



Claiming Williams 2014: Ephs Address Campus Issues Using Design Thinking

Williams College
Claiming Williams Day
From Potential to Action
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Executive Summary

On Claiming Williams Day 2014, Kinetic invited students to apply its problem solving strategies to the Williams community in an event titled *From Potential to Action*. To ensure that the event would reflect students' frustrations and worries, responses to the question "What concerns you about the future of Williams?" were collected from the student body prior to the event and grouped into five discussion topics.

At the event, students chose issue groups based on personal preference. Each group was twenty minutes to use the Kinetic problem solving model to tackle these issues by current Kinetic leaders, a group of students that have gained experience through guiding productive, solution oriented conversation through their roles in Kinetic.

The event was for many students a phenomenal introduction to Kinetic's methods. Issue groups began by identifying different key contributing factors to the issue at hand. With the guidance of discussion leaders, students then narrowed their focus by separating the aspects of these issues that were possible to control and change from those requiring systemic or bureaucratic change. The group was then asked to defer all thoughts of feasibility and brainstorm outrageous and creative solutions. As students allowed themselves to think without constraints, ideas flourished and expanded. Over the course of the twenty minute period, many of the original ideas matured from their unrealistic origins to more practical fixes.

This report is a collection of the creative ideas generated during each group's twenty minute sessions. Some are simple, others quite complex. Many are variations on ideas that exist and are successful outside of Williams, and some are unprecedented. *From Potential to Action* demonstrated the power and versatility of Kinetic's reach. Students unfamiliar with our methods and goals left the event with a renewed confidence in their potential to affect change, and openness to facing challenges, and a sense of pride and ownership for Williams College, their home for nine months of the year.

The day's event was empowering and inspiring, but in true Kinetic fashion, we feel it would be insufficient to treat the experience as simply an exercise. We share with you nearly fifty bold solutions that Williams students designed for issues that they deemed important. We think these have the potential for great positive change on our campus, if only they can be transformed from their current state into meaningful action.

Discussion 1: Encouraging Political Discourse

How can we inform students and facilitate political discussions at Williams?

The Williams student body is outspoken when it comes to issues directly concerning the campus, but a large population of the student body is hesitant to engage in either political conversations or political action that extend to the world beyond Williams. Involvement frequently goes no further than stating political views via social media platforms and is accompanied by little or no action. How can we address the “slacktivism” mentality on our campus?

The first *Encouraging Political Discourse* group was composed of all males with the exception of one discussion leader and one female participant, indicating that the women present felt some hesitation in joining the dialogue on this particular topic. All present clearly had a vested interest in having political conversations. The second group was made up of a majority of females. While we started with the same underlying problems, the groups came up with wonderfully distinct solutions.

- **Creating Spaces for Discussion:** There is no space to talk about politics. The state of Massachusetts is notoriously liberal, as is the campus, and Republican or students belonging to other political parties feel ostracized. To prevent uncomfortable conversations, students deflect political conversations, leaving few spaces for open political discussion.
- **Informing Students and Instilling Confidence:** Space oriented solutions are targeted towards those who are confident in their beliefs and are frustrated by a perceived inability to express them freely. Many people feel uninformed about politics for a number of reasons and are hesitant to have conversations for fear of seeming ignorant.
- **Extending Classroom Conversations:** Conversations about politics often start and end in the classroom, specifically the Division 2 classrooms. Students might go through their entire Williams Career without engaging academically in a conversation about contemporary political views.
- **Realizing the Potential of Social Media:** The potential of social media is not being exploited to its fullest extent. Many people use social media as a proxy for legitimate engagement, but it has the potential for being a useful tool for promoting productive political discourse.



