Foote '73 | O. Andreas Halvorsen '86  
 Jeffrey S. Harleston '82 | Gretchen E. Howard '95  
 Cooper Campbell Jackson '89 | Leila H. Jere '91  
 Mariam B. Naficy '91 | Kate Queeney '92  
 Michele Y. Johnson Rogers '79  
 Nathan K. Sleeper '95 | Jonathan D. Sokoloff '79  
 Mark R. Tercek '79 | Sarah Mollman Underhill '80  
 Martha Williamson '77 | Gregory H. Woods '91  
 Tom Gardner '79, *President, Society of Alumni, attends meetings by invitation of the Trustees*



## QUOTED

"Adequate resources in childhood matter a lot for self-sufficiency and well-being later in life. If we restrict benefits available to children who will grow up to be adults, in the long run we may be doing more harm than good."

—TARA WATSON,  
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS,  
in a Jan. 29 *PBS NewsHour* digital story  
about a new Trump administration  
rule that creates a "wealth test" for  
immigrants trying to enter the U.S.

"This should be a major convenience for the community, including Williams' students, faculty and staff. It also will complement nicely the goods and services available in the middle of town."

—MATTHEW SHEEHY, ASSOCIATE  
VICE PRESIDENT FOR FINANCE,  
quoted in a Jan. 16 *Berkshires* story  
on the partnership between Williams  
and Berkshire Health Systems  
that is bringing a pharmacy to  
Spring Street in Williamstown

"Being a mathematician and professor has made me a better mother, and vice versa. There's no separation between my personal life and my professional life. That line is extremely blurry."

—PAMELA E. HARRIS,  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF  
MATHEMATICS,  
quoted in a *Massive Science*  
profile published on Jan. 16

"Not only did Ashoka instruct his administrators to respect and protect members of all persuasions, but he also encouraged his people to mutually respect one another's sects: Concord, as he notes in one of his edits, is commendable."

—APARNA KAPADIA,  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
OF HISTORY,  
in a Jan. 26 *Scroll.in* essay:  
"Why Ashoka, the emperor of India  
who inspired the symbols of new  
republic, is still worth reading"

## LETTERS

## PRIDE

I just finished reading the current issue of *Williams Magazine* (fall 2019). Congratulations to one and all—the most attractive and fascinating issue I can remember. Williams has certainly come a long way since I was there. I was especially proud to see the picture and description of my classmate and freshman entry-mate Mike Dively '61 ("Pride in Progress"). I knew he had lived an amazing life as a legislator and swimmer, but I didn't know about his endowments to support LGBTQIA life at Williams. What a great way to make a contribution to one's alma mater! And how



Mike Dively '61

wonderful to get a look into President Mandel's pedagogy ("Profound Questions")—bringing Mark Hopkins and his log into the 21st century—although I expect no one would be more surprised than Hopkins to read this issue and see the changes in the student body and the presidency! Keep up the great work.

—JOHN S. MAYHER '61, MOUNTAINHOME, PA

## CALLED TO THE MOUNTAINS

Warm memories popped up when I saw the picture of smiling Williams people climbing Stone Hill on Mountain Day ("Called to the Mountain," fall 2019). I was an elementary pupil at the Walter G. Mitchell School in the 1940s. It seems Mountain Day on Stone Hill happened for us every week. There was no Clark museum or organized Williams expedition. We scooted up to the top, climbed trees and parachuted down (breaking a bone or two), picked blueberries and nibbled on lunches in the grass. The town was below and Pine Cobble above. Lo and behold, suddenly, one day, Pine Cobble, The Dome, Mount Williams, Berlin Mountain and Mount Greylock appeared to us as large as a necklace around Williamstown. We were older and bigger and couldn't resist. We climbed them all. Mountains do that to people.

—ERNEST "ERNIE" IMHOFF '59, BALTIMORE, MD

## HONORED

"It's an honor for me to celebrate all the work that our coaches do—our athletes do—every day. ... This, combined with our academic excellence, makes me really proud to be the athletic director at Williams College."

—ATHLETIC DIRECTOR LISA MELENDY (seated, to the right of the cup), speaking during the presentation of Williams' 22nd Directors' Cup on Jan. 18, 2020, held in the newly refurbished Towne Field House in honor of the women's track team, which won the NCAA indoor title in March 2019.





# NOTICE





HOME 17 VISITOR 14  
0:57 TIME  
4 QTR 2 DOWN 10 TO GO

## SHEER GREATNESS

Last fall, ESPN.com published its list of the 150 greatest coaches in college football's 150-year history. Coming in at number 138 was Williams' own Dick Farley, who led the team to a 114-19-3 record from 1987 to 2003. This photo, taken by *Berkshire Eagle* photographer Bill Tague, captures the moment Farley capped his first perfect season, at home against Amherst in 1989. He'd go on to six undefeated seasons and four conference titles, as well as a 128-game streak without losing back-to-back games—all of which, ESPN wrote, points to his "sheer greatness."







Pamela E. Harris



Charlie Doret



Michelle Apotsos



Greg Phelan



Leo Goldmakher



Susan Godlonton



Corinna Campbell

## NEWLY TENURED

IN JANUARY, SEVEN WILLIAMS faculty members were promoted to associate professor with tenure, effective July 1. *Williams Magazine* asked what they enjoy most about their role as educators. Learn more about their teaching and research at [bit.ly/wmstenure2020](http://bit.ly/wmstenure2020).

"I have seen my students succeed in the face of adversity, mathematical or otherwise, and they taught me the value of a community and the importance of belonging. Working with them has been the greatest joy in my professional career."

—PAMELA E. HARRIS, MATHEMATICS

"Integral to teaching at Williams is the formation of close partnerships with students. These start slowly, but suddenly you realize the students are contributing ideas that none of you could have arrived at alone. Witnessing that moment, the transition from student into fully formed colleague, is the very best part of the job."

—CHARLIE DORET '02, PHYSICS

"Faculty and students at Williams don't exist in a strictly hierarchical relationship. They can be colleagues—even collaborators—on progressive, groundbreaking research and scholarship in

ways that not only contribute to furthering cutting-edge fields of study but also in a manner both mutually enriching and fulfilling."

—MICHELLE APTSOS, ART

"I had a student fail an exam, and I told him, 'I believe in fairness, but I also believe in grace; I'll help you get where you need to be.' He not only got there, but years later he shared that story as he was about to be baptized."

—GREG PHELAN, ECONOMICS

"Williams students are willing to challenge me—they don't take my explanations on faith. Not only has this made me a better

teacher, it's also led to memorable and spirited class discussions."

—LEO GOLDMAKHER, MATHEMATICS

"I love being surrounded by colleagues and students who are so committed to learning, so curious about the world around them and so generous about sharing their perspectives and experiences."

—SUSAN GODLONTON, ECONOMICS

"It is such a joy helping students expand their musical horizons and witnessing their relationships to music evolve. Their expressive and intellectual risks are a source of perpetual inspiration."

—CORINNA CAMPBELL, MUSIC

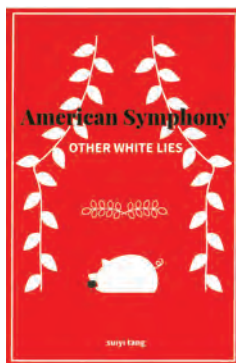
### RECENTLY PUBLISHED

## AMERICAN SYMPHONY

**Suiyi Tang** '20 was about to leave Williams for a year on a Wilmers travel fellowship when her advisor, Professor of American Studies Dorothy Wang, made a suggestion. "She remarked that I should write something for others who were also trapped in the empty parking lot of queer Asian American womanhood," Tang says. "She put it in more eloquent terms. I chose the unruly metaphor of empty parking lot because language is an architecture. It enables various structures of feeling, but it's decidedly not an equal-access infrastructure."

The result of Tang's writing is *American Symphony: Other White*

*Lies*, published by Civil Coping Mechanisms in fall 2019. The book is described as "a portrait of a portrait, a mirror's reflection of someone that's gone missing, a speculative memoir."



What's next for Tang, an American studies and comparative literature major who has published essays and cultural criticisms in *The Offing* and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, among others? "I am back to the drawing board to hone my craft and sharpen my mind," she says. "This means, hopefully, graduate school, and a lot of scribbling, wherever I am."

### ALSO IN PRINT

- *Beyond the North Wind: Russia in Recipes and Lore*, by **Darra Goldstein**, the Willcox B. and Harriet M. Adsit Professor of Russian, Emerita (Ten Speed Press)
- *The Book Keeper: A Memoir of Race, Love and Legacy*, by **Julia McKenzie Munemo**, *Williams Magazine* contributing writer (Swallow Press)
- *Cosmos: The Art and Science of the Universe*, co-authored by **Jay Pasachoff**, Chair and Field Memorial Professor of Astronomy (Reaktion Books)

See more works and submit information about new publications at [ephsookshelf.williams.edu](http://ephsookshelf.williams.edu).



## ON INQUIRY AND INCLUSION

IN NOVEMBER, PRESIDENT MAUD S. MANDEL and the Faculty Steering Committee, chaired by Professor of Classics Amanda Wilcox, released a statement on inquiry, expression and inclusion at Williams. The statement was informed by recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee on Inquiry and Inclusion and reviewed by the entire faculty.

The statement affirms Williams' commitment to free inquiry and inclusion, stating: "At Williams, our educational mission is to cultivate an inclusive environment in which each member of our community is equally respected and equally invited to speak and be heard. This goal unites the college's core commitments to freedom of expression and inquiry and to building a community in which everyone can live, learn and thrive, as enunciated in our codes of conduct for faculty, staff and students."

In an announcement to the campus community, Wilcox wrote that the statement is the "product of a sustained, thoughtful consideration of both general questions and the specific circumstances and commitments" of the college. She added that the "whole process has been an exercise in speaking and listening to one another respectfully and openly, as members of a community whose idioms are quite various and who have serious differences of opinion and even, sometimes, of values, but who are united in a shared mission to teach and learn from one another."

Mandel, meanwhile, thanked the community for "the intelligence and passion that many of you have shown in discussing, debating and sometimes protesting this most crucial issue."

"Freedom of expression and inquiry matters. Inclusion matters. Both values are essential to the health of any community and especially to a healthy learning community," Mandel added. "For Williams to continue reaching its highest educational aspirations, we need to maximize our commitment to both values. We need to run toward the hard things."

Read the college's entire statement at [bit.ly/inquiryinclusionstatement](http://bit.ly/inquiryinclusionstatement), and read more about the ad hoc committee and its report at [bit.ly/inquiryinclusioncommittee](http://bit.ly/inquiryinclusioncommittee).

### AT A GLANCE

## SEEKING ALUMNI STORIES

The Williams College Society of Alumni is turning 200 next year, and alumni will be celebrating throughout 2021 in ways large and small. As part of the early planning, a team of alumni volunteers is seeking stories about the ways Ephs connect with each other and with Williams. The stories will become part of a larger narrative about the alumni body and its past, present and future. Alumni are encouraged to send stories—good, bad, surprising or still developing—to [alumnistories@williams.edu](mailto:alumnistories@williams.edu). A volunteer may be in touch for additional information or for permission to publish or share.



