Examining Williams’ policies on sexual assault

By RHI ALYXANDER ’13 Contributing Writer

Since Amherst Student Angie Epifano’s account of how her institution treated her following a sexual assault, I have been a part of a number of conversations about the reporting process at Williams College. While Epifano did not report her case, the treatment she received from the administration did not indicate she would be supported through her process.

Additionally, the few things she does say about the reporting process - like questioning a survivor and their perpetrator simultaneously - indicate that the process at Amherst is far from ideal. As one of a small number of survivors to have been through the reporting process here at Williams, I am slow to suggest that rates of campus rape and sexual assault will be lowered by restructuring the reporting process.

Comparatively, Williams is already ahead of the curve in how it structures reporting. Survivors, the accused, and witnesses are allowed to bring advocates with them to interviews, as long as they are members of the college community. The survivor and the accused are never asked to be in the same room together. Survivors can request no contact orders, academic accommodations, and changes in living situations without going through the formal reporting process. The Dean’s Office shares this information quite clearly on its website, so survivors can research their options before choosing what action to take.

That being said, the process is far from perfect, and it never will be. In the process of reporting, survivors are repeatedly asked to share their story.

“The focus on the reporting process falls into the trap of forgetting that sexual assault is preventable.”

For the average Williams student, talking about good sex with friends can be taboo. Talking about violent sex with a Dean and members of Campus Safety and Security is unimaginably excruciatingly uncomfortable - not to mention, describing a traumatizing event outside of a therapeutic setting can bring back painful memories, nightmares, and flashbacks. I can only speak for myself, but I only started having nightmares about my sexual assault after I began the reporting process, and I still have them one year later.

For me, it was worth it. I will never be on campus at the same time as my perpetrator again. However, for the majority of survivors this is not the case. As Epifano and other news stories have pointed out since her article, it is rare for students to be permanently excused from a school following charges of sexual assault. For most survivors, the best they can realistically hope to gain from reporting is a year without that student on campus. Combined with no contact orders, strategic living situations, and (p. 4)

A surprise on the page

By TAYLOR BUNDY ’13 Contributing Writer

In middle and even high school, I was always embarrassed. I was embarrassed that my family didn’t take vacations, that our house was the smallest compared to all of my friends’ homes, that my parents’ jobs didn’t require a college education. Now, I’m embarrassed that I ever felt this way, and I’m prouder than ever of what my family and background has allowed me to learn at Williams.

The height of this realization came with the announcement of this year’s Williams Reads book, Nickel and Dimed. The book is authored by Barbara Ehrenreich, who spent about a year working jobs as a housekeeper, waitress and sales associate at Walmart to gain insights into the systemic inequities faced by the low-wage workforce.

Nickel and Dimed was chosen last year as the basis of the first-year orientation, which is intended to help first-year students get ready for college and prepare them for the challenges ahead. The book explores various social issues and critical thought.

A publication dedicated to social issues and critical thought

December 2012

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Doing something that matters

By LANI WILLMAR ’15
Contributing Writer

“Everyone can catch the light. It is what we do with it that matters.”
-Leymah Gbowee

This piece is written on behalf of the Williams Questbridge Scholars.

On September 14-13th, I was fortunate enough to attend the Millennium Campus Conference with the Williams Quest Scholars Chapter due to the generosity of the Williams Multicultural Center, now the Davis Center and our team leader, Kelsey Gaetjens ’13. From hearing Paul Farmer speak about his life, to listening to Nobel Prize winner Leymah Gbowee, the conference was packed with distinguished speakers, panels, and workshops. An invaluable experience I have taken away from the conference was the chance to listen to the personal narratives of ordinary people who accomplished extraordinary feats, and the inspiration that resulted from that.

Two common themes at the conference were personal stories of defeat and the discrepancies between expectations and reality. Paul Farmer was denied Fulbright, but it wasn’t the end of his journey; it was merely the beginning. It is evident through his story that if you truly care about something, no is simply not an answer that will be taken. Caring is the core of what drives the extraordinary people I saw on stage accomplish their goals. When put in an international activist context, caring is both personal and external, in addition, extremely powerful. The ability to care comes from within but is extended towards wanting to help because of internal reasons too intense to put into words, so activists like Paul Farmer turn to action where words fall short. This is how global change occurs.