Discussion 1: Encouraging Political Discourse

Focus Area	Solution
Creating Spaces for Discussion	<p>The Politics House: A house or other space set up in the style of a french salon, where students and professors could come to discuss different topics in either a structured or unstructured atmosphere. It would understood to be an ideologically respectful environment; the Poly Sci equivalent of the the Physics Common Room in the Thomson Physics Lab.</p> <p>Wednesday Night Politics: A student group dedicated to discussing political issues, the political equivalent of Thursday Night Grassroots (Wednesday Night Politics, for example).</p> <p>Pera Politics: Dinners with predetermined topics that encourage students to meet and discuss topics in a casual but engaging setting, such as the restaurant on Spring Street that has previously expressed interested in partnering with Williams.</p> <p>Politics and Bowling: Fairly self explanatory. A low-pressure political conversation.</p> <p>Political Parties: Social events centered around a political event, such as an election results release, a state of the union address or other notable event to encourage active discussions. (Alternative Title: Tea Party.)</p>
Informing Students & Instilling Confidence	<p>Link us to Sources: A series of links to news sources installed deemed reliable to library computers, WSO, or Williams homepage to encourage students to read up on current events outside the purple bubble.</p> <p>Entry Current Events: Encourage political conversations and awareness by choosing a topic each week for consideration in the entry for students who are interested in discussing this event. An interesting space to explore diverse perspectives. Some potential for conflict.</p> <p>Current Events Listserv: Loosely based on the Politico Playbook, informing students of the issues that might be relevant to their lives. Non-biased reporting. (Names suggested- The Williams/College Playbook, Williams News Report, Breaking the Bubble, Just the Facts). A radio broadcast or podcast was also suggested. This could easily be shared with college students in the 'Cac and nationwide.</p> <p>Politics for Dummies Panel Series: Speakers brought onto campus to discuss current political topics in a way that encourages students to first learn and then discuss. All present would have the same baseline knowledge and feel able to participate and present informed opinions. Professors or Williams Alumni would be perfect for this. Topic Suggestion: Unrest in Syria.</p>
Extending Classroom Conversations	<p>How'd You Get There?: Bring in speakers to share the steps they took to get from college into politics. What does a life as a politician really look like from the inside? How can we make internships for those interested in politics more accessible and well publicized? Career Center could be helpful. Suggested speakers: Chris Murphy, Senator, Williams '96. Todd Rogers.</p> <p>Interdepartmental Conversations: Where are the connections between art and political rebellions? What do policy makers have to do with the laws of physics? Many classes or mere discussions could encourage some good old-fashioned liberal arts connections.</p> <p>Increasing Voter Registration: Making voter registration and completion simpler, and offering materials and suggested sources for those who wish to be more informed on the candidates and ballot topics.</p>
Realizing Potential of Social Media	<p>Tinder for Politics: An application that connects you with others who share a passion for politics or current events and are interested in discussing these topics. It would make meeting for platonic conversation simple.</p> <p>Online Forum: The school student website, WSO, could be a useful place for encouraging the politically minded to engage in informative discussions and mobilizing students. A simple solution, but with high potential for abuse.</p>

Discussion 2: Prioritizing Mental Health

How can we change the campus culture of “effortless perfection”?

The culture at Williams encourages students to become involved in various campus activities. Unfortunately, this involvement leaves students overworked and under extreme pressure. Rather than care for themselves, students are willing to prioritize these extracurricular activities at the expense of their health and wellbeing. We were interested in seeing how we can improve mental health on campus and change the attitudes toward sleep and “effortless perfection” without detracting from the positive engagement of the student body.

- **Foster Campus-Wide Support:** Admitting weakness on Williams’ campus can be intimidating, and further developing programs and initiatives that de-stigmatize weakness at Williams would have a significant impact on the view of mental health at Williams.
- **Improve Access to Health Facilities:** Students may have difficulty accessing the health center and fitness facilities because of injuries or busy schedules. Small adjustments to the setup of health facilities at Williams would have a large impact on students’ stress management.
- **Offer Anonymity in Discussion:** Pre-existing programming that serves to personalize the hardships students face at Williams, such as “You Are Not Alone,” ask students who share their stories to step out of anonymity. This is a great method for starting conversation, but it alienates some students, leaving out many important voices. Potential solutions to this issue did not come easily, but identifying this pressure prompted a riveting discussion of when anonymity is the best option for a student dealing with a difficult situation and when it is counter-productive.
- **Increase Stress-Busting Efforts:** In times of need (i.e. midterms and finals) organizations on campus such as Peer Health provide treats and small “stress-busting” activities/foods. Students are interested in increasing these events.