When it's not reunion or homecoming, some special ways I gather with alums include \_\_\_\_\_.



THE MOST SURPRISING PLACE I'VE RUN INTO A FELLOW EPH IS \_\_\_\_\_.

TO ME, BEING AN EPH MEANS \_\_\_\_\_.



When I graduated from Williams, I never dreamed I would \_\_\_\_\_.



An unexpected way an Eph impacted my life as an alum is \_\_\_\_\_.



I'D BE A MORE INVOLVED/ENGAGED WILLIAMS ALUM IF \_\_\_\_\_.



IF I COULD GO BACK IN TIME TO MY GRADUATION, THE CAREER ADVICE I'D GIVE MY STUDENT SELF IS: \_\_\_\_\_.



## A CLOSER LOOK



Some highlights of the  
Sterling Allen Brown  
Collection at Williams

## MOMENTOUS AND TIMELY

THE CHAPIN HALL COLUMNS ARE IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZABLE BEHIND A young Sterling Allen Brown, who strikes a contemplative pose in the black and white photograph—hands in his pockets, face turned from the camera, looking off to his left, snow blanketing the ground. Brown, a 1922 graduate of Williams, went on to become one of the country's most influential poets and scholars, rooting his poetry in folklore and Black vernacular.

Now this iconic photograph, along with books, manuscripts, letters and more, are housed in the Williams Libraries—a donation to the college from the Brown family.

Lisa Conathan, head of Special Collections, says the new archive will be “the cornerstone of our 20th-century American literary collections.” And Rhon S. Manigault-Bryant, associate professor of Africana studies, calls the acquisition “serendipitous, momentous and timely. ... We anticipate that faculty, students, alumni and researchers alike will engage with his materials and learn a great deal about Black culture, poetry and the instrumental legacies of Black educators.”

Resources to catalog the material and make it accessible to researchers were made available through the Sterling Brown 1922 Endowment, established in 1990 by the Williams Black Alumni Network, with supporting gifts from various reunion classes.

## ZAKI NAMED DEAN OF THE FACULTY

Professor of Psychology Safa Zaki will become Williams' next dean of faculty, starting July 1. She succeeds Cluett Professor of Religion Denise Buell, who announced she is returning to teaching and research in July.

Zaki is chair of the cognitive science program and teaches courses including Experimentation and Statistics; Concepts: Mind, Brain and Culture; and Great Debates in Cognition. Her research with students on how the mind organizes the visual world into categories has been published in journals including *Psychological Science*, *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* and the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition*. The National Institute of Mental Health has funded her studies.

She is deeply involved in college governance, serving as chair of both the Committee on Priorities and Resources and the Faculty Steering Committee, among others. She also served on the most recent Presidential Search Committee and leads two strategic planning groups.

“In her 18 years at Williams, Safa has earned broad respect as a collaborative educator and leader and as an advocate for both faculty and staff,” Williams President Maud S. Mandel wrote in announcing Zaki's appointment. “We're fortunate that someone of her abilities and experience will continue Williams' tradition of filling senior administrative positions from within the faculty ranks.”



Safa Zaki



## AGENT OF CHANGE

WILLIAMS' 40TH RHODES SCHOLAR, SUMMIYA NAJAM '20, AN ECONOMICS MAJOR from Islamabad, Pakistan, aims to bridge the gap between policy and minority experiences. Before she heads to Oxford in the fall, she spoke with *Williams Magazine* about her passion for leadership and social justice.

### What inspired you?

After coming across the economic and institutional marginalization of Muslim women in Pakistan and the United States, I recognized the centrality of effective policymaking in giving voice and agency to the marginalized.

### Why study economics?

An M.Phil. in economics will equip me with the necessary knowledge and understanding of theory, techniques and

tools to study the effect of policies on marginalized communities. I'm excited about the opportunity to learn and grow alongside like-minded scholars who want to give back to their communities.

### What's your hope?

I aspire to better understand how specific marginalized populations react to economic policies using the lens of econometric identification and behavioral economics.

## GRANTS THAT ADVANCE

Two faculty members have received a total of more than \$250,000 in grants to support their ongoing research in computer science and in climate change research and advocacy, respectively.

With a grant from the National Science Foundation, Assistant Professor of Computer Science Shikha Singh's research looks at the problem of verifying that computation outsourced to third-party service providers has been performed correctly and aims to advance our understanding of the role of incentives in algorithms, which has wide applications to areas such as crowdsourcing, cloud computing and social computing.

Lecturer in Religion and Anthropology/Sociology Kim Gutschow continues her work funded by the National Geographic Society. The project examines how climate change and modernization

have affected the lives of people in the Ladakh region of India, develops local strategies for coping with their effects and trains and empowers women and youth to advocate for site-specific climate-smart policy and interventions within the region.



## IN MEMORIAM



Williams said goodbye to William "Bill" Chase Grant Jr., the Samuel Fessenden Clarke Professor of Biology, Emeritus, in November 2019. He was 95.

During his 35 years at the college, he served as chair of

the biology department and chair of the Science Executive Committee. He also spent a year at Oxford University as a visiting research scientist.

Colleagues remember Grant as an educator who

was knowledgeable about all the subdisciplines within his field. "He could talk with anyone about their work, understand its importance and, with his questions or comments, promote new

ideas and interpretations," says Heather Williams, the William Dwight Whitney Professor of Biology.

Grant's survivors include two children.



An increasing number of students are drawn to Pittsfield, Mass., to work in and learn from the community.

# THE POWER OF PRESENCE

IN THE FALL OF 2017, HALLE SCHWEIZER '21 WALKED into EOS@Eagle Street, an alternative high school program in Pittsfield, Mass., with high hopes and an offering: a party-sized sandwich platter from a local deli. Ten minutes later, she watched as a section of the sub she had purchased for the students bounced off the head of one of their teachers.

Schweizer, who, with classmate Michael Crisci '21, was working as a classroom mentor, says she was startled. Back on campus, snacks were a tried-and-true way to boost attendance and break the ice at meetings. But that day, the eruption of rowdy camaraderie served as a teachable moment for the Williams students.

"It was crazy, it was wild, but we knew that we wanted to be there," Schweizer says, recalling that first visit with a

laugh. "These were kids who had vibrant personalities, who had so much potential, so many talents and so many things to share about themselves, and I remember being so excited to get to know them better and to get to know the teachers and to support them in what was just a really hectic space."

EOS, shorthand for Educational Opportunities for Success, is just one of several programs drawing an increasing number of Williams students to Pittsfield as volunteers, paid staff or researchers seeking to learn from and have an impact on the community. In part, their engagement reflects a commitment by the college to boost experiential learning opportunities, whether on campus, in the region or around the world, says Paula Consolini, Williams' Adam Falk Director of the Center for Learning in Action (CLiA).

BY ABE LOOMIS



**Halle Schweizer '21,**  
a classroom mentor  
with EOS@Eagle Street  
in Pittsfield, Mass.



At the same time, there's been "an uptick in the number of students interested in working with under-resourced students and the incarcerated," Consolini says. "I'd conservatively estimate a 15% increase in participation over the past two years."

There has also been an uptick in innovation. Student-initiated programs fostering sustained support for communities close to campus are springing up with new regularity. EOS Mentoring (the Williams pipeline to EOS@Eagle Street), Justice League (a mentoring program at Pittsfield's John T. Reid Middle School), Dig Deep (a book club for young men of color at Taconic High School) and others have launched and rapidly expanded in just a few years. And they continue to operate even after the founders move on or graduate.

Participation in EOS Mentoring has increased tenfold since 2017—with 20 Williams students working there last semester alone.

"When we first started the program, it was just Michael and me," Schweizer says. "Now, there are more eyes, more ears, more people to listen to the kids, more people to help tutor, more students to help promote discussion, more students to play games. The power of presence is so essential to the work that we do."

**E**OS@EAGLE STREET IS LOCATED IN A FLATIRON-style building that houses several state offices on Pittsfield's Eagle Street. The high schoolers enrolled there take classes in science, math, English, history and deportment, focusing on social and behavioral skills. Working with CLiA to coordinate transportation, Williams students make the 20-mile trip several times per week, leading activities such as tutoring, painting or cooking, playing Uno and other games with the younger students, or just checking in with participants about their weekends or lives at home.

The high schoolers are considered "at risk," a label that Schweizer and Crisci work to unpack with the Williams students they train to work at EOS. The program takes a "trauma-informed approach" to educational support, Schweizer says—responding to a thrown sandwich, for instance, with concern and compassion rather than judgment or anger.

"A trauma-informed approach doesn't mean making excuses for problematic behavior or 'diagnosing trauma' in students who display inappropriate behavior," she says. "It means facilitating with empathy and with an understanding of the varying contexts from which students come to school every single day."

"Particularly in EOS," Schweizer says, "where we work with a population that has experienced a lot of trauma in the aggregate, these students are considered 'at-risk' because their current circumstances at home, in school and in their respective social lives make them more susceptible

to juvenile delinquency, poverty, substance use, dropping out of school, etc. Many of these kids are just looking to feel accepted and find some predictability in their lives."

Schweizer and Crisci—who met at Williams during a five-week program for incoming students from under-represented groups, including those who are among the first generation in their families to attend college—say their work at EOS is one way to support students in circumstances not far removed from their own. Both describe themselves as coming from low-income backgrounds, and both have a desire to share with others some of the advantages they have accrued at Williams.

"I see a lot of the same issues in Pittsfield as I do back home in New York City," says Crisci, who, like Schweizer, is an economics major. "This experience gives me an understanding of how populations are living, and economics is at the center of so many of their issues. I grew up in a primarily Latinx area that was lower income. Coming from that background, Williams is a very different atmosphere, and so it was important for me to stay grounded in the work that I was interested in doing. For me, it's always important to be doing work that's giving back."

The youngest of three siblings, Schweizer grew up in Kankakee County, Ill., an hour south of Chicago. Her parents divorced when she was 8. Her father was addicted to alcohol, and she was raised by her mother, who worked nights in the beauty department at Walgreens while attending college full time, earning an associate's degree and then a bachelor's in social work. Even as their family struggled, Schweizer says, her mother impressed upon her that there were others in greater need—and that helping them was important.

"I would say my mom is my main inspiration in the work that I do at Williams," Schweizer says of her community engagement. "Obviously, she didn't make a high wage at Walgreens, but what money she did have she always was sure to give back to people who had even less. Now that I'm at Williams, where I'm surrounded by an abundance of wealth and resources, I'm in a position to do even more. I can model what she gave me and the skills and values she showed me and incorporate those into my new setting."

Attending Williams was daunting at first, Schweizer says. She graduated from a high school where fewer than half the students went on to a four-year college. She had never heard of Williams before she applied through QuestBridge, a nonprofit that connects students from low-income backgrounds to leading institutions of higher education. She cried when she learned she was accepted, she says, but they weren't happy tears.