Peoples also discussed the role of collaboration. Ultimately, this was the very mission of the Millennium Campus Conference, but I think it’s also in many ways the point of college, and Williams specifically. Personally, after I started getting involved this year with things that I had always wanted to do. When you do things for the sake of, “It’s what I’ve always wanted to do” and not because it was assigned to you by a professor or you feel like you should be doing it, you tend to do a good job. That’s attractive to other people who are doing the same. You become friends and then collaboration magically ensues and before you know it, you have something bigger than you would have had on your own.

In essence, they may not know this, but I hold dearly onto the memories I’ve shared and made with my fellow Questbridge Ephs at the Millennium Campus Conference. The opportunity to be with them in such an elevated context, surrounded by global activists, generated some of the best conversations about our own awes, inspirations, and ambitions. After getting to know my friends in Questbridge through such an organic setting, I have full faith that the members of the Williams Questbridge Chapter will catch that light Leymah Gbowee described, and will go on to do something with it that matters.

Thank you to the Deans Office, the Davis Center, Kelsey Gaetjens, and all others involved in making this experience possible. We are grateful.

Quest Ephs take on NYC

By MICHELLA ORE ’16
Contributing Writer

I came back from one of the most exciting Thanksgiving breaks I have ever had. It was on this trip that I found a home away from home, filled with strangers turned to family within a matter of days. Not being able to go home to California for the week, was overshadowed by the late night conversations and daytime expeditions that I embarked on.

With 9 other Quest Ephs, I boarded the Williams Motorcoach ready to make my way to New York City for the first time. After 6 hours of traveling across states, we made it to Penn Station, where we took a train to Columbia University. It was there that we met the Quest Liaison, Tay, from Columbia who greeted us with other Columbia students and multiple boxes of pizza. After getting to know the small group that was currently present, I went off to my host’s room which was located a few blocks away from the center where we had arrived.

The next day, the rest of the Quest Scholars arrived from their schools which included Vassar, Trinity, Wesleyan, Yale, and Parsons. After a few ice breakers, we set out to explore the city and do some volunteering. Walking through central park and down a few blocks, we made it to the church where we were to help clean up the Thanksgiving dinner that was put on by the church. Since we had way more scholars than the church needed for volunteers, part of the group went out to central park to pick up trash.

After we finished cleaning up we all met back at the park and gazed at the city view in front of us. We then went to Times Square and then went back to Columbia for the Thanksgiving dinner the Columbia Quest scholars had prepared for us. That dinner was warm and frankly, magical. It was there that we bonded over turkey, mac and cheese and pie and got to know just how similar we all are. From then on out, we continued our conversations, whether it was a late night talk session in a Columbia student’s dorm or on the city streets.

Those conversations reminded me that I was not alone in my situation. I wasn’t the only one that couldn’t make it back home and I wasn’t the only one who didn’t have the smoothest path to getting to the school I am now in. We all had to overcome obstacles, whether they were financial or familial, in order to get into the top universities and colleges we are currently members of.

Having the opportunity to bond with people like myself was invaluable. I have a feeling we are going to continue our conversations, whether they be in person or through social media, far after the holidays pass.

The day we left (which was only yesterday!) was bittersweet. While I was ready to go back to Williamstown and the simplicity of life it would afford me (much needed to decompress from my city adventure), I was also sad to have to leave the friends I had made. With the tightest hugs we could manage, we wished each other safe trips back home and told each other that we were welcome to visit each other’s schools whenever we wanted. I boarded our shuttle back, with the warm feeling of knowing that I was no longer separated from my family.

