



## Changing the World One Step at a Time

The current generation of students gets a bad rap. Media tell us they're intent on separating themselves from the world behind a wall of video games, headphones and private pursuits.

But if Williams students are at all typical, this is untrue. They do some of these things, to be sure, but they also engage the world in many ways that elude public notice. This is partly because their means of engagement differ from my generation's. While students of the 60s and 70s marched and protested against broad issues, students now focus more on changing the world one person or one issue at a time. And now that those tie-dyed T-shirts have been eaten by moths, who's to say that this different approach isn't better, especially in a different time?

In just the past few years, Williams students have launched programs to fight global AIDS, register bone marrow donors and deliver leftover dining hall food to local social service agencies. The numbers and ways in which they engage the world aren't contracting; they're growing.

A "Profile of Civic Engagement at Williams College" was compiled by Chaplain Rick Spalding and Coordinator of Experiential Education Paula Consolini. The profile, which you can obtain by visiting [www.williams.edu/Chaplain](http://www.williams.edu/Chaplain) (the link for the report is to the left, under volunteer community service), should change your view of the current generation.

"Virtually every student group on campus is involved, in some way and at some point in the year, in community service or civic engagement," it reports. The Lehman Service Council, which has been around for decades, is expanding its projects and has been joined by such groups as Students for Social Justice and Greensense. Religious groups, cultural groups, athletic teams and arts groups all give time and talent to the local community. The Garfield Republican Club, Williams Democrats and Williams College Debate Union all help us see the world outside the Berkshires.

Experiential learning is an important part of the curricular innovations that lie at the heart of our strategic plan. "Learning by doing" has long been the rule in such courses as environmental studies, in which groups of students plan local bike paths, say, or conversions for abandoned buildings. But now it's spreading across the curriculum.

More than half of our students will experience at least one semester of study abroad. And beginning in fall 2005, they can explore what New York City has to offer in a pilot version of a semester-long Williams in New York program.

Much student engagement with the local community is through the schools. The College's Program in Teaching lists each year the many academic and extracurricular ways that students can get a taste of teaching, from classroom work to tutoring to coaching.

Summer internships send an increasing number of students into practical experiences around the world, from Capitol Hill to villages in Kenya.

As the ethos of caring grows, so does the creativity of these efforts. For instance, in The Translation Project, students "translate important documents into Spanish (and other languages) for the benefit of newly-arrived immigrants in the region." In Hats for the Homeless, students knit caps for those who need them.

The list goes on and on.

"Williams could not be Williams apart from an integral relationship with the communities that surround [it]," the profile concludes. The same is true of the world beyond the Berkshires. That Williams students are increasingly, constructively engaged with that world speaks well of them and of their generation and, as important, bodes well for us all.

—Morty Schapiro