Discussion 2: Prioritizing Mental Health

<u>Focus Area</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Foster Campus-Wide Support	<p>Peer Mentorship: Small changes to the peer mentorship program could have a great impact in supporting struggling students. Mandatory involvement in the mentorship program could ease transition and could change systemic problems.</p>
	<p>First Days Discussion: Increasing discussion about the detrimental effects of perfectionism could have positive effects on campus culture and encourage these discussions within entries. <i>Including this topic in JA training could be helpful.</i></p>
	<p>Poster Campaign: Similar to the I am Williams posters showing the diversity of student interests and experiences, “I am Williams...and I am not perfect” could provide inspiration and comfort to those that are struggling.</p>
	<p>Peer Health Talks: Members of peer health talking about their own struggles during First Days and throughout the year, in addition to You Are Not Alone.</p>
Improve Access to Health Facilities	<p>Health Center Relocation: Students who need the Health Center often are injured or ill and find it inconvenient to get to the non-central health center location. Moving the Health Center to a more central location on campus (e.g. Thompson) would make it more accessible to those who need it.</p>
	<p>24-Hour Gym Access: This could be staffed by students, and would offer jobs for interested students.</p>
	<p>Mini Gyms: Adding gym equipment in the new library and in major dorms (Mission, Frosh Quad, Lehman) would be welcomed by busy students.</p>
Offer Anonymity in Discussion	<p>Bring Speakers to Campus: Speakers can talk about sensitive issues without drawing on the experiences of students. This would allow for more variety and a dialogue that does not center around individuals. (i.e. Dr. Maas, famous sleep specialist who speaks about stress/performance and sleep correlation).</p>
	<p>Anonymous Surveys Surveys to gather data on prevalence of issues like depression and anxiety, eating disorders and others could ensure the issues that need to be targeted have been addressed. (Eating disorders in particular provide a poignant example of serious and prevalent issues that are rarely discussed.)</p>
Increase Stress-Busting Efforts	<p>NLT Snacks: Many neighborhood leaders make weekly snacks for their upperclassmen, but strengthening the snack relationship as a part of the upperclassmen experience could be a community building activity. (Note: Snacks, as a quintessential entry activity, can be alienating to students who did not have positive entry experiences.)</p>
	<p>Random Act of Kindness Group: Forming a Random Act of Kindness group at Williams would encourage students to appreciate the little things in life. Small events like a putting a stack of sticky notes in student mailboxes for the sole purpose for students to write notes that compliment someone and pass them on is a small activity that makes someone’s day.</p>
	<p>Libray Surprises: Increasing the frequency of library surprises, like the Spring Streakers or surprise a capella performance would break up the monotony of studying and remind students that the severity of their problem sets or essays are not always as extreme as they seem.</p>
	<p>Library “Play Corner”: Including a space in libraries with board games, Play-doh, crayons, etc. could alleviate the stress student stress.</p>

Discussion 3: Equalizing Career Readiness

How can we increase career opportunities for students of all socio-economics backgrounds?

Although avenues exist for preparation for life post-Williams in the Career Center and elsewhere, students socioeconomic backgrounds often have a large impact on their career readiness and ability to effectively pursue postgraduate opportunities. Increased career readiness and success is a concern for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

With the help of a senior and a junior from widely different socioeconomic backgrounds who had recently completed the job search process, our group started with an open and empathetic interview to understand the differences between their experiences in preparing for life post-Williams that were likely affected by their socioeconomic background. The group used these insights and the resulting conversation to frame the issue and brainstorm solutions.