As one Columbia scholar put it, family and home are wherever you are and on this trip I fully understood what it meant. Two days and my home has expanded far beyond California and Williamstown, all the way to the Big Apple. I hope that we can make this trip a tradition for Quest Scholars in the future, because it was trip I will cherish for many years to come.
Reforming campus relations for the future

By JUSTIN HUNTE '13
Contributing Writer

Last November, the campus simultaneously enjoyed the festivities of homecoming and rallied against a hate crime that threatened the entire community, a racially charged message on the four-and-half floor of Prospect House. The message, “all niggers must die,” triggered a group of 50-plus students to march to the Williamsburg Police Department to register the message as a hate crime. President Falk’s decision to cancel classes on the following Monday, and the swift organization of campus-wide events in Paresky Center. The most important issue that emerged out of every campus event was the fact that many students simply did not feel safe anywhere.

As result of this insecurity, students demanded that the administration form a committee that would address bias incidents and use specific protocols to identify incidents, communicate cases to the campus, and help guide the administration in decision making and investigative procedures.

Within one year since the Prospect graffiti, the task force was put to the test on at least two occasions. In October, Dean Bolton reported a hate crime involving the manipulation of words on a car magnet that transformed the phrase “Real Men Love Jesus” to “Real Men.” More recently, the campus was shocked to find out that someone had rekindled the Prospect graffiti incident with the phrase “all beaners must die” in Mission House. Although campus members later learned the intention of the message, students and faculty wanted to reaffirm their “solidarity” through an intense meeting in Goodrich.

Major concerns rested upon how we can resolve and prevent future bias incidents. Some people expressed more militant proposals, each stressing the need for more Draconian measures against suspects of hate crimes. Others wanted guidance on how we can use these incidents to reform the individual. Many could not overcome the power of the signifier—last year’s graffiti and this year’s mimic with racism and violence. Regardless of the intent of each incident, participants desired security. The fact that a hate crime can target any individual or group propels us to carve out preventative and reformation procedures.

The Williams staff recognizes its responsibility to mediate and make decisions on every bias case. But can the administration perform full damage control while trying to “minimize pain” for all parties? We do not doubt that the deans and other faculty should have a major hand in large scale incidents. Besides high level crimes, can our campus affinity groups appropriately manage minor incidents that do not surface on the front page of the Record? I would argue that more resources must be allocated for developing a more dynamic relationship between students. We cannot forget that many of us carry a latent desire to create an authentic “institutional memory.” Every student invests a respectable amount of time and energy in an activity, group, or study; each student also wants their voice heard and their interests recognized. If students want to honestly create their own experience, then affinity groups and the administration should not carry the heavy burden of authenticating our institutional memory.

Last year, one speaker proposed a crowd of listeners that we should implement a social honor code to prevent further bias incidents. I think we should not be so quick to dismiss this suggestion as catalyst for a police state, because a social honor code is not so foreign to the student body. We already sign an academic honor code before we can even register for classes. An academic and a social honor code vastly differ, but both codes rely on our ability to hold each other to a high standard. If we hold ourselves accountable for our success in the classroom, why should we not also hold each other to a higher standard in our social interactions?

At the Goodrich meeting, Lili Rodriguez, director of the Davis Center, reminded the audience of the original mission for the freshman entry system: Williams felt its students were becoming too sheltered and not fully engaged with the world outside of the purple bubble. Every week, freshman would read new material, have discussions and listen to lectures by the faculty. Surely, we were once on the right track to developing a more dynamic student body that attempted to understand the world outside of Williams.

As we move towards the end of this semester, we should remind ourselves of how far we have come as student body. We still have a long way to go before each person can truly feel at place here, but we have many more resources to utilize than our predecessors. With that in mind, we must not forget that students should continue to be the vehicles for social change.

Activism through ... Vote

By HELEN SONG '14

The Sierra Club recently released a video, featuring several musicians and Olympians, encouraging people to vote if they cared about the environment. The Sierra Club has always been an activist group, and surrounding the recent election, it is just one example of an activist group that has encouraged voting as activism.

Personally, as an environmental activist, “green” issues and positions on climate change have always been a part of my top platform considerations when choosing which candidate to elect. During the debates, I tried to listen for any arguments related to climate change or energy use. While I believe neither presidential candidate nor vice presidential candidate said anything truly substantive when it came to climate change, I still value the issue too much to let it go by the wayside because the candidates failed to directly address it. In some ways, this has encouraged me to further research what exactly the candidates’ platforms were instead of just taking in the information that I heard others spewing around me. The frustration has led me to become a more informed voter.

