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AND SAYS, *COME ON IN.*

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BY AMANDA KORMAN '10

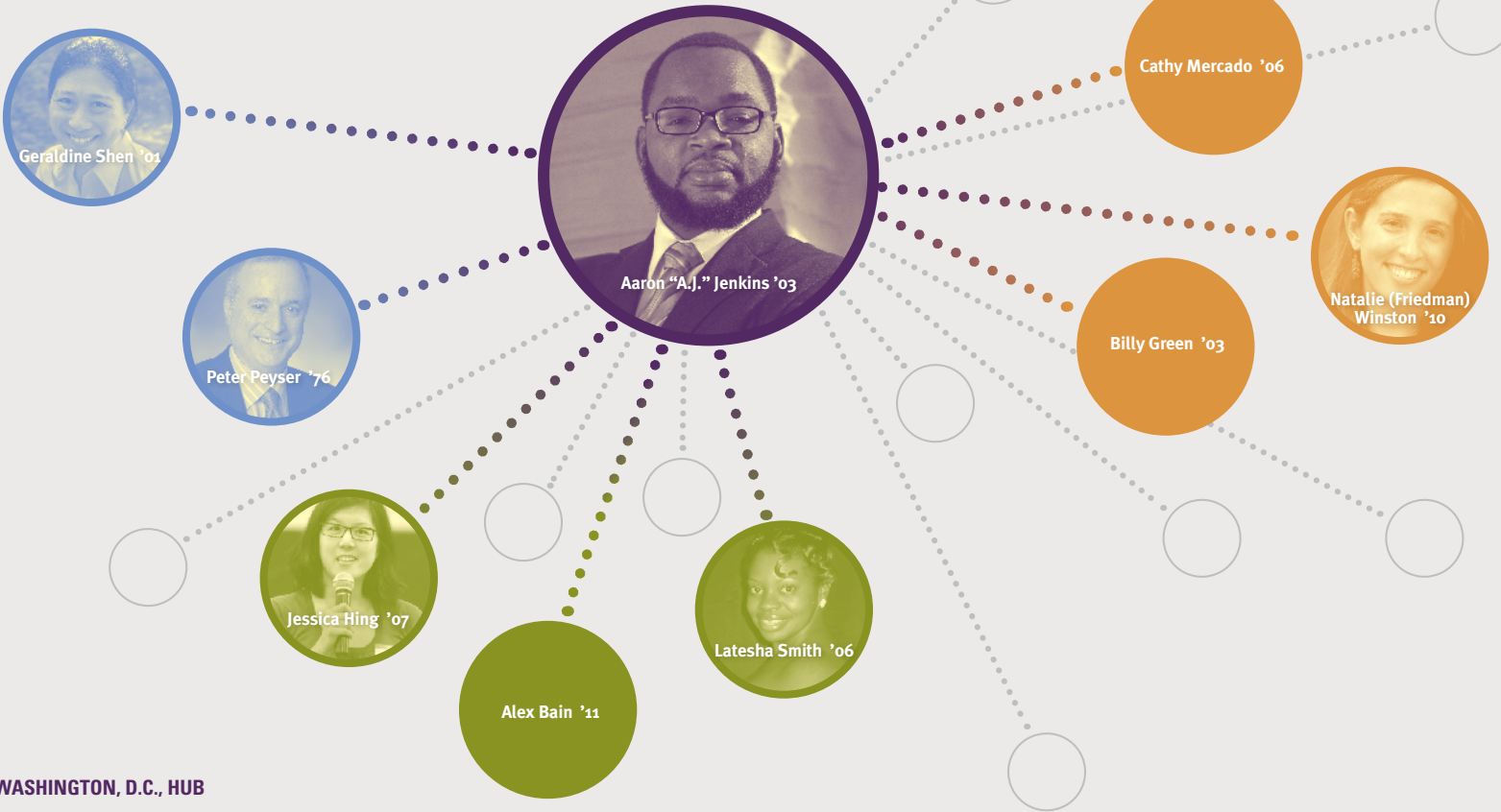
Aaron “A.J.” Jenkins ’03 made his first Williams connection at age 16, during a visit to campus. Naturally outgoing, he stopped a student at the snack bar to ask about the college. She not only answered his questions, she also treated him to ice cream at Lickety Split. To this day, Jenkins remains friends with Geraldine Shen ’01, who now works as a fundraiser for the college, and with Peter Peyser ’76, a Washington, D.C., lobbyist with whom he had an internship as a student. Their generosity was transformative and sparked in him the realization that “Williams is more than just a college, more than just an institution,” he says.