"It was more like, 'Holy crap, I'm going to Massachusetts,'" Schweizer says.

Then her mother, who by that time was assisting a client at a courthouse in Illinois, bumped into a judge she knew and casually mentioned Schweizer's college plans.



**Michael Crisci '21,**  
a classroom mentor  
with EOS@Eagle  
Street in Pittsfield.

“Like me, she was used to people saying, ‘Where’s that?’ or ‘What’s that?’” Schweizer says of her mother. “But this person actually recognized Williams and said, ‘Wow, good for her. That’s amazing. That’s such a good school.’ My mom said, ‘Oh, I’m surprised you know it.’ He said, ‘Trust me, the right people will know Williams College.’”

As the realization dawned that she had enrolled at an elite school with a far-reaching network, Schweizer says she felt both thankful and excited. But it also prompted some difficult feelings. She says she is acutely aware that being poor in America can be considered a personal or moral failing rather than a function of circumstance, and

her awareness sharpened her sense of the role that class and luck play in shaping experience. She sees those factors at work in the lives of the young people she works with in Pittsfield, where almost 50% of public-school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

“So many of these students experience things that they didn’t ask for, they didn’t sign up for,” Schweizer says. “Many of them are stigmatized as ‘bad’—disrespectful, druggies, dropouts and so on. And they know it. They aren’t [blind] to the ways people view them. I can’t fully empathize with many of the things they have experienced. But what I can relate to is this: knowing there is



a stigma attached to you, and that other people can see it. I can relate to that feeling—I've felt it at Williams—and I think we all enjoy getting to know each other beyond the stigmas."

Finding common ground is where the work often begins, says Schweizer, who plans to work as a youth-advocacy lawyer. During one early visit to EOS, she says she bonded with a Pittsfield student over a shared love of football.

"He had a Tom Brady jersey on, and I'm from the Chicago area," she says. "I said, 'Wow, I'm not super-excited to see you wearing that jersey, but I'm happy to see you anyway.' He was kind of taken aback. I think he's used to that kind of bantering with his peers, but he didn't expect this random girl from Williams College to come in and converse in a similar way."

Those kinds of interactions—and the willingness of Williams students to keep showing up—lead to deeper relationships, says Spencer Fraker, a science and math teacher at EOS. His students, he says, are sometimes hesitant to trust people.

"A lot of what the Williams students have brought to our program is the ability to develop positive relationships, because they come back week after week," Fraker says.

Crisci agrees. "Most of the work that we do is building relationships and friendships with the students," he says. "A lot of the students we're working with don't have people that are necessarily there to listen to them and their ideas and thoughts, and so [a lot of it is] really just us being consistent and listening."

Crisci, Schweizer and their peers have also found ways to harness resources back at Williams. High schoolers from EOS and middle schoolers from the Justice League mentoring program have taken field trips to the Williams College Museum of Art and participated in sessions in Lasell Gymnasium with members of Williams' basketball teams. Crisci says the visits spark curiosity and creativity, provide opportunities for bonding and fun, and expose the participants to life beyond middle and high school—and beyond Pittsfield.


Over time, the effects of the steady engagement have been palpable.

"When we first started EOS, it wasn't like we were embraced with open arms by the students," says Crisci, who is researching the efficacy of such programs through a Sentinels Summer Research Fellowship and who plans to study criminal justice reform. "What Halle and I had to learn quickly is that we had to be consistent to build those relationships. The more consistently we're there, the more accepted we are there—and the more Williams students who are interested in this work can go [to Pittsfield] and experience this as well. It's our third year, and we can definitely see the growth in how they're actually excited to see us now. It takes time to build community."

**Dig Deep founder  
Jaelon Moaney '19  
in Washington, D.C.**







**A**SIMILAR PASSION FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY led Jaelon Moaney '19 to establish Dig Deep, a book club for young men of color at Taconic High School in Pittsfield, in 2016. Run by The Society of the Griffins, a Williams group dedicated to fostering "a brotherhood for men of color while creating equitable pathways to success at Williams College," Dig Deep brings together 20 to 30 high schoolers and a similar number of Williams students to discuss in small groups a single book each semester.

During the program's first year, Dig Deep delved into Ta-Nahisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, written as a letter from the author to his teenage son about living as a Black person in the United States. Conversations within the group soon turned to questions about how to talk with family members and peers about the complex themes Coates addresses in his book.

"Coates asks, 'How do I live free in this Black body?'" Moaney says. "The students wanted to know how they could express these ideas to people at their school who weren't in the club, or how to talk about them with their communities. So, we switched roles and gave them a chance to practice. That way they came to sit in the driver's seat."

"One of the central missions of The Society of the Griffins is to tap into the local community," says Moaney, who served as the group's president for three years. "We find that our book club members take these conversations into the locker room and the classroom and their own clubs—and that's the point. We want these conversations to move in spaces where the students are the ones facilitating them. That's a very empowering experience."

Empowering others, particularly young people, is one of Moaney's guiding principles. Now a legislative correspondent in Washington, D.C., for U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, Moaney aspires to serve his home state in elected office. His LinkedIn profile features a photo of the Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse on the Chesapeake Bay—a nod to the fact that his family has lived for 10 generations in Talbot County on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Moaney grew up in the town of Easton. As a high school senior, he held a seat on his local school board; at the end of his term he successfully advocated for a second student seat. He led youth Bible studies at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Chestertown, where he remains an active member, and participated in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

At Williams, he majored in political science. His senior honors thesis, "Something on the Inside, Is Working on the Outside," is a 160-page book that explores the past and present of the Black tidewater communities of the Chesapeake. The work includes a long chapter on the history of Maryland's political battles over education and the ongoing racial and economic inequalities of the

Eastern Shore. Moaney has since released several episodes in a related video documentary series and is an advisor to Chesapeake Heartland, a project sponsored by Washington College and the National Museum of African American History and Culture that is designed to shed light on lesser-known African American contributions to that history.

"1619 has a distinct meaning for the Chesapeake Bay," Moaney says, noting that the area is the first crucible of the African diaspora in North America and the birthplace of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. "For those of us that didn't leave and just stayed there the whole time, we've seen it all the way up until the present day. So, I think a lot of what has influenced the work I was able to do at Williams, and that I'm doing now, I inherited. I wouldn't describe it as revolutionary. It's just what I've seen my ancestors do before me."

As a Williams student, reaching out to the surrounding community via Dig Deep was a natural outgrowth of that work.

"This is something I had been used to at home," Moaney says. "Speaking to people. Getting into the communities and listening and seeing what they actually need and then coming up with a solution. And I wanted to know about the children of color in the region. Not just Williamstown or North Adams, but Pittsfield and Berkshire County as a whole."

He says he recalls attending a Black Student Union meeting at Williams and "asking some of the older students, 'What have you been doing locally? Are there really desperate areas of need?'" Williams keeps you really busy, but I had some time on my hands and wanted to devote that time back."

Like Schweizer and Crisci, Moaney felt a pull to get off campus and do good.

"Williams is a beautiful place," Moaney says. "It's a very prestigious place. But beyond the campus and beyond the town of Williamstown, the prospects for life are very different. I needed to do this work to understand, not what it meant for me or my family to have me attending Williams, but what it meant for me to become a part of *that* community. Because I was living there."

Schweizer echoes Moaney's sentiment.

"It would be really, really easy to get caught up in 'Williams College' and all of the fanfare that surrounds it," she says. "We recognized that we wanted to stay humble and remember how we got here and why we're here and remember all the people we know and love that just haven't had the opportunity to be here."

"There are so many people who deserve these resources and this wealth and access that don't have it," she adds. "We want to share that." **W**

*Abe Loomis is a writer in New York. Additional reporting by Julia Munemo, contributing writer for Williams Magazine.*









# ON COURSE

In addition to the usual offerings, students had 77 new courses to choose from during the spring semester. Among the highlights are *The Economics and Ethics of CO<sub>2</sub> Offsets*, taught by Ralph Bradburd, the David A. Wells Professor of Political Economy, which examines whether offsets are successful and if there's something inherently wrong about selling or buying the right to pollute; *Opioids and the Opioid Crisis: The Neuroscience Behind an Epidemic*, taught by Assistant Professor of Psychology Shivon Robinson '11, which looks at the scientific, historical and societal context surrounding the use and abuse of opioids; and *Monsters of the Renaissance*, taught by Assistant Professor of French Cécile Tresfels, in which students are analyzing a variety of works from 16th-century France, "when writers, doctors and travelers developed a critical reflection on monstrosity in order to deal with otherness," as stated in the course catalog.



# COMPLICATED COLLECTIONS

During a visit to Williams for his exhibition *The invisible enemy should not exist*, conceptual artist Michael Rakowitz shared his thoughts on the role and responsibility of museums, the relationship between artworks and ghosts, and how his work connects on many levels to two of the college museum's most important works of ancient art.

TO WHOM DO ANTIQUITIES BELONG? IT'S A COMPLICATED question, one that the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) engages with often in considering its own objects and exhibitions. A new exhibition, *The invisible enemy should not exist* (Room Z, Northwest Palace of Nimrud), on view through April 19, "adds yet another layer of complexity, nuance and possibility to our understanding of the role of the museum and our responsibility as both stewards and citizens," says Lisa Dorin, WCMA's deputy director for curatorial affairs and curator of contemporary art.

*The invisible enemy* places two of the museum's most important ancient objects—massive stone reliefs from the 9th century BCE palace of King Ashurnasirpal II—in conversation with re-creations of seven other panels among those lost when the palace was destroyed by ISIS in 2015.

The new panels are the work of artist Michael Rakowitz, who draws inspiration from his own Jewish Iraqi heritage and his family's history of exile. Food was central to his experience growing up in the United States, he says. And so, he uses wrappers from Middle Eastern foods and Arabic-English newspapers available to Iraqi communities living in the States to "reappear" these ancient objects as part of a long-term project.

In November, Rakowitz took part in a panel discussion led by Magnús Bernhardsson, Williams' Brown Professor of History and chair of Arabic studies, that included Old Testament and Hebrew Bible scholar Alison Acker Gruseke '82 and Clark Oakley Fellow Kirsten Scheid. Rakowitz also spoke with art history, Arabic studies, creative writing and history classes about WCMA's and other museums' complicated histories of collecting.



View of Winged  
Guardian Spirit (left)  
and Guardian Spirit from  
the Northwest Palace of  
King Ashurnasirpal II,  
Neo-Assyrian period, ca.  
880 BCE, gypsum, part  
of WCMA's permanent  
collection since 1851.



WCMA'S ASSYRIAN RELIEFS WERE THE FIRST OF THEIR kind to come to an American college or university. They were a gift in 1851 from the Rev. Dwight Whitney Marsh, Class of 1842, who procured them from British archaeologists during a mission to Mosul, Iraq. The panels were in storage for most of the 20th century until 2001, WCMA's 75th anniversary, when they were permanently installed in the Stoddard Gallery. Now they anchor *The invisible enemy*, which presents for the first time Rakowitz's re-creations alongside panels that survived, intact, for 3,000 years. As Dorin writes in the exhibition brochure, "Weaving these two narratives together across time and place, the exhibition invites a reconsideration of what objects ask of us."