My desire to become a better-informed voter has thus translated over towards activism. On campus, I have worked with Thursday Night Grassroots (TNG), the campus environmental club, to create an easily accessible google document that highlights a few environmental issues such as “ending fossil fuel subsidies,” “position to approve the Keystone XL pipeline permit,” and “voting on the expansion of offshore oil and gas drilling” and provides the voting record of each senator on each individual issue. While I realize this is not the only information everyone should be making their voting decision based on, I think it is an example of how we, as students and as young voters, can help each other to become better voters.

I am voting precisely to make it known that environmental issues matter to certain voters, and to ensure my vote in the future. Candidates need to start addressing climate change as the critical problem it is. If I am going to have the privilege to vote in this country, then I am, at the very least, going to vote to make others pay attention to and care about the issues that we are all too quick to dismiss in our daily lives.

As important as it was for me to be an activist through my vote, it is just as important for me to continue being an activist outside the ballot. In future elections, if who I vote for wins—great, I will only continue to urge my representatives to think more about climate change. If the candidates I vote for lose—I will choose to make the newly elected politicians think more critically about the positions they have taken on climate change. While my vote is just a drop in the ocean, I refuse to let my activism be limited to just one day. It is a lifestyle.

Photo courtesy of minhbat.com
WCURF Becomes Allison Davis Research Fellowship

By MOLLY MAGAVERN
Director of Special Academic Programs

On October 20th, when the MCC became the Davis Center, the Williams College Undergraduate Research Fellowship (WCURF) also took on a new name and figurehead.

One of the two distinguished Davis brothers to be honored by the rededication of the Multicultural Center, Allison Davis serves as a perfect namesake for the fellowship, which was designed to promote diversity in Ph.D. programs and academic careers.

Allison Davis excelled at Williams, graduating valedictorian of the class of 1924 despite not being allowed to live on campus because of his race.

He went on to earn two master’s degrees – in English and anthropology – from Harvard and a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Chicago and spent his career in academia.

The first African American to receive tenure at the University of Chicago, Davis published groundbreaking scholarship on class and race, including two books, Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South (1940) and Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class (1941).

The Allison Davis Research Fellowship (ADRF) and its sister program, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF), were both developed as “pipeline programs.”

That is, their goal is to increase the number of talented students from underrepresented groups who enter graduate school and academic careers.

The key components of both fellowships are: faculty mentoring, time for independent research projects (stipends alleviate the need for campus and summer jobs), and activities designed to educate fellows about graduate school and the application process.

A highlight of the fellowship is being part of a cohort of peers who share a strong sense of purpose and place high value on intellectual endeavors.

The Davis Center rededication program included a panel of four alumni fellows: Elizabeth Hoover ’01, assistant professor of American Studies at Brown University, Crystal Mun-Hye Baik ’02, Ph.D. candidate in American Studies at the University of Southern California, Esa Seegulam ’06 Ph.D. candidate in biology at the University of Washington, and Ashley Brown ’07, Ph.D. candidate in public policy at Duke University and dissertation fellow at Gettysburg College.

The panelists spoke about how their undergraduate research experiences helped prepare them for graduate studies and how their work carries on the scholar-activist legacy of Allison Davis.

Each of the panelists in different ways has demonstrated a strong commitment to social justice and has used scholarly work as a platform for that commitment.

Between the MMUF and the ADRF, Williams has sent over 50 fellows into Ph.D. programs since 2000.

Sixteen fellows have completed their doctorates and the rest are working toward completion. There are currently 13 Allison Davis Research Fellows and 11 Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows on campus.

The Office of Special Academic Programs runs both the MMUF and the ADRF.

One of the panelists in different ways has demonstrated a strong commitment to social justice and has used scholarly work as a platform for that commitment.

Allison Davis Research Fellows on campus.

The focus on the reporting process falls into the trap of forgetting that sexual assault is preventable. Our goal should be to reduce the number of assaults. Countless studies of other crimes have shown that punishment is not the most effective form of discouragement.