“There’s a familial connection,” he says. “People are looking out for my best interests, so I should do the same.”

Jenkins returned to D.C. after graduation to work on Capitol Hill and was happy to pave the way for an ever-widening circle of Ephs. As a legislative aide to U.S. Sen. John Kerry, he offered them career advice, forwarded their résumés and shared leads on jobs and apartments. He helped students find internships in his office and elsewhere. Now, as the executive director of the nonprofit Operation

Understanding DC, which brings together African-American and Jewish high school students to build community and learn about civil rights and social justice, he’s looped in alumni to serve as board members, speakers and mentors.

Stories abound of the kinds of informal, often impromptu, professional networks like the one Jenkins helped create in D.C., some of which are highlighted on the pages that follow. Fueled by a shared experience and understanding of what it means to have lived



## A WASHINGTON, D.C., HUB

Aaron Jenkins ’03 was a prospective student when Geraldine Shen ’01 introduced him to Williams. As an undergraduate, he interned with Peter Peyser ’76, a D.C.-based public affairs and strategic business consultant who remains a friend and mentor. As a legislative aide to U.S. Sen. John Kerry, Jenkins hosted Williams interns

including Jessica Hing ’07 (now New England’s Clean, Green and Healthy Schools coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency) and Alex Bain ’11 (in medical school at the University of Pennsylvania). He also connected Latesha Smith ’06, whose Williams roommate knew Jenkins through the step-dance team Sankofa, to her first

job, at Meridian, helping international ambassadors get acclimated to the U.S. Smith is now a freelance event planner. Jenkins recently became executive director of the nonprofit Operation Understanding DC, which educates African-American and Jewish high schoolers about civil rights and social justice. He recruited Billy Green ’03 to speak to the group

about LGBTQ issues. And Natalie (Friedman) Winston ’10, who participated in Operation Understanding in high school, is one of Jenkins’ board members. Jenkins also runs the Abramson Scholarship Foundation’s mentoring program for first-generation college students. Several Williams friends, including Cathy Mercado ’06, are mentors.

and learned in the Purple Valley, the networks cut across class years, geographic lines and industries.

And Williams is devoting new resources to expand access to those networks. In addition to maintaining a database of 28,700 alumni, fostering 70 regional associations that host networking events around the globe, overseeing 95 internship opportunities supported by alumni and having an active LinkedIn presence, the college last fall hired Wendy Webster Coakley ’85 as its first-ever director of alumni career networking. It’s her job, working in concert with the Career Center, to ensure that members of the Williams community see the college—and each other—as resources at every stage of their lives.

“We have an alumni network that’s the envy of other schools,” Coakley says. “And the college is dedicated to supporting that network, providing resources that everybody can access to help them find jobs or become more successful in their careers.”

## THAT FIRST INTRODUCTION

A professor who connects students with alumni to launch a nonprofit; a mentor who points the way after an unexpected job loss; a benefactor whose support provides a foothold in a tough industry;

an employer who understands the power of a Williams education—so often it’s a fellow Eph who opens the door to what turns out to be the rest of your life and says, *Come on in.*

That was the case for Tracy Heilman ’88. Twenty-six years ago, as a Williams senior, she was camped out in the Career Center, wading through binders in search of alumni working in management consulting back home in the Midwest. She wrote down the name Bill Holt ’81, the youngest person listed who met her criteria—and, in her mind, the least intimidating. She had no inkling that Holt would help set the course for the rest of her professional life and inspire her to do the same for others.

