

# A Message from President Morty Schapiro

A Report from Williams 2007 Excerpt: A New Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences\*

Page 1 of 2

Dear Alumni, Parents, and Friends,

As an economist, I spend a lot of time thinking about the unintended consequences of well-meaning changes. They are usually bad consequences. But at Williams, we've experienced a disproportionate number of wonderful surprises—inspiring results beyond even our own high aspirations.

The '62 Center for Theatre and Dance is a perfect case in point. A magnificent performance space, '62 has also attracted renowned visiting artists who work directly with our students. In addition, the center has spawned the Summer Theatre Lab, an intensive program that brings together current students with Williams alumni who work in the performing arts. Together, they develop and stage a range of provocative productions—and learn a huge amount from each other in the process.

Another strong example is our new Paresky Center, which has proven to be more popular, more welcoming, and more supportive of a wide range of Williams community-building activities than our most optimistic expectations.

Then there's The Science Center. We knew, when it opened in 2000, that the center would provide students and faculty in the sciences and mathematics with state-of-the-art work space, and we hoped the design would encourage more student-faculty interaction. Today, we continue to be amazed at how the building has energized all our efforts in these key departments. It has attracted students, professors, and visiting lecturers who might not have considered Williams before. It has stimulated unexpected collaborations among faculty members and a whole new level of interaction between professors and students. And it has

entirely reinvigorated the south side of campus, giving it a distinctive pulse and purpose.

I always tell prospective students that they should never choose an institution because of its buildings; it's what's going on inside them that counts. But what we've learned from these recent projects is that the right buildings can trigger positive changes beyond our most ambitious plans.

Today, with these encouraging experiences in mind, we've plunged enthusiastically into another transformative project: Stetson-Sawyer. As you can see, on the facing and following pages, the current Sawyer Library will disappear, reemerging in a magnificent new incarnation, with a fully renovated Stetson Hall as its main entry. The new Sawyer Library will also house the Chapin Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts, the Williams College Archives and Special Collections, and the new Center for Media Initiatives. To make way for the new Sawyer, the old Stetson annexes will also disappear, to be replaced by two wonderful new academic buildings, flanking the north and south sides of a leafy new quad.

## Defining the Problem

Because the Stetson-Sawyer project is much more ambitious than we originally imagined, it's worth looking at the problems it aims to solve.

If you've been in the Stetson annexes you know that some of our faculty members are making do with offices better suited for small burrowing animals than for hardworking teachers and scholars. (When I started teaching at Williams, my own office there was so hard for students to find that I deliberately held office hours somewhere else.) Today, these conditions constitute much more than an inconvenience; they pose a real obstacle to achieving our academic mission.

For example, with the impetus of our strategic plan, we've almost tripled the number of tutorials. (We used to offer around 20 a year, involving 180 students. Now we offer around 60 and reach nearly 500 students.) Many of these tutorials are taught by faculty in the humanities and social sciences, as they squeeze their students into substandard offices. At the same time, in the current Stetson annexes, and in other offices scattered in old houses and fraternity buildings, many faculty members are widely separated from colleagues who would otherwise be natural resources, mentors or collaborators, across disciplines and even within their departments.

Equally important, since Sawyer Library was built 30 years ago, the definition of a first-class academic library has changed almost completely. Even with significant renovation, the current Sawyer could never live up to these new demands,

whether the measure is technology, suitable rare books storage, full handi-capped access, sufficient group meeting rooms, or bathrooms on the main floor.

### Building the Solution

The new Stetson-Sawyer project aims not only to rectify these conditions, but to serve as a crucial step in realizing our strategic plan by giving faculty and students the space to do their best work, and the proximity to strike up fresh intellectual connections.

With the new Sawyer Library, we'll gain a worthy home for Williams' extraordinary collections, and we'll give students and faculty the state-of-the-art facilities their work requires. And with the two new academic buildings, we will finally be able to give the faculty in humanities and social sciences — two-thirds of our professors — the same kind of conducive places to work with students, collaborate with colleagues, and conduct their own research that The Science Center provides for professors in science and math.

Ultimately, I'm convinced that the project will have the same profound effect on the north side of campus that

the science quad has had on the south. Judging from our past experience, the benefits we anticipate may be only a fraction of the positive momentum we'll see.


### Imagining the Future

In addition to updates on The Williams Campaign and the College's (excellent) financial condition, this issue of *The Report from Williams* highlights the imaginative teaching and learning that the new Stetson-Sawyer complex is designed to support. For example, we look at what makes this small American country town such a terrific place to learn Mandarin Chinese and how uniting the foreign languages faculties will strengthen the program still more. We hear from Magnus Bernhardsson, a professor who is already using video-conferencing technology to connect Williams students with university peers in Egypt and Israel and who has high hopes for the facilities slated for the new Sawyer Library. We join Professor Alex Willingham as he digs deep into Sawyer's holdings to unearth the history of voting rights. We learn from Charlotte White '08 and Matthew

Wollin '09 what it's like to take a "film noir" tutorial with Professor Jim Shepard. And we meet Professor Antonia Foias, who explains how the new archeology lab in the North Academic Building will help her introduce students to the subtle questions and profound thrills of primary archeological research.

Stories like these hint at the inspiring possibilities that we hope the Stetson-Sawyer project will unleash. The best part is knowing that the most exciting changes may once again take us by surprise.

Sincerely,



MORTON OWEN SCHAPIRO