Research by psychologists such as David Lisak has shown that most perpetrators, like other criminals in many other categories, have impulsive personalities – the kind that easily forgets the rules.

Cutting down on sexual assault is part of a larger movement to shift cultural values and understanding of what words like “survivor” “rape” and “consent” really mean. It will require friend groups shared by a perpetrator and survivor to empower the survivor and keep him or her safe.

It will require us to break down our awkwardness when talking about sex, so that people will vocally discuss consent in the bedroom, or wherever else it occurs. It will vocally discuss consent in the bedroom, or wherever else it occurs. It will require us to break down our awkwardness when talking about sex, so that people will vocally discuss consent in the bedroom, or wherever else it occurs.

It will require us to break down our awkwardness when talking about sex, so that people will vocally discuss consent in the bedroom, or wherever else it occurs. It will require us to stop putting faith in the system to deliver justice, as it is not the path all survivors wish to take in their personal road to recovery.

Sexual Assault (from p.1)

December 2012
Masculinity
By Taj Smith

Everywhere, I mean everywhere I look
There exist this thing called masculinity
Masculinity attacks me in my dreams
Taunts me as I walk,
Corrects the way I talk and restricts the bending of my legs
It keeps me prideful not wanting ask for help or beg
So instead, my fists drip in red as I’ve punched through another wall again
Can’t help it? Masculinity enjoys going to war over and over again
But is this truly my essence, the reason why I am on this planet
I’m so tired of masculinity sticking its nose in my business
Like I can’t hug another man without sending a sexual message
Like I can’t jump rope without making sure my Adam’s apple is in my throat
Like I can’t go without having a drink if it’s a woman I want to approach
As you can see masculinity drives me insane,
It’s the wheel and pedal that shifts me in and out of lanes
It’s the package that surrounds alcoholic beverages,
It’s the EXTRA LARGE condom that inflates my ego,
Influencing me to treat sex as conquest, gazing narrowly like a peephole
Masculinity is the key that locks up my true feelings in the closet
Keeping me silenced until the hegemony calls me back on stage
To perform gendered expectations for people older and my age

Cactus
By Valeria Pelayo

I stand in the heat
Small things hide in my shadow
but who will shade me?

Tortilla
By Valeria Pelayo

molded by women
same shape, different flour.
crushed to two dimensions
same shape, different maize.
filled with someone else’s cooking
same shit, different day.

Well-

Worded
The Alum: Jason B. Lucas

By JASON B. LUCAS ’02
Contributing Writer

I came to Williams College in the fall of 1998 from an all-male, all black Catholic high school in Chicago. I immediately told myself that it was my duty to take advantage of every opportunity there was to enjoy my college experience, and I did. Throughout my Williams experience I immersed myself in the community, with Kusika, Sankofa, Jazz Ensemble, the track team, and the Black Student Union (BSU) board.

Yet the idea of being a part of the campus also meant leaving my own unique stamp on things while there. So I was a member of two a cappella groups, started my own band, was a DJ for parties, had two radio shows on WCFM, was an active member in the Big Brother/Big Sister program within the BSU, and helped to leave new traditions, and spark activism in the wake of graduation. These experiences and others helped to shape my views on my community; and on the opportunities we can create for the greater good.

After leaving Williams, I sought to become an artist and musician full time, and have traveled the country in bands and now live and work in Brooklyn. I am currently seeking an MPA from Northwestern. I also have plans to acquire a Ph.D in ethnomusicology. I do these things because throughout my life I have seen the power of music and its ability to cross divides and strengthen our common bonds. Sadly our society has devolved into a place where art and excellence are less important. Yet, my current and future studies are aimed at bucking that trend.

At Williams I was an economics major, but graduating after September 11th, forced many students to alter their career paths. Having grown up in the arts, and being at somewhat of a crossroads, I decided to create a career that helped to inspire people to tap into their artistic capabilities in ways that lead to excellence in education, creativity, and innovation. That one decision was something I learned at Williams that motivates me today. The idea that I can create the future I want, and that Williams was there to give me the tools to do so.