Holt worked for a small health care information company in Chicago called The Sachs Group and responded warmly to Heilman’s letter of introduction. He suggested a meeting, which turned into an interview, and before she knew it Heilman was shaking hands with Sachs’ president and going out for a beer with Holt’s colleagues. Within three days she had a job offer.

Holt sent Heilman apartment clippings while she was finishing up at Williams and, later, introduced her to the city’s running community. One Thanksgiving when Heilman was bogged down with work and couldn’t make it home to Holland, Mich., Holt welcomed her at his own family’s table.



Tracy Heilman ’88

At Sachs, Heilman got involved with Internet product development, an expertise that eventually led her and several colleagues to launch the consumer health information startup Subimo, which they sold to WebMD in 2006. Today she is the co-founder and consumer behavior strategist of ConnectedHealth, which helps educate consumers about health insurance options.

Holt died from complications due to AIDS in 1993. And Heilman, acknowledging the role he played in her career, is now helping Williams students and alumni find their own paths. Last spring she helped judge the college’s third annual Business Plan Competition, in which student entrepreneurs compete for \$15,000 to launch or bolster a business.

She’s also active in Williams’ 13,240-member career network, talking with young alumni who are interested in health care entrepreneurship. “In part because of how open people like Bill have always been to me,” she says, “I want to pass that along and be available to other people.”

In a survey of alumni volunteers last summer, 59 percent said they were willing to participate in career-based initiatives supporting students; 46.7 percent would do the same to support fellow alumni.

“Ephs are predisposed to help other Ephs,” says Coakley. “They provide opportunities for current students and each other because they know opportunities were provided for them.”

A PROFESSOR’S CONNECTIONS

Look closely at the nonprofit Reclaim Childhood, and you’ll find a web of Williams connections that spans more than 40 class years. But it all began with a conversation between two students and a professor.

Katherine (Krieg) Fischer ’08 and Anouk Dey ’09 were troubled by the refugee crisis in Jordan; 750,000 Iraqis had fled there during the war, and the small country couldn’t support them. Fischer, then a senior, and Dey, a junior, decided to submit a proposal to the Davis United World College Scholars Program, an organization co-founded and run by Philip O. Geier ’70, which offers grants to undergraduates implementing grassroots solutions to complex problems around the globe.

In developing the proposal, Fischer spoke with Magnus Bernhardtsson, her professor of modern Middle Eastern history. He suggested that she and Dey focus on young girls, who had been gravely impacted by the displacement; many had been forced into labor or prostitution. Bernhardtsson felt that Fischer, a field hockey player, and Dey, a skier, cyclist and rower, could use their enthusiasm and expertise to help the girls reclaim their childhoods through sport. The idea for a summer sports camp for refugee girls was born.

Bernhardtsson put the students in touch with Eric Widmer ’61, who was opening a private school in Jordan called King’s Academy. Widmer provided them with housing at the school, arranged for his students to volunteer at the camp and brought in people to help

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Fischer and Dey navigate the Arabic-speaking world—including Omer Khalayleh ’13, then a high school student who helped them negotiate more efficient busing.

“It’s one thing to make the connection,” says Bernhardtsson, “but it’s the person who has to then capitalize on that opportunity. And I had total faith in them.”

Dey and Fischer originally planned to hand over the camp to King’s Academy volunteers after the \$10,000 Davis grant they’d received ran out. But after their first summer in Jordan, they decided to form a nonprofit, Reclaim Childhood, and expand the program to include year-round camps, clinics and sports programs for refugee girls, as well as coaching clinics for women.