During his visit, Rakowitz discussed the relationship between the archeological excavations of the 19th century and the modern-day looting and destruction that link WCMA's panels and his work to each other. As he related during the panel discussion:

"It was the existence of an antiquities market that allowed for these museums to be looted. ISIS destroyed the stuff that was too big to sell. What they could loot, they sold on

the black market, and that liquidation of those antiquities into finance is what helped fund their war machine. It was important for me to point to the fact that this is a story about displacement and destruction that does not begin and end with ISIS in 2015. It actually begins in the 1840s when [British archaeologist] Austen Henry Layard and the protagonists or antagonists, depending on your politics, descended on that site to displace those reliefs and to bring them into Western collections. Some of these pieces, when they were sent to the West, were broken up to save on shipping. And, in some cases, those Western collectors did not want to pay for the shipment of an entire panel, so excavators came up with a wonderful technique where they could simply slice off a piece of the gypsum. So a museum like the British Museum could have a piece that was the most palatable for their audience, which was the head. And this rubs up against some of the quotes that are paired with the work [in the WCMA exhibition], where people talk about how the beheadings were done very much like the beheadings of the Palmyrian people alongside the ruins of Palmyra or the Assyrian Christians alongside Nimrud or Nineveh when ISIS destroyed them. [Some of the work makes] an uncomfortable reunion, as I've allowed pieces to be temporarily un-beheaded, suturing them together.

"I had the fortune to get to know Dr. Donny George Youkhanna, the former director general of the National Museum of Iraq when it was looted, who was really generous in opening up about all the different stories about why it was looted. Everyone heard rumors that Uday Hussein [Saddam's eldest child] was running a smuggling ring, but Donny would show me an object and say, 'This piece has a really nice story. It was taken by a group of people who were in the museum at the time it was being looted, and they felt really bad that they couldn't protect everything. So, they decided to take this home and put it in very, very protective storage. And then when there was amnesty for the looters, and also the American army was finally protecting the site, they brought it back. And they said, 'Don't ask us for our names. We just wanted to protect this because we knew if we didn't, it would be sold.' In other cases, Donny very matter-of-factly told me that when you're facing the devastation of your country, and you're thinking about keeping your family alive, loot[ing] was a ticket out. There was this liquidation of the past to save the present and preserve a future."

DURING THE DISCUSSION, BERNHARDSSON NOTED THAT Rakowitz's own family's heritage "was essentially destroyed or wiped out in Iraq" and pointed out that the artist's work "creating new objects and giving old objects new life" is born of destruction. Rakowitz then shared some of his influences:

## AN UNBREAKABLE CYCLE

*Commentary from panelist Alison Acker Gruseke '82*

The ancient city of Nimrud sat 20 miles south of present-day Mosul. Built circa 1200 BCE, and then vastly renovated around 850 BCE by Ashurnasirpal II, King of Assyria, the site was excavated beginning in 1845. When British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard started turning up fantastic relics (two of which were gifted to Williams by the missionary Dwight Whitney Marsh, Class of 1842), Layard joined what Alison Acker Gruseke '82 called "an arms race among the great powers of the Old World."

Gruseke made her comments during a panel discussion in November with conceptual artist Michael Rakowitz, whose exhibition *The invisible enemy should not exist* frames WCMA's reliefs.

Many such reliefs were, in Gruseke's words, "spread like potato chips around New England by missionaries. They were often broken up to make shipping easier." Indeed, those in WCMA's collection bear the marks of such splits—observers can still see the cracks where the panels were bonded back together upon their arrival at Williams.

Gruseke, a scholar of the Old Testament and Hebrew Bible, is a visiting instructor at Yale Divinity School and has taught several Winter Study courses at Williams that center on the two Assyrian reliefs in WCMA's collection, contextualizing them within an understanding of the politics, religion, gender dynamics and culture of the Neo-Assyrian period.

Both reliefs feature figures with human bodies, though one of them has a bird head. "They come from a tradition of ancient wise men who can protect people from malevolent spirits," Gruseke said. "They were all around the palace, guarding entryways, hallways and corners. They're generally winged to show that they're deities, though we don't know why some are bird headed." —J.M.





The ancient ruins of Nimrud following the recapture of the ancient town on the outskirts of Mosul from jihadists of the Islamic State group on Nov. 15, 2016.

“My grandmother and grandfather fled Baghdad in 1947, and I grew up in their house on Long Island. What was on the floor was from Iraq. What was on the walls was from Iraq. What was coming out of the stereo was from Iraq, and what was coming out of the kitchen was definitely from Iraq. They immersed us in the place they had left with a lot of sadness and confusion. They were very proud to be from Baghdad, and they considered themselves Arab Jews. They had a bittersweet feeling about what they left behind, which I’m grateful for, because when one goes through those traumas, you can also go the other way, which is to forget. So then, at 16, I saw CNN images of [a completely different] Iraq—buildings being blown up, places I would never be able to visit. The place my grandparents fled to was destroying a place they fled from, and that created a split for me. I’ve always thought about trying to piece together those stories, mending those things, but always keeping the scar visible.”

RAKOWITZ’S VIBRANT WORKS ARE A NOD TO THE ORIGINAL reliefs in King Ashurnasirpal II’s palace, which were imbued with color but lost their tint with the passage of time. Today the gray panels in WCMA’s collection stand in stark contrast to the artist’s bright re-creations, which Rakowitz made from Arabic-English newspapers and materials used to package Iraqi food imported to the U.S. He explained to the audience how the complexities around importing Iraqi food also influenced his work:

“In 2004, I was living in Brooklyn, and I went to a grocery store my grandparents frequented. I saw a can of date syrup with Arabic writing and beautiful swaying palm trees, and when I brought it to the cash register, [the proprietor] said, ‘Your mother’s going to love this. It’s from Baghdad.’ But the label didn’t explain the syrup’s provenance, and he also said that importing products from Iraq would be bad business. I thought it would be good art.”



"I reopened my grandfather's import/export business [after the sanctions were lifted], bringing in goods from Iraq. I spent a lot of time in the empty store, which got me thinking about the empty museum in Iraq after it was looted in 2003. I started to look at all these things that surrounded me, like these date syrup cans that had to repress their provenance, and it made me think of the antiquities that were valuable because of their provenance. I started to think about antiquities coming back not as a reconstruction but as a reappearance, as a ghost that could haunt us. And so the reconstructions of these antiquities that are listed as missing, stolen, destroyed or unknown now wear the skin of a veiled provenance. And the desire was to create a situation where the viewer was going to be put into the position of an Iraqi looking at that space the day before ISIS destroyed it; to look at that room with its removals visible. This [exhibition] follows very closely some of the archaeological theories about what they think the color schemes were.

"So, I'm making these things out of the detritus of Middle Eastern food packaging and the Arabic-English newspapers—which help newly arrived refugees settle—that are given away for free in the supermarkets where I buy the food, and I realize my studio looks a lot like my mother's pantry. I'm using detritus to make things that have disappeared, but I'm making them out of materials that sustain those communities and allow for them to survive. There is joy in that packaging. There's color. And it allows for the color to return to those reliefs. We see them all as monochrome, and it's a little bit like blood returning to the veins. You get your color back. But they're also made out of

vulnerable materials, and it's guaranteed that, even though it's reappeared, one day it will disappear. But you're not a very good ghost unless you disappear at some point."

RAKOWITZ OFTEN LIKENS ART OBJECTS TO GHOSTS, "moving freely among dimensions," as Dorin writes in *The invisible enemy's* exhibition brochure. He "navigates the slippery domain of objects through a concept he calls '(g)hosting' that is inspired by a Duchamp multiple containing the words 'A Guest + A Host = A Ghost.'"

"In that way," Dorin writes, "an answer to the museum's dilemma might indeed lie in our own version of (g)hosting: being both host and guest in our institutions, welcoming in and ceding control, sharing our collection with others on equal terms with curiosity and empathy, and allowing objects to speak rather than always speaking for them."

The "dilemma" Dorin refers to in part has to do with the ethics of WCMA continuing to own and display the Assyrian reliefs. In response to a question about that ethical dilemma during the panel discussion, Rakowitz said:

"When conversations come up about what it means to decolonize a museum, or to address issues of accountability, [we see that] they're uncomfortable objects, inasmuch as they are teaching objects. They represent a whole lot of trauma in terms of how they got here and what has happened since. I want to be guided by people to whom those objects belong in determining what their future should be. I would like for those people in Iraq to add their voices to a discussion about what restitution or repatriation might look like. I think the end game of repatriation and restitution

## UNDERSTANDING ARTFARE

*Commentary from panelist Kirsten Scheid*

When Napoleon Bonaparte seized Rome in 1796, he stripped nobles' homes of statuary, paintings and relics. "That collection is what constituted the core of today's Louvre Museum," said anthropologist Kirsten Scheid, who holds a joint fellowship at Williams' Oakley Center and the Clark Art Institute.

Scheid talked about this so-called "artfare" as well as "aesthetic profiling" during the November panel discussion with conceptual artist Michael Rakowitz.

Aesthetic profiling "starts with the presumption that art is a universal category all humans have the capacity to make, recognize and cherish in the same way," Scheid said. "It therefore becomes grounds for advocating oppression against those who do not meet a desired profile."

Bonaparte's actions drew international outrage that led French artists and scholars to publish a treatise asserting that Romans were "lazy, superstitious barbarians who neither respected nor deserved their treasures," Scheid said. She added that the shift of artworks from Rome to Paris meant that "Rome ceased to be the center of art and was relegated to being the cradle of art. Paris became the city of light, the obligatory training ground for generations of artists until World War II."

A similar scenario is playing out in Iraq, which Scheid became interested in when the U.S. invaded in 1991. Iraq once provided free art education and was a site of "flourishing art making," she said. After the war, though, a generation of highly trained

artists began reproducing mainly Orientalist pieces they knew would sell. "This is how people could live in Iraq under siege," she said.

The 2003 looting of the National Museum of Iraq likewise led to artfare and aesthetic profiling. Because there was a market for the pieces from the museum, they were stolen by people desperate to survive. The U.S. government simultaneously promoted a story—thanks, Scheid said, to a video clip of a teenager stealing a single vase—that Iraq had very little valuable art. In Scheid's retelling, this was enough to "warrant a proper military occupation."

"Emptying the National Museum of Iraq was [eventually] mourned—but as a loss for humanity, not as a loss for contemporary Iraqis," Scheid said. "Enter artfare." —J.M.

might be too easy on the West. It lets too much off the hook. Decolonization is a process, not a result. I believe in unsettling, that the discomforts that come from a continuous and ongoing forever conversation about these things are necessary, because the traumas of displacements actually go from generation to generation to generation. I also believe in keeping the traces of problems and failures alive. So, I leave open the possibility that if repatriation is what is most desired, then that is what should happen. But I do believe that a wide-ranging cultural project—this conversation—is even more important, to recognize that there’s something basically good about us being curious about one another. I’m not necessarily against an encyclopedic museum—I have two small children, and I like that they can go and learn things in a place. But [what’s important] is that it’s done consensually, that it is about exchange as opposed to extraction. There’s a reason encyclopedic museums emerge in the West: It’s a colonialist program, a project that comes from conquest.”

