Lawrence Williams leaves his mark in Luther history

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STAFF WRITER

Professor Lawrence Williams shares his story as he says farewell after 25 years of teaching and building community at Luther

Williams’ Journey:

1965: Graduated from Kentucky State University

1971: Attended Baptist Theological Seminary & received Master’s in Divinity from University of Louisville

1980: Worked toward receiving Ph.D. from University of Iowa

1985: Began teaching at Luther in Africana Studies Department

1986: Started teaching in the History Department

Lawrence Williams will retire this spring after 25 years at Luther College. He will return to his hometown of Louisville, Ky. at the end of this year.

Throughout his time here, Williams has made use of his personal experiences, willingness to teach and thirst for knowledge to educate and enlighten his pupils and colleagues. Williams has also made a great contribution to the Luther community as a whole, bringing it closer together.

Williams grew up in Louisville, Ky. and graduated from Kentucky State University in 1965. He also attended the Baptist Theological Seminary and later received a Master’s Degree in Divinity from the University of Louisville. In 1980, Williams moved to Cedar Rapids to acquire his Ph.D from the University of Iowa.

Before arriving at Luther, Williams was not only well-educated but also had a variety of teaching experiences. He worked as a teacher, a pastor in a few churches and ran government programs for dropouts in schools.

“I never thought that I would overcome to the extent of my circumstances,” said Williams. “I’ve come all the way from being in a city in lower Kentucky with a pretty average income to being a college professor in the Midwest with a number of degrees.”

Williams first arrived at Luther in 1985 to work in the Africana studies department. One year later, he was asked to also work in the history department.

Williams is admired by many of his colleagues for his work in the Africana studies department. “I would go as far as to say that without Dr. Williams, we wouldn’t have Africana Studies, certainly not as we have it right now,” Martin Klammer, head of the Africana studies department, said.

Not only is Williams respected by his colleagues, but he connects with his students through teaching.

“He tries to put real experiences with the things he lectures on,” Emily Cory (’12) said. “He says what he wants and isn’t afraid of offending anyone.”

Williams uses the stories of his past to share a wealth of knowledge with others. He has been published in several scholarly journals and connects his experiences to what he teaches in the classroom.

Williams is also regarded as a great example of determination to the Luther community.

“I would compare Williams to Bugs Bunny,” Klammer said. “I’m not saying he’s a trickster, but he is someone who, I find, is very smart about how he operates with an institution, especially as an African-American professor within a white majority.”

As one of the first black faculty members in a predominantly white school, Williams has often had to forge his own path, but he still considers his journey a positive one.

“I’ve had some great experiences in this school,” said Williams, “And the bottom line after 25 years is thank you.”