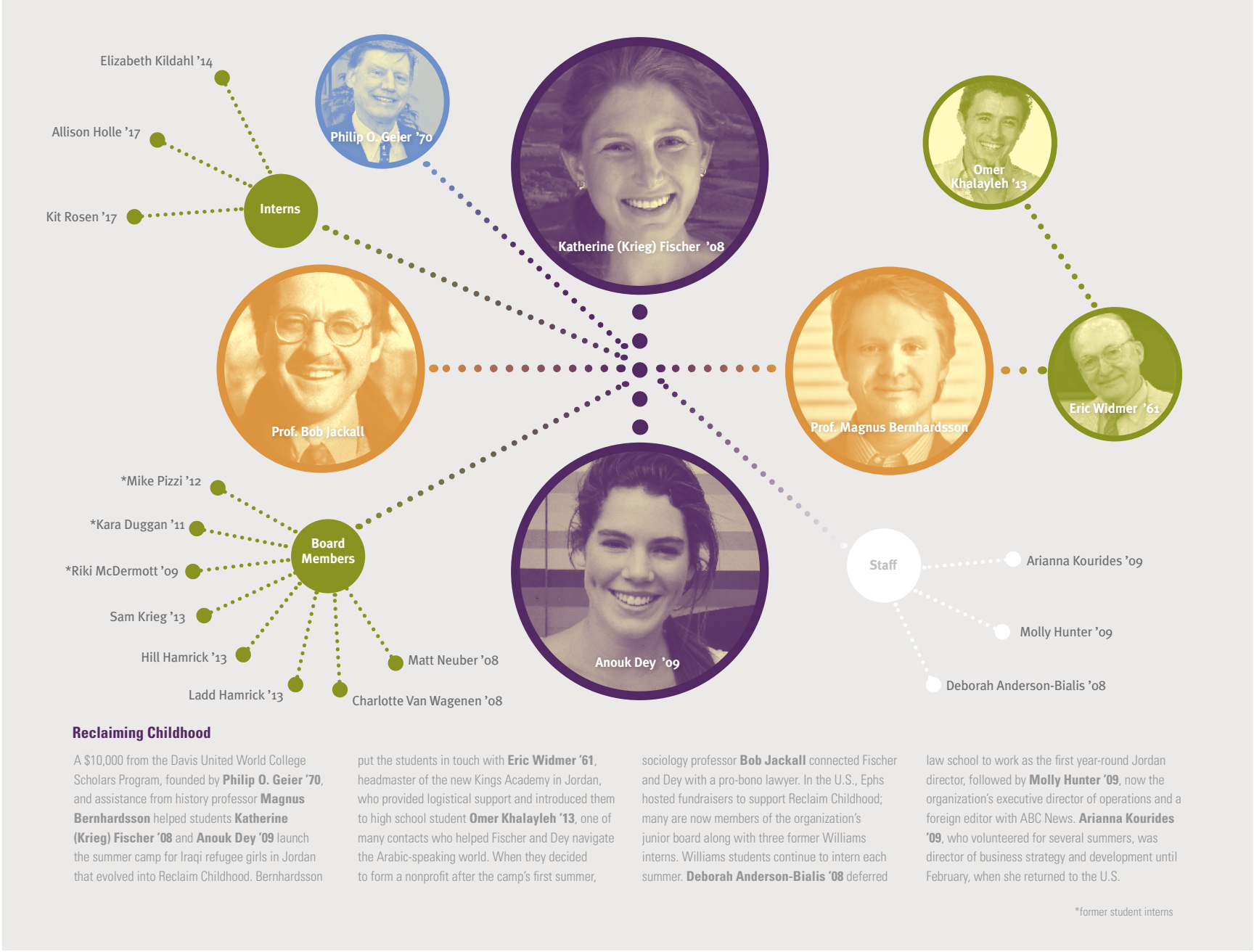
Williams connections were crucial to keeping the organization afloat. Ephs back in the U.S. hosted fundraising events. Deborah Anderson-Bialis ’08 deferred law school for a year to become the camp’s first year-round Jordan program director while Dey finished her last year at Williams and Fischer began a job at Bain & Co. Sociology professor Bob Jackall provided the women with the name of a lawyer friend in New York who worked pro bono to obtain 501(c)(3) status for the organization. Molly Hunter ’09 came on as the next Jordan director and is now executive director of operations. Arianna Kourides ’09 volunteered for several summers and worked for a year as director of business strategy and development. A steady stream of Williams students now spend summers working in Jordan.

