

OPINIONS & EXPRESSIONS

West Meets East

China, we're told, is the country of the future. When you're there, as I was this summer, it's easy to see why. The amount and rate of change—economic, social, political—is breathtaking. I'd not been to the mainland in almost 20 years; it felt more like 200.

I was traveling with Trustee Paul Neely '68, Asian Studies Chair Neil Kubler and others on a visit organized by Trustee Emeritus Jack Wadsworth '61, former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, and Robert Oxnam '64, former president of The Asia Society.

More than 40 Williams-related people attended a reception in Beijing, and a new regional association, the College's 77th, was born.

In addition to meeting with alumni and parents, the purpose of the trip was to discuss with leaders in Chinese education, business and government the future of higher education there and how Williams might most effectively engage with it.

Globalization is one theme of the College's 2020 Project—our effort to identify the trends most likely to affect Williams' mission over the next dozen years and how best to respond to them. In the last *Review* I wrote about changes in U.S. demographics and in the market for faculty. Next time I'll talk about technology and the environment. But for now, what's on my mind is globalization.

We need to ensure that students leave Williams prepared to act as global citizens—aware of different cultures and their growing interconnectedness and



Pictured at a dinner in Beijing, from left: Freda Wang, trip organizer; Jim Kolesar '72, Williams assistant to the president for public affairs; Paul Neely '68, trustee; Joe Bergeron '01; Geraldine Shen '01; Morty, Mimi and Rachel Schapiro; Rosie Zhang '09; Mao Zhang and Yanyuan Liu P'09; CK and Li Shen P'99, '01, '11; Marcie Rothman (Mimi's mother); Asian studies professor Neil Kubler; and Enoch Blazis, Williams senior development officer.

able to operate effectively in a variety of contexts.

To help reach this goal, in recent years we've increased the number of students from abroad from 4 percent to 8 percent (another 5 percent carry both a U.S. and a second passport), launched an international studies program and brought to campus more international leaders, scholars and performers.

Faculty are now exploring more ambitious initiatives. We might, for instance, use both Winter Study and the summer in more focused ways to provide international experiences for our students. We could bring overseas faculty to campus for one- or two-year fellowships, perhaps even adopting a "scholars-at-risk" program that would offer temporary positions to scholars and artists from areas marked by war, natural disaster or limited intellectual freedom. We certainly want to take more advantage than we have of the potential of the Center for Development Economics

to connect the College and its students with the wider world. To tie together these efforts we might be well served by a newly formed campus Center for Global Initiatives.

The Chinese leaders we met agreed unanimously that their higher education system needs to move from its current mode of specialized training toward the liberal arts. One distinguished academic went so far as to say that a reason the Cultural Revolution occurred was that leaders hadn't been trained to think independently, so the liberal arts were needed to prevent such a thing from happening again.

At the same time, American students have much to learn from Asia and elsewhere. So it feels urgent indeed that we bring those worlds to Williams and bring Williams to those worlds. ■

—Morty Schapiro



In “What’s the Price of a Williams Education” (June 2008), Jim Kolesar ’72 uses an old, specious calculation to determine the “real” cost of a top education—dividing a university’s operating budget by number of undergraduates. But are students the only beneficiaries of every item in the budget? Are landscaping, sports teams, orchestras, libraries, museums, foreign programs and faculty

price points

research legitimate parts of each student’s education? Certainly, the state universities of New York, Texas, Michigan and California yearly furnish many thousands of stellar educations at a fraction of the tuition and “real cost” of the top-tier schools.

On the income side, consider direct government grants for research and tax abatements for all universities. Endowments start as tax-free contributions by well-to-do donors and then grow tax-free. And one can only guess the enormous sums of real-estate tax that Williams, were it not exempt, would annually generate for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

I am a proud dad of a Williams alumnus and of a Princeton undergraduate. But that is another story, and don’t get me started.

—Howard Schranz, 2004 parent, New York, N.Y.

From Jim Kolesar ’72, special assistant to the president for public affairs: Everything Williams does relates to the education of students (including certainly libraries and faculty research), and even deduct-

ing the costs Mr. Schranz suggests would leave the College’s cost per student far above the highest price charged. It’s certainly true that some colleges offer a fine education while spending less per student. But few would say that students’ experiences there are the same as at Williams. And most of that higher cost the College absorbs, while passing some on to families—those who seem able to afford it. I would hope, therefore, that Mr. Schranz could be proud not only of his Williams son but of that son’s alma mater as well.

As he was for Phil Smith ’55, Fred Copeland ’35 was a powerful influence on my choosing Williams over Harvard and some other good places (“Admitting Success,” June 2008). Fred was also my lab instructor in freshman biology, and he gave me a sharp early lesson

remembering fred

in proper academic behavior my first month on campus. I had left a

lab report with a classmate who looked puzzled at the assignment, thinking it might help him.

When I got the paper back, Fred had written in large letters, “WHO WROTE THIS, YOU OR _____?” Scared spitless, I explained it to him, and he smiled and accepted my explanation. Lesson learned.

—Mac Nelson ’55, Fredonia, N.Y.

I was walking down the hallway during a break between classes at Shoreline High School, north of Seattle. It was 1960. A friend walked up beside me and said, “Let’s go hear this guy talk about Williams College.”