THE LANGUAGE OF CONQUEST IS EVIDENT IN A LETTER Marsh wrote to Williams President Mark Hopkins a few years after sending the Assyrian reliefs to the college: “My great desire & prayer is that students who look upon the relics of the past may think wisely of time & be led to take a deeper interest in the efforts made to rescue the degraded from the beastliness of their present life, & the eternal dangers impending. Would that every active imagination would hear the stones cry out.”

Bernhardsson asked during the discussion, “Do the relics of the past make us think wisely of time? And what is this wisdom of the present time that these ancient relics are supposed to bring us?”

Answering the question, Rakowitz said:

“I don’t know that that’s happened, really. I often talk about how the looting of the National Museum of Iraq was the first moment of pathos that opened up in the war. Because it didn’t matter if you were for the war or against the war. There was an agreement that this was catastrophic and that the museum held some of the early examples of writing, early examples of urban planning. It was like a primal scene in human history. So that was very useful that it wasn’t just confined as a localized Iraqi loss. It was a loss for all of humanity. But when the outrage around lost objects did not turn into an outrage about lost lives, I found that infuriating. The West attaches a lot of value to these objects. What happened in the 1840s created situations in 2015 of these iconoclasm and the state-sponsored destruction of heritage. I think that we would be really, really naïve to not look deeper at the reason that happens. And so, no, I don’t think we’re really understanding our own times through these objects. But I am also interested in who we are as humans, and



View of Michael Rakowitz's *The invisible enemy should not exist* (Room Z, Northwest Palace of Nimrud), on view through April 19 at WCMA.

our creatureliness, which makes us imperfect. And the fact that our grief sometimes goes into places that are indirect. So sometimes going into a votive statue from Mesopotamia and letting it be a votive for our grief is maybe understandable from a psychological point of view, but I’m not so sure that’s where it should end.” [W](#)

*Michael Rakowitz’s visit to Williams was sponsored by Thomas Beischer MA ’96.*



# IN GOOD COMPANY

On the occasion of his 90th birthday, Stephen Sondheim '50 is the subject of a campus celebration and deep reflection on his musical theater—and Williams—legacies.

BY LIZ LEYDEN

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM KERR





**T**HE THOUGHT OF STEPHEN SONDHEIM SHOWING UP FOR a course about the history of Broadway musicals seemed crazy, but Natalia Halpern '20 couldn't help but wonder.

It was just a few days before she and her classmates in The Broadway Musical were scheduled to discuss Sondheim's work, and Professor W. Anthony Sheppard had suddenly begun reminding everyone to be on time and ready with questions.

Sondheim—the composer, lyricist and pioneer of musical theater who graduated from Williams in 1950—was the reason Halpern signed up for the course in the first place. Watching *Gypsy* at age 13 had kick-started her passion for musicals. She shared her suspicions with a fellow diehard fan, her dad, but he was skeptical. Still, she thought, “It’s Williams. Crazy things like that can happen.”

On the day of class, in the spring of 2018, Halpern walked into Bernhard Music Center’s Presser Choral Hall and saw a giant video screen at the front of the room.

For the next hour and fifteen minutes, Sondheim’s face filled the screen as he fielded questions about craft and collaboration and kept the packed room—45 students and a dozen more members of the Williams community who were auditing the class—on the edge of their seats.

“It was insane,” Halpern says. “We saw Sondheim. That was as good as it’s going to get.”

#### “I WANT TO BE A PART OF IT.”

After the class, Sheppard, who is the Marylin and Arthur Levitt Professor of Music, started thinking about how much Sondheim’s work has meant to generations of Williams students. With Sondheim’s 90th birthday approaching, it seemed a celebration was due.

And so, with help from the theater department, Sheppard organized a campus-wide tribute, slated for March 6 and 7, 2020, including a new play by visiting theater professor Ilya Khodosh '08 about Sondheim’s Williams years; a symposium featuring Sondheim scholars from around the country; and a production of his 1973 Tony Award-winning show *A Little Night Music* by the student theater group Cap and Bells. At the heart of the weekend: a performance of Sondheim songs by alumni, including Sebastian Arcelus '99, Andrea Axelrod '75, Eric Kang '09, Claire Leyden '16, Evelyn Mahon '18, Evan Maltby '11, Michelle Rodriguez '12 and David Turner '97.

Turner, who has appeared in two Broadway revivals of *Sunday in the Park with George*, was 15 when his boyfriend stood up in a New York City piano bar and serenaded him with “Anyone Can Whistle” from Sondheim’s show of the same name.

“It stopped the place cold,” Turner says. “I thought, ‘Whatever music this is, that reached me this way, that reached this room this way, I want to be a part of it.’”

When Sheppard asked him to be part of the celebratory weekend, Turner says he couldn’t say no. Sondheim’s

legacy belongs to the world, where devoted fans road trip to revivals and serious scholars study his reinvention of an art taken not quite as seriously before he came along.

But at Williams, that legacy feels a little personal, too. Though the campus has changed dramatically since Sondheim’s days, the basement stage of the Adams Memorial Theatre has not. And, as any veteran of Cap and Bells will tell you, he once stood there, too.

Says Turner: “To repay the favor—the favor that he paid us by spending all those days writing instead of out doing something else—it’s sort of the least we can do.”

#### “WILLIAMS WAS THE LIMITLESS SKY.”

Sondheim arrived at Williams when he was 16 years old, following an unhappy childhood whose central defining event—his parents’ divorce—led him to one of the most important people in his life: Oscar Hammerstein.

After the divorce, Sondheim and his mother moved to Bucks County, Pa., where they were neighbors of Hammerstein, a lyricist, book writer and one half (with Richard Rodgers) of a legendary Broadway duo. Hammerstein became a father figure, a mentor and the reason Sondheim wanted to write musicals.

At Williams, Sondheim intended to pursue an English degree but, on a whim, took a music class with Professor Robert Barrow. While some students chafed at Barrow’s anti-romantic approach, it woke something in Sondheim.

“I had always imagined that writing music was all about sitting in your penthouse or your studio until this lady muse twitters around your head and sits on your shoulder and goes, ‘Da-da-da dum, da-da-da, dum,’” Sondheim said in a 1995 interview with *Inside the Actors Studio*. “Instead, Robert Barrow was talking about leading tones and diatonic scales, and I fell in love.

“He took all the mystery out of music and taught craft,” Sondheim said. “Within a year, I was majoring in music. He changed my life by making me aware that art is craft, not inspiration.”

Sondheim’s time at Williams coincided with the college’s post-WWII realignment. During the war years, the campus was used as a naval flight prep school, and enrollment dwindled so sharply that the yearbook was suspended for several years. When Sondheim arrived in 1946, it was, in some ways, to a blank slate.

Sondheim helped shape the campus’s creative life, writing for two magazines, *The Purple Cow* and *Comment*, and joining Cap and Bells, where he performed in nine plays and led the group to put on its first-ever musical: *Phinney’s Rainbow*.

A satire of college life, the show was an original collaboration between Sondheim and Josiah T.S. Horton '48. *Phinney’s Rainbow*, whose title riffed on the Broadway musical *Finian’s Rainbow* and invoked then-Williams President James “Phinney” Baxter III, Williams Class of



1914, contained more than 20 original songs composed by Sondheim.

The show drew raves from students and the frequently prickly *Williams Record*, which deemed the cast “terrific” and the music “amazing,” stating: “It has been argued that singing songs is not the way to achieve that elusive quality known as ‘school spirit,’ but *Phinney’s Rainbow* has demonstrated that it damn sure helps.”

In his junior year, Sondheim returned to the Adams Memorial Theatre with *All That Glitters*, an original musical adaptation of George Kaufman and Marc Connelly’s *Beggar on Horseback*. It was Sondheim’s first completed assignment for an informal apprenticeship designed by Hammerstein, from afar, to have the young composer write four different kinds of musicals.

Sondheim’s independent pursuit unfolded alongside his work for the music department, where he was developing a wide-ranging technical understanding of Maurice Ravel, Aaron Copland and Paul Hindemith and writing an ambitious piano sonata for his senior thesis.

His efforts were noticed. In the Class of 1950 *Gul* yearbook, he received votes for most versatile, most brilliant, most likely to succeed, most done for Williams and most original. A chronicle of significant moments for his graduating class spotlighted not only Amherst weekends, football seasons and the freshman-year discovery that “gin and grapefruit juice mixed with pleasing effects,” but also each of Sondheim’s musicals along with specific praise for the man himself: “We were sure he was a genius.”

The fermentation and newness of the postwar years at Williams provided an open space for Sondheim’s developing talents, according to Steve Swayne, professor of music at Dartmouth College and author of the 2005 book *How Sondheim Found his Sound*.

“Had he gone to Columbia or Yale, which already had a history of collegiate shows, would he have been afforded the same kind of opportunities?” asks Swayne, a speaker at the Williams symposium in March. “Maybe not. I think Williams gave him an opportunity to climb as high as he could dare. I think for him, Williams was the limitless sky.”

#### “LISTENING TO HIM FELT LIKE GROWING UP.”

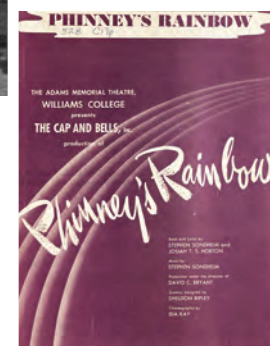
The same creative ambitions Sondheim nurtured at Williams blazed throughout his lifetime.

His many awards, including a Pulitzer, an Oscar, eight Tonys, eight Grammys and a Presidential Medal of Freedom, only scratch the surface. Consider the seismic impact of the work itself, splintering across the musical theater world almost from the moment Sondheim left Williams, starting with the lyrics he wrote for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy* and onward from there. Sondheim helped redefine what was possible for a musical in both substance and style, placing unlikely characters and subjects center stage, from murderous barbers and singing assassins to the 1853 opening up of Japan to the Western world.

His lyrics turned away from the frothy fizz of easy love and happy endings and allowed characters to wrestle with the darker edges of life: loneliness, disillusionment, regrets. And he treated the music as seriously as he did the work of his favorite classical composers, creating wildly original scores that drove the drama and were custom built for the lyrics and characters, a jumble of puzzle pieces fit together with invisible seams.

He left Williams with a Hubbard Hutchinson Fellowship, awarded to one fine arts graduate each year, and used it to study composition, theory and harmony with the avant-garde composer Milton Babbitt. At the same time, he kept working on Hammerstein’s assignment to write four musicals. For his last challenge, he wrote an original, *Climb High*, whose title was inspired by what Sondheim described to *Inside the Actors Studio* as the “very Hammersteinish” dedication on the campus’ Hopkins Gate: “Climb high, Climb far, Your goal the sky, Your aim the star.”