The Williams engine that powers Reclaim Childhood also inspires one of the organization’s long-term goals: To one day provide a scholarship to a refugee so she can become an Eph.

Says Fischer, “The mission of the organization was formed by our Williams experience and the like-minded philosophy that there is a lot of value in having another sport or activity in your life.”

A MID-CAREER MENTOR

In almost every career there are shifts—whether because of a job loss, personal circumstances or the desire to pursue a new direction. Coakley is particularly attuned to the unexpected turns professional lives take. At the age of 50, she needed a change from her 17-year



THE WILLIAMS CONNECTIONS BEHIND RECLAIM CHILDHOOD CROSS MORE THAN 40 CLASS YEARS.

COURTESY OF RECLAIM CHILDHOOD



corporate career in the financial services sector, where she most recently was public relations manager for a Fortune 300 insurance company. The opportunity to serve as director of alumni career networking for Williams was one she couldn't pass up.

"Very few, if any, Williams grads are going to find a job or career path that's financially, mentally and emotionally rewarding for 40-plus years," she says. "And for those whose careers are disrupted by a job loss, there can be a stigma. I want Williams grads' first instinct to be to tap into the alumni network, particularly when they're at a fork in the road 10, 15, 30 years in."

That was lawyer David Futterman's '87 instinct when he reached a crossroads in his own career. After working as a litigator for a large New York City firm for 10 years, he had a yen to do something different in the field. A friend put him in touch with finance lawyer Steve Brody '83, who met with Futterman to discuss their work. Brody told him, "I don't have a position to offer you, but I like you, and I'm going to help you." Not long after, Brody—whom Futterman still considers a mentor—kept his promise, putting in a good word with a former colleague who interviewed Futterman for a position with Bank of America. Futterman got the job and worked there for eight years until, he says, his position was "restructured out of existence."

Futterman again turned to Williams, sharing his experience in his class notes in an effort to lessen the stigma associated with losing one's job. "As with other crucial phases of my life," he wrote, "Williams friends were there to support me. Too many to mention from our class and others eagerly shared their connections, served as references, took meetings, listened to my whining and more.

"And it was an Eph," he wrote, "who introduced me to the contact that ultimately produced my new role as U.S. director of litigation for TD Bank."

Futterman is also a resource for those just getting their start in law. In 2012 he spoke to the Williams Law Society and, before the night was over, connected with a handful of students on LinkedIn.

He's also a mentor to young lawyers. Hoyoon Nam '01, a banking and finance attorney, sought him out in 2011 after finding his name in the career database. At the time Nam was working at a large law firm but wasn't sure whether it was the right fit. Nam says Futterman was a voice of reason and understood his decision to leave the path many top-tier law grads take. Nam recently moved to a smaller firm.

"As a high school student applying to Williams, you hear about this tight, close-knit alumni network as one of the big advantages of going to a small liberal arts college," Nam says. "You don't really understand what that means until you're put in a situation where you need something from people who have gone through the process."

Says Futterman, "Among other things, your Williams degree is a ticket to this incredible network of people willing to do anything to help you, to talk to you, to be a sounding board, to be a mentor. It's a

"Your Williams degree is a ticket to an incredible network of people willing to do anything to help you, to talk to you, to be a sounding board, to be a mentor."

— DAVID FUTTERMAN '87



David Futterman '87

very special piece of Williams that we get to take with us when we leave school."