- **Exploiting Experience:** The college offers resources for career advising through the Career Center, a majority of students claim that their most insightful career information comes from individual connections outside of the Career Center's individual or group advising sessions. (Due to Williams small student-population and location, it may not be feasible to have top-tier advising in every field that a Williams student may wish to pursue post-Williams. As a result, our brainstorming sessions veered away from direct Career Center advising for every career path as a potential solution.)
- **Providing Counseling:** Williams graduates who receive offers from top firms post-Williams note that non-trivial preliminary costs in the job search process can add up and inhibit some students from investing in a competitive advantage in the job search process. Obtaining a job in Boston or New York (two locations where a number of recent Williams graduates congregate) often requires upfront costs not included in a final-round interview reimbursement (e.g. travel, business clothing, and dry cleaning expenses). These obstacles should not hinder the competitiveness of a Williams student's application.
- **Easing Job Preparedness Costs:** Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have distinct advantages at networking, a key element of the job search process. These students are more likely to have been exposed to appropriate social interactions in formal business settings and are also more likely to start the networking process earlier.



Discussion 3: Equalizing Career Readiness

<u>Focus Area</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Exploiting Experience	<p>Senior Mentors: Seniors may sign up or be nominated to serve as mentors to first-years or sophomores to talk about career preparation. Pairs would be matched based on personal and professional shared interests.</p>
	<p>Advisor Speed-Dating: Another variation on student mentorship, Advisor Speed-Dating would involve speed dating sessions that paired freshmen with upperclassmen to discuss career aspirations and connect on a professional basis. This model could be adjusted to involve alumni speed-dating with students from each class.</p>
Providing Counseling	<p>Faculty House Dinner Parties: Regular formal dinner parties would allow Williams students to practice dining etiquette and formal social interactions. Holding the dinners in a somewhat foreign, formal setting would prepare students for formal interactions beyond the Purple Bubble. (Note: The Etiquette Dinner had not been established/announced at the time of this discussion).</p>
	<p>Alumni-Student Connection: Alumni and current students would create profiles of their favorite activities to do in the Purple Valley and their personal/professional interests. When alumni visit campus, they could connect with students with similar interests through an afternoon hike up Stone Hill or a trip to Mass MoCA. The program would create meaningful connections between current students and those who have had similar experiences when entering the workforce.</p>
	<p>Politics for Dummies Panel Series: Speakers would be brought to campus to discuss current political topics in a way that would encourage students to first learn and then discuss. All present would have the same baseline knowledge and feel able to participate and present informed opinions. Professors or Williams Alumni would be perfect for this. Topic Suggestion: Unrest in Syria.</p>
Easing Job Preparedness Costs	<p>Networking Fellowships: Williams students could use funding set aside for subsidizing travel expenses when used for networking or job preparation purposes. The system would allow students to make important connections for future success regardless of personal access.</p>
	<p>Subsidized Dry Cleaning: When students attend an approved networking event or have an interview that require business attire, they may be eligible to apply for subsidized dry cleaning.</p>

Discussion 4: Improving Upperclassmen Residential Life

How can we facilitate strong, diverse communities in upperclassmen residential life?

Williams boasts a diverse student body and an emphasis on community. However, students from underrepresented groups are often not well integrated into campus life. Many students feel the strongest social divide exists between those who participate in sports and those who do not. A large portion of the student body at Williams College, approximately 36%, participates in varsity athletics. 44% of the student body participates in intercollegiate sports. These tensions between athletes and “nonners” manifest themselves in the housing system at Williams, counteracting efforts to integrate the community through the freshman year entry system. How can the campus better facilitate strong diverse communities in upperclassmen residential life?

This discussion group consisted of a fairly even representation of athletes and nonathletes. We began by discussing both perspectives of the issue and gauging the extent that discussion participants observed this divide. Students were well prepared to share their views, as the recent abolishment of the neighborhood system at Williams has made upperclassman life a hot topic for discussion. From here, we identified to areas of focus within this issue:

- **Unifying Student Groups:** Students at Williams feel a distinct social divide between those who participate in athletics and those who do not. Oftentimes, athletes feel stereotyped because of their involvement in sports, while non-athletes feel they are not welcome in team dominated settings. However, this divide is manifested in the weekend social activities that teams engage in. Inter-team socialization including meals, mixers, and parties exclusively for athletes are examples of the divide.
- **Strengthen Living Communities:** Students of all demographics seemed to agree that within their houses or dorms, there was an absence of unity. This is shown in peoples’ lack of familiarity with their neighbors and housemates. A few efforts have been made to encourage camaraderie such as neighborhood events and snacks, but more can be done in the way of bringing together community members.