Within a dozen years of his graduation, Sondheim would write lyrics for two of the century’s most iconic musicals, *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, and then, in 1962, came *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The farce, based on the works of the Roman playwright Plautus, was the first musical with both lyrics and music by Sondheim to open on Broadway; there, his voice began to emerge.



***Phinney’s Rainbow*, a collaboration between Stephen Sondheim ’50 and Josiah T.S. Horton ’48, was the first musical ever performed by the student theater group Cap and Bells.**





**Above:** An Oct. 15, 2018, performance of *Company* at the Gielgud Theatre in London; poster for the original Broadway production, which opened in 1970 and ran for 705 performances at the Alvin Theatre. **Opposite page:** Larry Kert, as Tony, and Carol Lawrence, as Maria, in the Broadway production of *West Side Story* at the Winter Garden Theatre in 1957.

A string of flops followed, including *Do I Hear a Waltz*, for which Sondheim wrote lyrics and Richard Rodgers wrote the music. But then came the show that changed everything.

*Company*, a revolutionary musical about an ambivalent bachelor and his struggles to connect, opened in 1970 and was nominated for what was then a record 14 Tony Awards; it won six. The show marked the start of a string of musicals from Sondheim and collaborators, including legendary director and producer Hal Prince, about unhappy marriages (*Follies*), tangled love affairs (*A Little Night Music*), the Westernization of Japan (*Pacific Overtures*) and obsession and revenge (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*) that remade Broadway.

"If I had turned to somebody in 1940 and said *Company* is a Broadway musical, or *Pacific Overtures* is a Broadway musical, they would've looked at me like I had three heads," says Jamie O'Leary '04, a professor of musicology at Oberlin College who specializes in Broadway musicals of the 1940s. "Sondheim stretched those boundaries."

O'Leary first listened to Sondheim with his piano teacher, who was a big fan. The teen was so dazzled that he found his way to three of Sondheim's most famous shows before graduating from high school: directing *Company* for a children's theater group, performing in *Follies* on a community stage and landing his first gig as the second keyboard for a regional production of *A Little Night Music* at The Theater Barn in New Lebanon, N.Y.

O'Leary soon discovered skeptics who were perplexed by the intellect of Sondheim's lyrics and decided lack of happy endings. For the children's theater group, he says, "We did a Sondheim revue as a fundraiser, and all these parents came up to us and said, 'Oh, what is this stuff?'" But O'Leary reveled in the intricate music and heady subject matter.

"Sondheim musicals struck a different chord with me than other musicals did," he says. "Listening to him felt like growing up."

He chose Williams in part because Sondheim's work inspired him. O'Leary studied music and joined the Ephlats a cappella group, conducted the student symphony and served as musical director for a Cap and Bells production of *Company*.

"I was so impressed with how intelligently he wrote, how critical he seemed to be, how vastly knowledgeable and creative," he says. "I wanted to be at a place that would have the potential to do something like that for me."

#### "SHINE AND BUBBLE AND RISE AND FALL."

It wasn't simply the subjects Sondheim tackled that set him apart. He demanded that musicals be taken seriously by taking them seriously himself, creating scores that surprised audiences with their imagination and innovation.

For *Sweeney Todd*, Sondheim used dissonance and a relentless churn of background music to keep the audience on edge as its title character sought vengeance with a sharp razor.

Williams Professor W. Anthony Sheppard remembers watching a PBS broadcast of the show when he was 13 and being blown away.

"Musically, *Sweeney Todd* was so interesting and so different from other musicals I had performed in," he says. "We did not do *Sweeney Todd* in St. Petersburg, Fla. We did *Oliver!*."

The genre-crossing *Sweeney Todd*, which Sondheim has called a "dark operetta," stuck with Sheppard.

"It planted the idea in my mind that I could just ignore any kind of big division between classical and popular, between opera and musicals," says Sheppard, whose scholarly interests now range across American music, from Tin Pan Alley songs to contemporary opera.

Sondheim's work helped erase another division, O'Leary says: "Sondheim's legacy is that musicals are not stupid. We can demand they be taken seriously. Serious and entertaining are not opposing values. You don't have to cordon off the two in your head."

Sondheim was no less ambitious with his dense and detail-rich lyrics. Each word mattered, and few came easily. As he once said: "Making lyrics feel natural, sit on music in such a way that you don't feel the effort of the author—so they shine and bubble and rise and fall—is very, very, very, very, very hard to do."

Early on, he thought he'd be pigeonholed as a lyricist. And, maybe he was right to worry: He was very, very, very, very, very good at it. By 1976, *The New York Times* was describing his lyrics as "devilish, wittily and delightfully clever" and Sondheim himself as "the most remarkable man in the Broadway musical today."

Audiences, however, didn't always know what to do with him. Andrea Axelrod '75, a writer and cabaret singer

in New York, remembers seeing *A Little Night Music* with her parents and their neighbors when it opened on Broadway in 1973. She left exhilarated but also incredulous when the neighbors sniffed that it lacked melodies.

"Of course, there were melodies!" Axelrod says. "It was melodic and luscious and so memorable."

"The thing is, now you hear other people's shows and say, 'Oh, it sounds like Sondheim,'" she says. "Anybody who is witty and has a brain, now people say, 'It sounds like Sondheim.' He is the gold standard."

#### **"HE MAKES YOU FEEL EVERYTHING MORE."**

The facts of Sondheim's life are found in the recordings held at the Library of Congress, in a 709-word biographical entry in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and in the thousands of newspaper articles chronicling his rise, tracking his flops and measuring his impact across 70 years and counting. Even his name, "Sondheim," merits an entry in the Merriam-Webster dictionary: "Stephen Joshua, 1930–. American composer."

But the impact of his life is perhaps best understood by listening to the stories of the people Sondheim has influenced.

Eric Kang '09 came to Williams to become a doctor. Music—from his study of classical piano to playing keyboard in a high school rock band—was his hobby.

Then he agreed to direct a Cap and Bells production of *Assassins*. Over the next four years, he worked on three more Sondheim shows and spent hours in the basement of the old Sawyer Library, studying scores and listening to recordings. During his junior year, Kang, a pianist who is currently the musical director of the touring production of *Cats*, told his parents his plans had changed.



**"I was so impressed with how intelligently he wrote, how critical he seemed to be, how vastly knowledgeable and creative. I wanted to be at a place that would have the potential to do something like that for me."**

—OBERLIN PROFESSOR JAMIE O'LEARY '04, WHO CHOSE WILLIAMS IN PART BECAUSE OF SONDHEIM

"The reason I wanted to be a doctor was about connecting with human beings," he says. "But working in musical theater, I realized I was already pursuing those goals. Musical theater, and particularly Sondheim, is the reason I thought I should be a musician."

It's no surprise that he and so many others said yes when Sheppard asked them to perform in March.

"Any time you're asked to be involved with anything Sondheim, anywhere, much less with this personal connection, you say yes," says Sebastian Arcelus '99, a Broadway performer and TV actor who most recently appeared on the CBS drama *Madam Secretary*. "I can't listen to one of his pieces and not feel more vivid, more an artist, more a human, more a son. He makes you feel everything more. And that's a gift beyond comprehension, really."

Among the host of performers and speakers at Williams for the Sondheim celebration, there is one notable absence—Sondheim himself. He's said he is not interested in marking his 90th birthday, and he's largely kept his distance from Williams over the years.

Sheppard almost didn't ask him to speak with his class in 2018.

"It takes a lot of chutzpah to reach out and presume he'd be interested," he says. "I kept talking myself out of it: 'No, he's too busy, he wouldn't want to do this.'"

He wrestled with the idea for months until, finally, the week they were scheduled to discuss Sondheim, Sheppard emailed him. "I said to myself, 'This is crazy. I should try.'"

Sondheim said yes that same afternoon.

The result—a lively back and forth between the composer and students—"was a class meeting I'll never forget," Sheppard says.

Evelyn Mahon '18, now a professional actor, was sitting in the center of the second row that day. She was supposed to be in a modern drama class in Hopkins Hall, but her boyfriend was taking Sheppard's course and, like Halpern, suspected Sondheim might show up.

A longtime fan, Mahon grew up listening to Sondheim at home and in school, where her Latin class screened *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* each year. She'd seen a revival of *A Little Night Music* on Broadway, and every time she gave a recital, she sang a Sondheim song.

So, she cut class and tagged along with her boyfriend, just in case. How could she not?

"He's one of those composers that people are still going to be talking about hundreds of years later," Mahon says. "We just happen to be living at the same time as him." **W**

*Liz Leyden is a writer living in New Jersey.*



# STUDY



The Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima, Japan, which was located almost directly underneath the Aug. 6, 1945, explosion but withstood complete destruction. The remains still stand and were designated as a World Heritage Site in 1996.





# A NUCLEAR NARRATIVE

Sociology professor James Nolan's forthcoming book, based on his grandfather's letters and recollections about working on the Manhattan Project, sheds light on the early atomic age.

IN THE YEAR AFTER THE LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL Laboratory opened, U.S. Army Capt. Jim Nolan, M.D., delivered 80 babies at its hospital. With his training in radiology, the obstetrician also worked with other scientists on different projects until, at a crucial moment, he was asked to deliver something else—the A-bomb. Nicknamed “Little Boy,” it was the first nuclear weapon used in warfare. Nolan escorted components of it from Los Alamos to Tinian Island, where it was built and then deployed.

His experiences are the subject of a new book by his grandson, James Nolan, Williams’ Washington Gladden 1859 Professor of Sociology. In addition to informing *Atomic Doctors: Conscience and Complicity at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age*, to be published in fall 2020 by Harvard University Press, Nolan’s research resulted in the course Going Nuclear: American Culture in the Atomic Age, which he taught for the third time in the fall.

“In the book, my grandfather serves as a Virgil of sorts, leading me through major events of this important era and introducing me to a variety of interesting people,” Nolan says. “It’s not so much about him as it is the front-row seat his journey provides for exploring defining features of the early nuclear age.”

Nolan has long held an interest in the role of technology in modern society and says, “The atomic bomb is the quintessential, most determinative technological invention of the 20th century.” His course is cross-listed in sociology and history and delves into topics about technology and the military.

“In both the book and the class, I draw on the work of the French sociologist Jacques Ellul, who talks about the deterministic quality of technology,” Nolan says. “One of Ellul’s important ideas is that once a technology is invented, it takes on a life of its own, and we lose control of it and begin instead to react to it.”

Nolan points to a sentiment he came across multiple times in his research: “A number of the Manhattan Project physicists, including Frank Oppenheimer, said, more or less, ‘It was as though the machine compelled us forward.’” Nolan says many of those scientists have since expressed profound regret, yet, “They each seemed also to feel that the bomb was an inevitability they could not stop.”

This concept struck Giebien Na ’20, who studies history. He finds it difficult to imagine a world without nuclear weapons and says he first encountered the idea of Manhattan Project physicists regretting their invention in Nolan’s course.

“My generation accepts nukes as fact, and political science courses present them as an effective deterrent, something that offers global stability,” he says. “This course has shown me a very different narrative.”