### ENTRÉE TO AN INDUSTRY

In their work to map the relationship between majors and careers (see <http://bit.ly/Devadoss>), math professor Satyan Devadoss and student researchers combed through 15,600

alumni records and grouped them into 15 fields. They found that, not unexpectedly, certain fields attract a large number of Ephs: 26 percent work in K-12 or higher education; 15 percent in health care and medicine; 12 percent in the law; and 9 percent in banking or finance. The concentration of Ephs in other industries is lighter, and the college's Alumni-Sponsored Internship Program is helping to feed these smaller but no less active professional networks.

Since its creation in 1991, the program has funded 1,500 students in fields where internships would otherwise be unpaid. According to Career Center Director John Noble, 95 students this summer are receiving \$3,200 stipends from 15 different funds, most of them geared toward nonprofits, public service and community service.

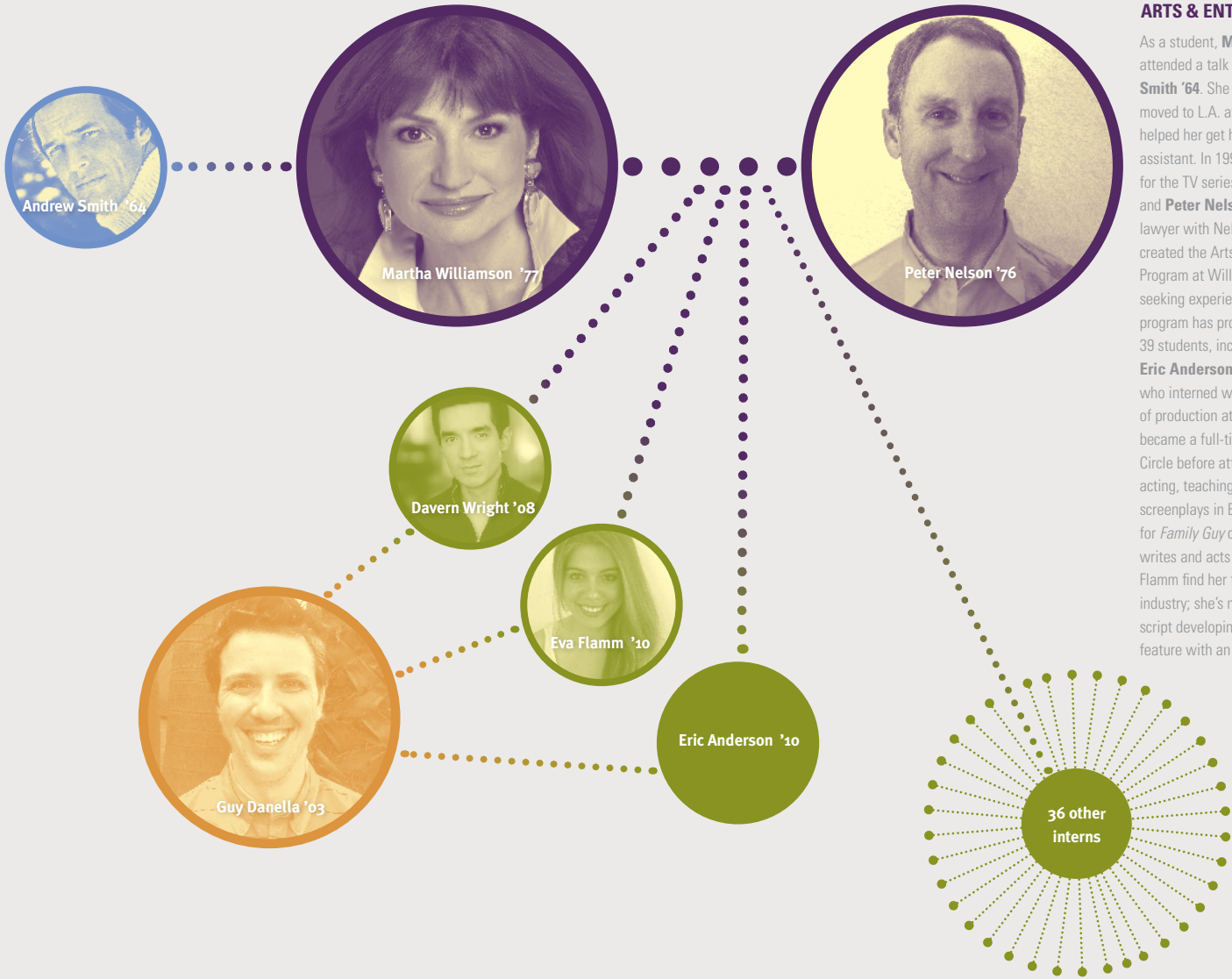
The Arts & Entertainment Internship Program is unique among them in that it's specifically designed to expose students to the entertainment industry. Devadoss' research shows that 3.26 percent of Williams alumni work in TV and film production, sports promotion, composing and related fields.