Discussion 4: Improving Upperclassmen Residential Life

<u>Focus Area</u>	<u>Solution</u>
<p style="text-align: center;">Unify Student Groups</p>	<p>Expand Superfan Program: Williams College Superfan currently works with SAAC (Student Athletic Advisory Committee) to garner support for athletic teams on campus and within the community. Expanding the Superfan program to fine arts events on campus will help spread the word about these organizations and garner more campus support for both athletic and arts events. In addition to the athletic Superfan event of the week, we can also feature a fine arts performance of the week.</p>
	<p>Brother-Sister Program: The Michelin men of Williams College are members of the Varsity Baseball Team who regularly attend and support the Varsity Women’s Soccer events. Several athletic teams on campus have established similar brother-sister programs. Expanding brother-sister programs between athletic teams and fine arts groups could help decrease the divide between athletes and non-athletes on campus. This mutual support system between athletic and arts programs will create a stronger sense of community throughout Williams and increase campus support.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Strengthen Living Communities</p>	<p>Social Housing: To combat the issue of generational divides between different class years, a social house system would be instated. Such a system would include every Williams student living on campus. Social housing would be a voluntary engagement whereby students live with others and engage in house functions. The system would draw the focus away from athletic groups as the main providers of weekend social activities and events.</p>
	<p>Dorm Day: One of the best ways to get people to come together is to create a common goal or opponent. Dorm day would be a field day in the spring where houses or neighborhoods would compete together to beat other teams at simple competitions like egg toss, a potato sack race, a handstand contest, a crossword race, a puzzle competition, etc. This event would bring housemates together in an atmosphere to encourage community and fun!</p>

Discussion 5: Bridging the Socio-Economic Divide

How can we ease social tensions that arise from daily expenses?

Students at Williams come from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. While financial-aid allows students to attend Williams College, it does not address many of the economic challenges students face on a day to day basis. Expenses such as the rising costs of textbooks, social dinners, team gear and transportation to and from Williamstown require attention and critical reform in order to make economic inequalities as little of an impediment as possible to a successful and happy Williams experience.

- **Link Students with Hosts:** Transportation to and from the college has high costs for international students and students who live at a considerable distance from Williams. Additionally, securing alternative arrangements for breaks in the college schedule can involve significant time costs in addition to the financial costs.
- **Facilitate Transportation:** Transportation to New York, Boston, or other major cities for internship and job interviews is also expensive. Students who have a car are able to get off campus much more easily than students who must pay for the infrequent Williams bus service, the expensive Peter Pan bus service or the Zipcar service.
- **Economize:** The rising costs of textbooks requires students to spend several hundred dollars each semester and poses a particular challenge for students who are not on financial aid and who do not receive the book grant, but for whom paying for tuition is a challenge.
- **Business-Customer Partnerships:** The cost of social events and team dues is a large portion of student spending. Spring Street restaurants and other social gathering spots are quite expensive and become an impediment to successful social interaction for students who wish to join their friends out at a restaurant but cannot afford to do so.
- **Spark Dialogue:** The lack of awareness or openness about socio-economic diversity on this campus can make students who struggle with these issues from feeling as if they have neither a safe space to share their concerns nor a person to whom they can turn for help with these issues.