Na describes a visit to the class by Tomiko Morimoto West, a Hiroshima survivor who was 13 and working in a factory with her schoolmates when the bomb was dropped. “She talked about all of her classmates being instantly killed and then walking through the city and all the bridges having collapsed,” Na says, adding that the class has changed his perspective on the role of technology in the military. “New technology has consequences that we don’t always fully consider before invention.”

Nolan’s grandfather was with the first team of Allies to walk into Hiroshima days after the bomb fell, and he was never the same afterward. “He never talked about what he saw in Japan, but he maintained a sort of tortured silence about his role on the Manhattan Project,” Nolan says. “Because publicly he only ever supported the official narrative about the bomb—that it saved American lives and ended the war—it’s difficult to know what he really thought about it and its lasting consequences.”

—JULIA MUNEMO



# DECODING DRUG RESISTANCE

ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE IS NEARLY AS OLD AS ANTIBIOTICS THEMSELVES.

Not long after penicillin became widely used in the 1940s, an enzyme called TEM showed up and started destroying its structure on the molecular level, thus inactivating it. In response, scientists came up with new antibiotics. And in response to that, the enzyme adapted. Today, scientists know of more than 200 different versions of TEM—a number that Assistant Professor of Chemistry Katie Hart says is constantly increasing—along with a host of related enzymes that also degrade the effectiveness of antibiotics.

Hart, a biochemist who recently received a three-year, \$378,000 grant from the National Institutes for Health to study the structural components of these enzymes, says there's a mantra in biology: Form underlies function. "The way something looks is critical to what it's able to do," she says. "But the structure of these molecules is also critical to understanding the ways in which they can evolve—and their ability to evolve so quickly is what makes them so dangerous."

Drug resistance depends on a small number of mutations that result in changes to an enzyme's amino acid sequence. Hart says that by investigating how these

changes affect the enzyme's structure, stability and function, she may be able to find insights to inform the design and implementation of new drug treatments.

Hart studied the evolution of other kinds of enzymes in graduate school and later held a research position at the medical school at Washington University in St. Louis, where she applied her training to questions in human health. At Williams, she was eager to continue with that work, and so, with her thesis students, she decided to investigate antibiotic resistance.

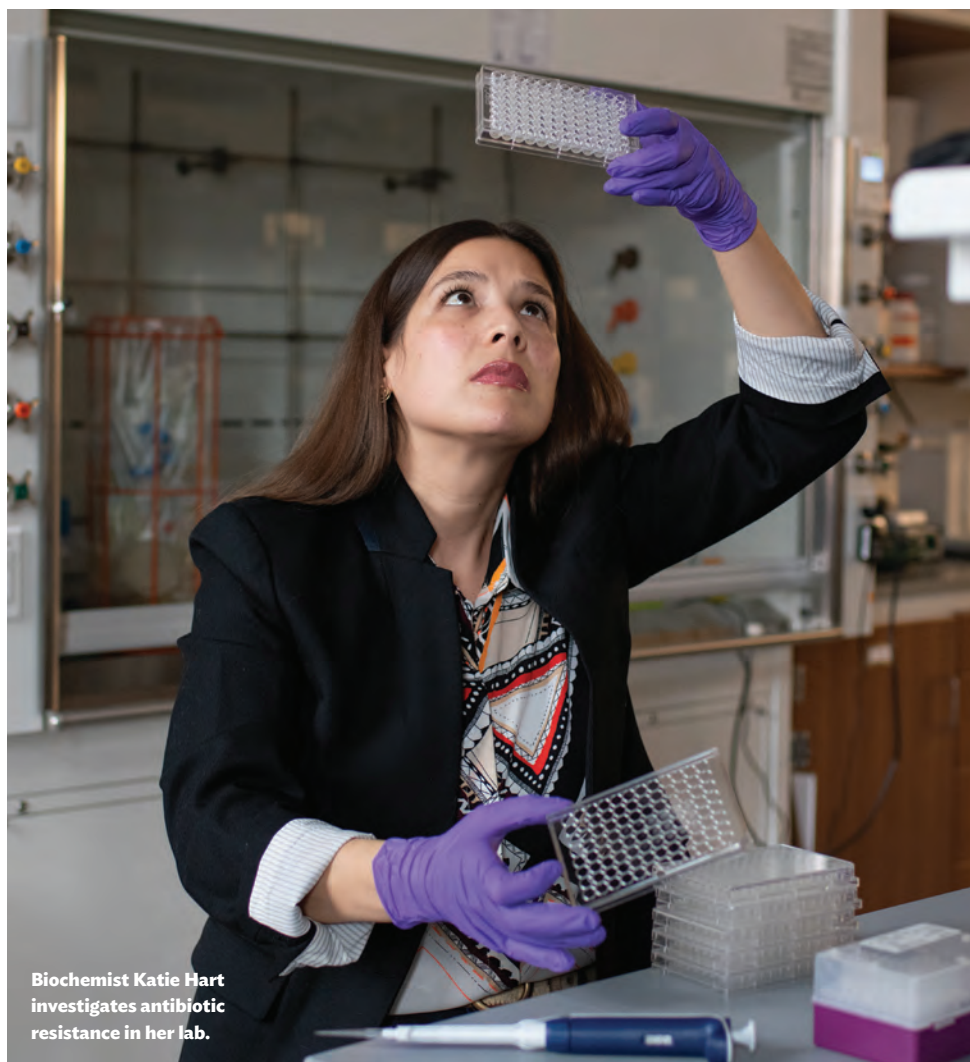
She started by comparing TEM with another enzyme that has the same effect on antibiotics but is different in several important ways. "We found that the structures the enzyme adopted weren't at all what we expected," Hart says. "The question then became, what is it about the chemical composition of this enzyme that allows it to adopt these unusual structures?"

Because enzymes can adapt so quickly, the race to create new drugs is endless. "We hope to understand how the chemical composition of proteins relates to their ability to evolve," Hart says. "When DNA changes through mutation, it changes the chemical composition of the enzyme. Understanding how mutation leads to changes in function is at the crux of this work."

Her project is always evolving, too. "The best thing that can happen in science is that you end up with a more refined hypothesis, one that has more refined questions," Hart says. Her current thesis students, Drew Cohen '20 and Ryan Rilinger '20, are building on the work of her earlier thesis students, refining questions and collecting data.

"As a graduate of another small liberal arts college, I can say that places like Williams enable excellent teaching in the classroom and cutting-edge research at the bench," says Hart, an alumna of Haverford College.

Rilinger agrees, adding, "Our work has the potential to help future researchers develop new ways to combat antibiotic-resistant bacteria. It's an incredible experience to ask and answer previously unanswered questions about something so relevant." —J.M.



Biochemist Katie Hart investigates antibiotic resistance in her lab.





Students examine miniature paintings from the Mughal Empire in WCMA's Object Lab.

## CLOSE LOOKING

"YOU CAN SEE THE INDIVIDUAL HAIRS IN HIS BEARD," A STUDENT SAYS, USING A magnifying glass to study a 17th-century portrait of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan that's displayed on the wall of the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA).

"Yeah, and also shadows on his face!" says another.

Associate Professor of History Aparna Kapadia steps closer to the painting for a better look, while Assistant Professor of Art History Murad Mumtaz nods his head.

"Exactly," Mumtaz says. "These miniature portraits were intended to be recognizable, almost like photographs of the emperor. Now look at the rest of the folio and see if you can figure out how it was constructed."

The 10 students are gathered with Kapadia and Mumtaz in the Object Lab, a hybrid gallery-classroom where faculty collaborate with museum staff to select works of art that investigate key course concepts.

Kapadia first developed a course on the Mughal Empire several years ago. When Mumtaz joined the faculty in 2018, and the two discovered their shared interest in the Muslim dynasty that ruled northern India for nearly three centuries, they decided to co-teach the class, now called *Emperors of Heaven and Earth: Mughal Power and Art in India*. Among the course's central questions are how the Mughals sustained their empire for so long, how they used art and politics to rule over diverse and largely non-Muslim populations, and how Mughal culture continues to shape the South Asian imagination today.

According to the course description, "Mughal kings were globally viewed as political innovators and unprecedented patrons of art. Their visual practices were as much a part of their imperial ideologies as their administrative and military measures." The most well-known example is the Taj Mahal, a mausoleum in Agra built

by order of the Emperor Shah Jahan, whose portrait now hangs at WCMA. No bigger than an illustration in a textbook, the portrait likely was part of an album filled with similar Indian miniature paintings.

"Indian miniature painting is known for its degree of formalism and stateliness," says Mumtaz, who also studies Sufi devotional portraiture and is a practicing painter himself. "For the Mughals, the image was central to political self-fashioning, and the collection of Indian miniature paintings at WCMA provides an excellent resource for our students to see the connections between the art and the history we're learning about in class."

In her sections of the course, Kapadia covers the life of Shah Jahan and other Mughal emperors, as well as the political and ideological mechanisms at work during their rule.

"We wanted to introduce students to a multifaceted picture of one of the greatest empires in precolonial world history," says Kapadia, whose research interests include the cultural and literary history of premodern and modern South Asia, as well as Indian regional traditions and the Indian Ocean.

Adds Mumtaz: "Another goal was to familiarize students with a wide range of visual and written primary sources and to help them develop a vocabulary for 'reading' those."

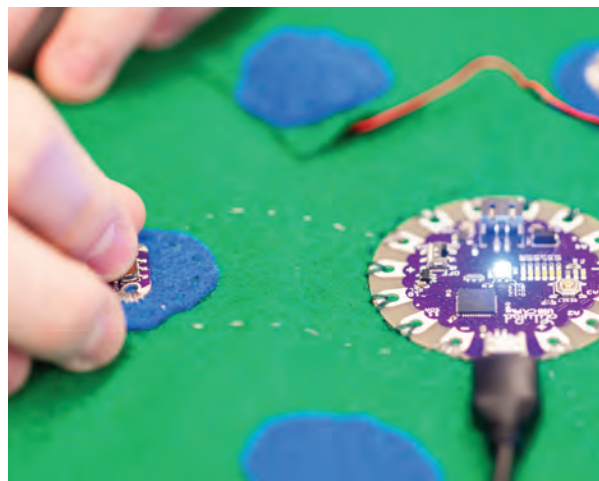
Back in the Object Lab, Mumtaz smiles when the students compare the border around the portrait of Shah Jahan to a collage. "We can see how the folio page was constructed, with sections of the border glued together," he says. "We can't know where those border pieces originally come from, but they were likely created as we see them now after Shah Jahan's lifetime."

The professors riff off of one another, which helps the material come alive for students. "I can really tell that they're both invested in learning from one another," one student remarks to another as the session wraps up.

Collaboration across both academic divisions and disciplines is rare at Williams, but Mumtaz points out that such distinctions didn't exist for the Mughals. "History was visual, and visuals were historical," he says. "The segmentation of today is a very modern, Western thing, and now we are able to break out of that and see things as they were originally meant to be seen." —J.M.