Martha Williamson '77, executive producer and creator of the TV series *Touched by an Angel*, established the fund in 1991 with Peter Nelson '76, a senior partner with entertainment law firm Nelson Davis Wetzstein. They were looking to host a unique event for the college's L.A. regional association and decided on a fundraiser to support Ephs seeking work in Hollywood.

Williamson knows firsthand how difficult it is to get a start in L.A. When she moved there after graduation, she slept on a friend's floor until writer Andrew Smith '64, who spoke at Williams while she was a student, helped her secure her first job as a production assistant.

From there she met the people who hired her to work for *The Carol Burnett Show*. Her first job as a staff writer was for *The Facts of Life*.

"It's not like an entry-level position where all you have to do is keep going up the ladder and survive," Williamson says. "You don't



### ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

As a student, **Martha Williamson '77** attended a talk by the writer **Andrew Smith '64**. She contacted him when she moved to L.A. after graduation, and he helped her get her first job as a production assistant. In 1991, Williamson, who's known for the TV series *Touched by an Angel*, and **Peter Nelson '76**, an entertainment lawyer with Nelson Davis Wetzstein, created the Arts & Entertainment Internship Program at Williams to support students seeking experience in Hollywood. The program has provided \$3,200 stipends for 39 students, including **Davern Wright '08**, **Eric Anderson '10** and **Eva Flamm '10**, who interned with **Guy Danella '03**, VP of production at Gold Circle Films. Wright became a full-time script reader for Gold Circle before attending film school; he's now acting, teaching and developing his own screenplays in Berkeley. Anderson works for *Family Guy* creator Seth McFarlane and writes and acts on the side. Danella helped Flamm find her first two paying jobs in the industry; she's now freelance writing and script developing while working on her own feature with an independent film producer.

even know where to find the ladder in show business."

While the Arts & Entertainment program is helping Williams students find their way into show biz, an eager group of alumni is welcoming them when they arrive. The L.A. alumni group Ephs in Entertainment, launched by Dan Blatt '85 in 2002, hosts informal mixers for industry newcomers and veterans. Meanwhile, Guy Danella '03 routinely hosts Williams interns at Gold Circle Films, best known for *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and *Pitch Perfect*, where he is executive VP of production.

"I moved out here without knowing anybody or without any real information," Danella says. "So I'd like to try to be a bridge from the Berkshires to L.A."

Eva Flamm '10, a theater major at Williams, interned with Gold Circle for about a year after graduation. Danella set her up with her first two jobs in the film industry: as an assistant first to a producer and then to a manager of writers and directors.

Flamm says Danella "was a great friend and mentor, finding time for me even when he was incredibly busy and always treating me like an equal even when I was a very little fish who knew absolutely nothing about Hollywood."

She is now developing her first feature with an independent film producer, and one of her short films was shot and directed by a friend in June.

In an industry where who you know can seem more important than what you know, the Arts & Entertainment program and alumni network provide sturdy footholds for students and young alumni. "We went to Williams," says Williamson, whose latest TV show, *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*, premiered on the Hallmark Channel in April. "We have what it takes to do it *if we can get the chance*—that's important. And the best people to give us that chance are other Williams alumni who understand what we're capable of accomplishing."