Discussion 5: Bridging the Socio-Economic Divide

<u>Focus Area</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Link Students with Hosts	<p>Student Host Forum: A listing of students and faculty who are willing and able to host students for breaks during Thanksgiving, winter, and spring breaks would help cultivate the Williams community and alleviate the pressures associated with finding plans for break, which can be a costly experience (in terms of time costs to finalize plans and financial costs of paying for lodging and/or transportation).</p> <hr/> <p>Alumni Host Program: A similar service including interested local alumni to host students over breaks would provide similar benefits and help connect interested alumni with current Williams students. The Alumni Office could help coordinate this effort.</p>
Facilitate Transportation	<p>Interview Transportation Funding: The Career Center could fund more buses and Zipcar accounts for students who need to get to interviews. This is a high priority issue because it is integral to students' success in finding internships and jobs. This fund should be robust and easily accessible to ensure equality of access for students both on and off financial aid who find access to transportation challenging.</p> <hr/> <p>Career Center Cars: The Career Center could have a car or two available for students licensed by the college to reserve to take to interviews, similar to the Center for Learning in Action's cars available for students to use for volunteer engagements.</p>
Economize	<p>Student Textbook Exchange Program: An institutionally recognized student textbook exchange program would allow students to swap used textbooks and alleviate costs associated with procuring class materials, which can be substantial for students who do not receive a book grant from the college.</p> <hr/> <p>Williams Used Textbook Market: Monetizing the Student Textbook Exchange Program described above would allow students to sell their books at a discounted rate to other students. This service could be hosted by WSO or a third party website.</p>
Build Business-Customer Partnerships	<p>Group Rates and Discounts: Spring Street Restaurants could offer discounts to be advertised in the William's Record. This would improve their business and ease costs for students.</p>
Spark Dialogue	<p>Encourage Entry Conversations: Formal training and guidelines for facilitating productive conversations about socio-economic diversity could ease friction in these freshmen living spaces and improve campus culture.</p> <hr/> <p>Set Precedents with Academic Discussions: A precedent for conversations about socio-economic diversity could be established upon arrival with academic advisors. Advisors could hold small group discussions with their advisees, offering a space outside of the entry space to talk about these challenges.</p>

Recommendations for Further Action

To Whom It May Concern,

This collection of innovative ideas is a testament to the applicability of the Kinetic design model to a wide range of issues, including those that affect the local community. At Kinetic's 2014 Claiming Williams event, we sought to inspire and empower the students who joined us to develop solutions to address critical concerns on our campus. We as an organization consider this event a great success, but Kinetic strives to move beyond interesting and valuable discussion to tangible action.

Kinetic's model can be a great asset to the already active student organizations working to tailor the campus to students' demands. The host of ideas articulated here was developed by current Williams students whose discussion and design were informed by their own experiences at the College and those of their peers. Many of these solutions serve the needs of students with mixed identities and diverse interests. For this reason, we are making these ideas available to the public in the hopes of contributing our solution-oriented voice to on-going conversations.

Our efforts are incomplete until the implementation of some of these ideas is realized. Here in these pages is the potential for lasting change on the Williams College campus. We believe the first step towards the goal of a Williams that has been claimed by the current student body is the persual of one or more of the ventures designed at our Claiming Williams event in direct response to experiences students face daily on this campus.

Following the brainstorming phase exercised at this event, the Kinetic process typically involves developing partnerships with organizations with shared goals and values and collaborating to polish and actualize these plans. Because campus-specific work is not Kinetic's focus, we are not currently working on implementing these solutions. However, we offer these suggestions to the organizations, departments, programs and individuals who have the vested interest and the resources to make these student ideas a reality. Should any of the listed groups or individuals listed on the right find the ideas in this report valuable, we hope they will work in tandem to achieve their implementation.

Yours in Action,

Kinetic Executive Board

ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS FOR ACTION

1. Claiming Williams Committee
2. College Council Great Ideas Committee
3. Steve Klass
4. Committee on Diversity
5. Peer Health
6. Department of Political Science
7. Williams Democrats
8. Williams Republicans
9. Williams Career Center
10. College Council
11. The Davis Center
12. Stressbusters
13. Center for Learning In Action
14. Active Minds
15. Williams Libraries
16. Office of Student Life
17. Mental Health Committee
18. The Health Center
19. Office of Student Life
20. Minority Coalition
21. Superfan
22. Cap & Bells
23. First Days Committee
24. Junior Advisor Advisory Board
25. Karen Ryan
26. Dean David Johson
27. Department of Political Science
28. Department of International Studies
29. Neighborhood Leadership Team
30. Office of Financial Aid
31. The Gargoyle Society