Williams taught me to seek what drives me, as a person, as an artist, an economist, and a member of society. When I realized it was the importance of the arts in my life, then my decision was, how do I create a career that allows me to do the task only I am individually suited to do. The realization that my specific career path may not exist in the immediate was an epiphany to say the least, yet it was also an inspiring moment.

My growth since graduation has given me no fear in the face of uncertainty. Every day I realize more and more how well equipped I was as an Eph heading out into the uncharted world of being an artist and musician who graduated from Williams. The best advice I received while at Williams was in a meeting with Prof. Ernest Brown, Sandra Burton, and Kweyao Agyapon from the Dance Department where they more or less said, “Once you realize you’re capable of doing what has been done, take every opportunity to do the things that you haven’t. Those things will be your legacy, and they will inspire others to do the same.”

I hope that my Williams experience is a testament to the idea that you leave Williams better equipped to succeed than when you entered. Who could ask for anything more!

Retraction:

The Davis Center would like to make a retraction about a photo in our previous issue of Incite/Insight.

The photo associated with the article “Surviving the Margins: The Resilience of Poor Jamaican Women” was decided on by the Incite/Insight staff and not by the author, Jallacia Jolly.

Williams Reads

(from p. 1)

But let me be clear: This is only within Williams, and the “real world” of which Ehrenreich writes is just that real—perhaps even for some at this college. In my last semester at Williams (and beyond), I want to engage with this community—on and off the Williams Reads Committee—on discussing how the issues Ehrenreich writes about do and don’t affect us, and those of us outside the purple bubble.

I would like to thank the Williams Reads committee of last year for choosing this book to explore, and for continuing to choose books that examine not only pressing social issues, but also encourage individuals to realize the perspectival nature of understanding how such issues affect each of us individually. And I’d also like to thank everyone—especially my hard-working parents—who have encouraged me to trade embarrassment for pride.
Communty Spotlight: Ali Mctar ’14

Ildiko Bodor was born in Budapest, Hungary and moved to the United States 12 years ago. A staff member of Dining Services, she has taken Italian classes at Williams and said the experience has changed her life.

So, how did you get to Williams?

I'm Hungarian; I was born in Budapest and I grew up there. I met my ex-husband in Budapest and we moved here 12 years ago for his work. I was an optimist originally, in Hungary. I tried to get a job here, but most of the offices are family businesses. They also didn't take my papers and told me I had to go through schooling again.

Do you feel integrated into the Williams community?

I don't feel like I'm a part of the community. I've been here since October 2000 and have yet to find a true community of friendly and welcoming individuals. Maybe it's too small of a town. There aren't many places to hang out and meet people.

Do you think the dining staff feels as though they are a part of the community?

I think we could feel more a part of the community.

What should be done to improve dining staff services?

We need more people because we're short staffed all the time. We can't handle the amount of students and visitors we serve. I've been working here for 10 years and have seen many unfortunate changes. When I first started working in dining services the bakery was incredibly full of variety; it was normal to have eclairs as a part of our regular menu, not just for special occasions! The selection is so narrow now.

What would you say has been the best aspect of working at Williams?

The highlight of my time here at Williams has been the amazing Italian courses taught by Professor Anthony Nicastri. I took my first class about four years ago and it has changed my life. The class was full of life and the students were bright and ambitious. The professor only spoke in Italian, which was challenging, but a lot of fun.

Do those Italian courses still have an impact on your life?

Definitely. I went to Sicily this summer. I don't have the words to explain such a phenomenal trip. I have a strong passion for the language and culture, which began in my younger years when I was planning to learn English, but the class was full so I took Italian instead. I'm so grateful for that because I've always enjoyed Italian so much more. The courses allowed me to get by in Sicily pretty well, though they have a different accent on the island. The food was incredible and the people were so warm! They treated me like a friend, even after just meeting. My Italian improved. There are some things you can't learn from a class. My love for Italy is so deep. Through the Italian courses I also gained some friends. I practice Italian with one of them every Monday.

Last words:

There's no place like home. I miss it dearly.
Coming Next Semester:

Spring Heritage Months