### A TWO-WAY STREET

Williamson's statement underscores an important point about the power of the alumni network. Those in a position to help often benefit from the relationship as much as those who reach out to them.

That was the case for Pittsfield, Mass., Police Chief Michael Wynn '93, who was creating the department's first crime analyst

# Williams

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position when he heard from Amanda O'Connor '10.

O'Connor joined the Army National Guard after graduation and spent two years on active duty. But when her dream of working for the FBI was sidelined by the U.S. government sequestration, she returned home to the Southern Berkshires to look for a job. She sent dozens of résumés "into the abyss," she says, but got little traction.

On the recommendation of a former boss who knew their Williams connection, O'Connor contacted Wynn to pick his brain. That's when she learned about the crime analyst position and applied for the job. With her training in military intelligence and her Williams background, her résumé quickly rose to the top of the more than 50 Wynn considered. She started work this past December, building the Berkshires' first police intelligence unit.

Police and military work are unusual career choices for Ephs; Devadoss' research shows that fewer than 5 percent of alumni work in "government," which includes the two. Says Wynn, "I would be thrilled if more Williams grads chose public service. So if I can influence that in any way, then that's part of my responsibility as both a Berkshire County resident and as a grad."

Wynn and O'Connor met not only because they are Williams alumni, but also because they had the Berkshires in common. And Coakley is hoping to make it possible for alumni in every profession, in every geographic location and at every stage of their careers to easily find one other.

"There are some directions in which alums tend to go, at least initially," she says. "But a liberal arts education is designed to give you the wherewithal to consider a variety of paths or areas in which your skills can be adapted. So it's incumbent on us here at Williams to enable alumni across all industries to connect with one another and to learn from one another."

## HOW CAN I BE HELPFUL?

When Coakley started work as director of alumni career networking last fall, her first order of business was knitting together the network of Ephs online. She created a Williams College LinkedIn page (<http://bit.ly/WMSLinkedIn>), connecting more than 15,000 alumni. She and fellow members regularly share career- and college-related information there. Members can find each other with a search by field, city and class year.

"Ephs live everywhere," Coakley says, "and you can't always be in a city where a big event is happening. You may not be employed in an industry where there happens to be an active career affinity group."

So she's also working on developing a hub for alumni careers on the Williams website to complement the alumni directory. She imagines the site as an employment marketplace as well as a resource center for sharing advice and experiences related to career

building—a giant map where alumni can "check in" with their location, current job and the path they took to get there, accessible to all members of the Williams community, including students.

Equally important is fostering the face-to-face connections and mentoring relationships that already benefit so many Ephs. Planning is under way for annual networking events in a handful of major cities. Coakley is also beginning to work with alumni to create career affinity groups based on the Ephs in Entertainment model. The groups would offer professional advancement for alumni and serve "as an on-ramp for students who want to go into a certain industry," she says.

The alumni career network "can teach new skills, it can provide referrals, and, in a perfect world, it can provide job offers, too," Coakley adds. "Whatever the outcome, it can demonstrate to students and underscore to alumni that their Williams experience will remain meaningful long after they leave campus."

That was the case for A.J. Jenkins, for whom the alumni network is a second, enormous family that only gets better with age. It's only natural, he says, to want to help.

And it's only natural, hearing as a student about the power of the Williams alumni network, to seek help, too. A survey of the Class of 2014 showed that 70 percent of seniors talked to at least one alumnus as they made plans for after graduation. Of that group, 96 percent said they found alumni advice and assistance helpful.

"A fish doesn't know it's in water," Jenkins says. "So offering assistance to a Williams person isn't even something I actually think about. It's, 'Oh, someone from Williams is calling. How can I be helpful?'"

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Amanda O'Connor '10



Michael Wynn '93



WENDY WEBSTER COAKLEY '83  
DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI CAREER NETWORKING

PHOTO BY ROMAN IMASIWKA