## STUDY



Students learn coding and sewing skills in Iris Howley's new computer science course, Electronic Textiles.





# CREATIVE PROGRAMMING

"DIGITAL DATA IS BEING INFUSED THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PHYSICAL world, escaping the computer monitor and spreading to other devices and appliances, including the human body," Assistant Professor of Computer Science Iris Howley writes in the description for Electronic Textiles, a new course she taught in the fall. The course had students stitching together coding skills with basic (and not so basic) sewing skills for a final project that can be worn as clothing.

"We already have wearable tech in some niche markets, like a bicycling jacket that, when you press a button on your sleeve, lights up a turn signal on your back," Howley says. "Fifty years from now, people won't use Fitbits, because their fabric will provide personal analytics."

Products involving wearable technology may seem straightforward—lights on a shirt that pulse to the beat of music, or a teddy bear that plays a song when its hands are pressed together. But the code required to program the tiny computer chips, as well as the sewing skills needed to embed those chips in fabric, are anything but simple.

"You don't need years of study to do what we do, but this type of coding requires that you think like a computer scientist," says Howley, who designed the course for students who don't yet have that background.

In an early project, students were asked to program a computer chip to send signals to three different lights, mimicking the behavior of fireflies from the Great Smoky Mountains. Each light had to blink in a different pattern. "This was a project about timing and simultaneity, which are important concepts in computer science," Howley says.

She first got involved in wearable technology in graduate school at Carnegie Mellon University, when she partnered with a friend who was running an after-school program for girls in Pittsburgh. The girls were making plushies and wristbands, and Howley, who had been sewing since childhood, saw an opportunity to help them build on that

skill. "Observing the girls sharing my own enthusiasm for making through computer programming motivated me to continue spreading knowledge of the technologies that combine the digital and physical," she says.

Howley first came to Williams in 2017 and taught a Winter Study course on wearable technology for students with experience coding. She then developed the semester-long class for nonmajors. "It gives me an interesting framework through which to teach basic coding and other computer science skills, and it opens the discipline up to learners we don't always see in this field," she says.

Sebastian Job '22 already knew how to sew when he signed up for Howley's class; he learned to tailor his own pants as a teenager. He plans to major in sociology and says he was curious about the creative potential of programming. "A friend told me that CS is like painting," says Job, who is now considering a computer science major as well. "You imagine something you want to create and then solve problems in order to create it."

Job's final project was a holiday costume for his brother's pug. The costume lights up and plays "Jingle Bells" when a button is pushed, and Job says the process of figuring out how to make it work was "challenging, but also really fun."

"Professor Howley fosters a sense of excitement about programming," says Job, who is now taking Introduction to Computer Science, the gateway to the major.

Howley is thrilled to have nurtured curiosity in a student who hasn't yet declared a major. "The more diverse opportunities you make available in computer science, the more diverse students you will attract," says Howley, who was recently awarded a National Science Foundation grant to support her research into understanding artificial intelligence algorithms in educational technology.

"Williams is a great place to explore cross-disciplinary topics, both as an instructor and as a student," Howley adds. "Electronic textiles started out as an experimental Winter Study course and now empowers students with a variety of backgrounds and interests to discover the creative core of computer science." —J.M.



# BALANCING ACT

INTERVIEW BY ABE LOOMIS

*A professor of law at UCLA School of Law, Jon D. Michaels '98 is a widely published expert on presidential power and the separation of powers. "Over the years," Michaels says, "I've come to appreciate the degree to which presidents of both parties have taken it upon themselves to exercise more unilateral power. That has led to the question: What can Congress do, what can the courts do, and what can the states do to limit what in modern times has been called 'the imperial presidency?'" With impeachment dominating the news cycle at the start of the year, Williams Magazine asked Michaels to share some of his thoughts on the topic.*

## Why is the impeachment clause in the Constitution?

The framers were deeply concerned about corruption. They didn't trust the president. They didn't trust each other. They didn't trust foreign governments. They didn't trust whoever would come after or succeed them. The Constitution is basically the framers saying, "We can't trust anyone, so we're going to set up a number of different mechanisms and institutions to police each other." Impeachment is just one of many ways in which that's done.

## So, it adds another layer to the separation of powers.

Yes, but impeachment shouldn't be seen as a way for Congress to grab hold of the reins, for a couple of reasons: One, it is inappropriate; it's not what it's meant to be used for. And, two, it's awfully hard to accomplish. Congress has the power to impeach and remove the president. But Congress has a lot of power to curtail the president's discretion in ways that are much simpler, much cleaner and much easier.

## When is impeachment appropriate?

To be impeached is to be given a scarlet letter. Congress is putting down a marker—a moral and, to some extent, legal marker—that this person has run afoul of ordinary political disagreements, that this is not maladministration, this is not incompetence, this is not a difference of opinion. Family segregation, the travel ban, cozying up with North Korea, pulling troops out of Syria prematurely—those, to me, are questions of maladministration. They're about policy. They ultimately may have far worse consequences than a bribery scheme with Ukraine, but they're within the realm of normal politics. And the way we resolve them, if Congress isn't going to stand up to the president in the moment, is through periodic elections. But when a president acts with venality, when a president acts with corrupt intent, that's when we talk about impeachment.

## Is it a question of legal versus illegal acts?

It would be a mistake to assume that everything the president could do to jeopardize the state, to undermine the integrity of democratic processes, would be found in a code of criminal law. The phrase "high crimes and misdemeanors" was never meant to track federal criminal law. There are some violations of federal law that don't rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors. And there are some noncrimes that imperil the state but would never fit into our federal criminal law, because only the president has the power to do them. Endangering national

security, subverting the democratic process, violating one's oath of office—those aren't in the federal criminal code, because they're in the Constitution. They're already against the law—they're against our supreme law. At the same time, the constitutional language "other high crimes and misdemeanors" is in a series with treason and bribery. We can take from that construction that the impeachable acts have to be of significant magnitude—a petty criminal offense probably doesn't rise to the level. There's a famous hypothetical in which a president helps a young aide hide marijuana during a police search. That's a crime. But it's probably not a crime of the same magnitude as treason and bribery. So the criminal code is both under- and over-inclusive of what should be subject to impeachment.

## What do you think will be the historical implications of this impeachment?

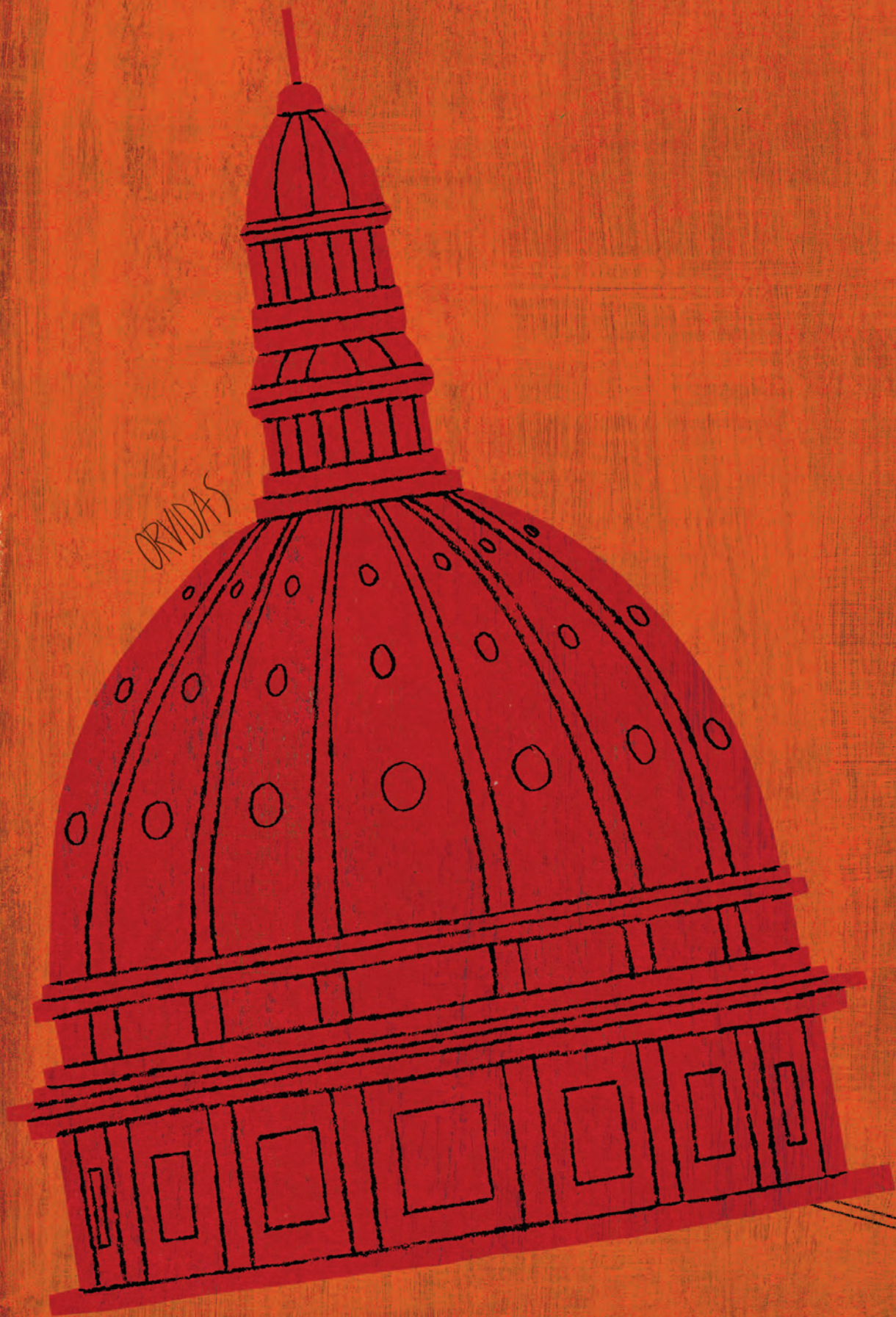
It's an important milestone, but I don't think it's the final word on Donald Trump or this Congress. We constantly revisit our understandings. For example, the vote to acquit

Andrew Johnson in the Senate during his impeachment trial in 1868 was lauded in John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*. *Profiles* was written in the mid-'50s, and it already feels like a very dated assessment. People are much more critical of Johnson now, because we're much more sensitive to the destructive nature of white supremacy. Kennedy was writing before the Civil Rights revolution and re-emergence of the virulent strain of white nation-

alism that we're confronting today. We think of Kennedy as one of the early modern presidents, but his assessment of Andrew Johnson is regarded much more dimly now. Similarly, we'll be debating the meaning of this most recent impeachment for generations.

**We constantly  
revisit our  
understandings. ...  
We'll be debating  
the meaning of  
this most recent  
impeachment for  
generations.**





ORVIDAS





# Williams

EDITORIAL OFFICES  
P.O. BOX 676  
WILLIAMSTOWN, MA  
01267-0676

## A SONDHEIM STORY

Celebrating the Eph who  
changed musical theater—  
and Williams **p.24**