I said, “What’s Williams College?”

“I think it’s a small men’s college in Massachusetts.”

I said, “Why would I go to that?”

“You can cut your next class.”

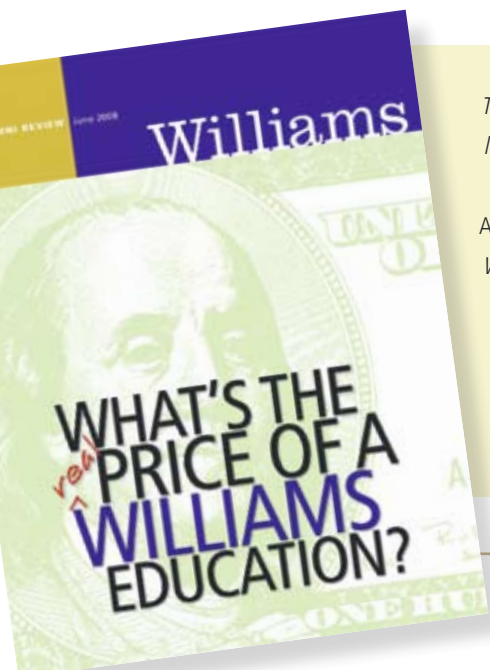
So, of course, I went, and I listened to a “Mr. Copeland” explain how the freshman dorms were vertically connected, and how they had scholarships available and how they would really like to have more students from the Pacific NW.

I went to Williams because Fred Copeland ’35 believed in me, even though he didn’t know me. Now I still believe in Williams.

—Johnny Sundstrom, ’66, Deadwood, Ore.

LETTERS

The Alumni Review welcomes letters related to topics in the magazine. Send letters to: Alumni Review, P.O. Box 676, Williamstown, Mass., 01267-0676; fax: 413.597.4158; e-mail alumni.review@williams.edu. Letters may be edited for clarity and space.



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Williams-at-Home, Reprised

by Jeff Thaler '74

Last January Charlotte Silverman '10 began her Winter Study project, "Resettling Refugees in Maine," looking for answers about what life was like for a Cambodian family living more than 8,000 miles from their homeland. Instead she left with even more questions—and that was my plan.

"Resettling Refugees" grew out of my 1971-72 participation in Professor Robert Gaudino's Williams-at-Home program. I was one of 17 students who lived and worked with Southern small-business owners, Appalachian miners, Iowa family farmers and Detroit autoworkers—while keeping journals and writing papers—exposed constantly to what Gaudino, a proponent of experiential education, called "uncomfortable learning." We returned to campus, Gaudino said, "with revised purposes for the Williams education."

Years later, during a panel discussion at my 20th Williams reunion, I said that even if it took another 20 years I'd push for current students to have the "chance to do the type of experiential education program with rigorous follow-up" I had done through Williams-at-Home. With the invaluable help of the Gaudino Memorial Fund, established by former students and colleagues, this year I took a step closer to that goal, cramming Williams-at-Home into a three-week Winter Study project held in Portland, Maine.

For 30 years, Portland has been a refugee resettlement city, attracting more than 10,000 refugees. With fewer than 70,000 residents total in Maine's largest city, refugees are an important part of our social fabric. Indeed, more than 50 languages are spoken at several local schools.

Before moving in with their host families and working with service providers, the four Williams sophomores who signed up for "Resettling Refugees" wrote papers about race, class, ethnicity, and national identity in their lives. Two of them had never been outside of the U.S. or Canada; none had been to Africa, Asia or Eastern Europe, where our host families were from. Their frames of reference were quickly changed.

They kept journals during their stays and then, before leaving, wrote how their perceptions had changed or evolved. As Charlotte wrote after working in Portland High School tutoring refugee and immigrant students, "I've had to explain simple parts of grammar

I HAD TO FIND THAT LINE BETWEEN INTERACTION AND INTRUSION. I DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE THE FIELD STUDY ROLE."

—SAMANTHA DEMBY '10,
ON LIVING WITH A SUDANESE REFUGEE
FAMILY IN PORTLAND, MAINE.

that really have no explanation; it's just the way English works. What I'm realizing is that there are certain parts of American society that are very hard to explain, as well. So actually having to reflect on [this] while being exposed to aspects of other sorts of cultures has been very interesting."

Samantha Demby '10 wrote about her first night living with a Sudanese woman and her five children. Five minutes after she went upstairs to her room to read, her host brother came in and asked whether she was OK. She realized that they were concerned because in their household people just didn't go off by themselves without explanation. They "do everything around the TV, around the dinner table—everything is shared, which is nice," wrote Samantha, who taught at Portland Adult Education's ESL program, administered by my classmate Rob Wood '74.

The experience, Samantha added, made her realize how much refugee families struggle with differences in language, race and culture. While the children quickly latch onto greater freedoms in America, the parents often feel their rights are being taken away.

As for me? I learned at least as much as the students. I realized what a challenge it was for Bob Gaudino—on his own—to undertake a program with 17 college students living and working all over the U.S. for five months. And, in his honor, I decided to offer the Winter Study project again. ■

Jeff Thaler '74 is a founding trustee and former chair of the Gaudino Fund. An environmental, energy and litigation attorney in Maine, he is organizing "Resettling Refugees" again for Winter Study in January 2009.