Claiming the Williams Riverfront: A Cole Field Bike Path and Riverwalk Accessibility Study

Julie Jung, MaryKate O’Brien, Claire Swingle, Hannah Van Wetter
Esteemed Clientele

Tim Kaiser

Todd Holland

Lauren Stevens

Goals:

Bike Path

River Walk
Project Goals

1. To map a feasible bike path route through the Cole Field recreation area

2. To improve access to and use of the Hoosic River waterfront
Presentation Agenda

Bike Path
- Case Studies
- Site History and Description
- Law and Policy
- Proposed Routes
- Evaluation Matrix
- Recommendations

Riverwalk
- Site History and Description
- Survey Results
- Evaluation Matrix
- Law and Policy
- Progress and Recommendations
People Want:
1. Safety
2. Accessibility
3. Scenery

Design Goals:
1. Avoid wetlands
2. Minimize street / river crossings
3. Target level terrain
4. Avoid private property
Polling Result of Town Meeting

- 78% satisfied with path
- 60% believe the path is important to the community
- ½ of respondents say the path had a positive effect on the area
Site Description

Hoosic River to the North; Cole Ave to the East ; Syndicate Road to the West; Stetson Ave to the South
Cole Field falls within determination of WPA

- “Limited” Project: allowing the “construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of footpaths, bike paths, and other pedestrian or non-motorized vehicle access to or along riverfront areas.”
  - Cannot be in another resource area
  - Must be compatible with the character of the Riverfront Area
  - Adverse impacts must be minimized
  - The maximum paved width must be ten feet
FEMA 100-Year Floodplain

- **Compensatory Flood Storage**
  - Any fill or displacement must be balanced somewhere else within the same floodplain
  - Potentially hazardous to landscape

- **“Uncapped Landfill Route”**
  - Requires 2ft of material on top of landfill
  - Tested every 50ft
Uncapped Landfill
Site History

1999: HooWRA began relative feasibility studies of bikeway routes

2006: BRPC received Massachusetts Scenic Byway Grant

2010: BRPC published “Mohawk Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Feasibility and Investment Study”

2014: Town of Williamstown filed a Request for Qualification to review hiring of Greenman Pedersen Inc. Engineering Firm

2014: Williams College ENVI 302 Students take on the Bike Path
Moving Forward:
Greenman Pedersen Inc.

- To be hired by Town of Williamstown to construct bike path
- Future Timeline:
  - Wetlands flagging - (hopefully!) before it snows
  - March-April: Submit 25% plan to MassDOT
  - June 2015: 75% design to MassDOT
    - file Notice of Intent for Wetlands Protection Act
  - July 2016: Start construction
    - 100% design plan, funding and budget
Route Comparisons

Routes:
● Uncapped Landfill Route
● Through Driving Range
● No Disturbance of Area
● Loop Route
● Around Driving Range

Evaluation Matrix Categories:
● Environmental Impacts
● Safety
● Community Accessibility
● Technical Feasibility
● Cost
## No Disturbance of Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route Options</th>
<th>Environmental Impacts</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Community Accessibility</th>
<th>Technical Feasibility</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=most recommended</td>
<td>1=low impact 5=high impact</td>
<td>1=safe 5=dangerous</td>
<td>1=accessible 5=inaccessible</td>
<td>1=feasible 5=infeasible</td>
<td>1=least cost 5=most cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“No disturbance of area” (3)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> No disturbance of natural area</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> Non-existent use by bikers means no accidents</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> None</td>
<td><strong>Infeasible</strong></td>
<td><strong>$</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong> None</td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong> Minimal interaction and awareness with natural area</td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong> Will not increase accessibility for community members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 13 1 1 5 5 1
Cole Avenue!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROUTE OPTIONS</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS</th>
<th>SAFETY</th>
<th>COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY</th>
<th>TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY</th>
<th>COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1=accessible 5=inaccessible</td>
<td>1=feasible 5=infeasible</td>
<td>1=least cost 5=most cost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Uncapped Landfill Route” (2)</th>
<th>Pro: Follows the natural area of the riverbank</th>
<th>Pro: Avoids driving range</th>
<th>Pro: Accessible via Cole Ave &amp; Southworth St</th>
<th>High feasibility because GPI support</th>
<th>$$$$.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: (i) Wetland Disturbance</td>
<td>Con: Ends at Syndicate Road</td>
<td>(i) Accessible via Cole Ave &amp; Southworth St</td>
<td>(i) Tree clearance (ii) Pavement pouring</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Compensatory Storage</td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Increases accessibility to Hoosic River and Nature Trails</td>
<td>(iii) Landfill capping *may be required (iv) Stream Crossing</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Tree Clearing</td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Avoids sewage line with tendency to flood</td>
<td>(iii) Landfill capping *may be required (iv) Stream Crossing</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: (i) Interferes with natural aspects of walking path</td>
<td></td>
<td>Con: (i) Interferes with natural aspects of walking path</td>
<td>Con: (i) Interferes with natural aspects of walking path</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total: 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uncapped Landfill Route
## “Through Driving Range” (4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment Impacts</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Community Accessibility</th>
<th>Technical Feasibility</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pro: (i) Avoids uncapped landfill (ii) Minimal tree clearing (iii) Sewage easement already leveled | 4 | 3 | 3 | $\$
| Con: Sensitive areas near sewage easement path | 3 | 4 | | Pavement |
| Pro: Openly visible path | 3 | | | |
| Con: (i) Ends at Syndicate Rd (ii) Cuts across driving range | 4 | | | |
| Pro: (i) Easily accessible from Cole Ave & Southworth St (ii) Flat pre-maintained route | 3 | | | |
| Con: (i) Ends at Syndicate Rd (ii) Dissenting neighbors (iii) Eliminated recreational use of field beyond just that of Driving Range (IM sports, WUFO) (iv) Sewage easement flood frequently | | 3 | | 2 |

**Total:** 15
Through Driving Range
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROUTE OPTIONS</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS</th>
<th>SAFETY</th>
<th>COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY</th>
<th>TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY</th>
<th>COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=most recommended</td>
<td>1=low impact</td>
<td>1=most recommended</td>
<td>1=least cost</td>
<td>1=least recommended</td>
<td>5=least recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5=least recommended</td>
<td>5=high impact</td>
<td>5=least recommended</td>
<td>5=least cost</td>
<td>5=least recommended</td>
<td>5=least recommended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| “Loop Route” (4) | Pro: Avoids all sensitive areas (uncapped landfill & sewage easement) | Pro: Avoids wooded areas; open visibility | Pro: (i) Easily accessible from Cole Ave & Southworth St (ii) Avoids floodplain | Low Feasibility | $\$\
| Pro: Stetson Rd. busy area due to cars (esp. during games) | Con: None | Con: (i) Steeper grade hill (ii) indeterminate end point (iii) Use of Stetson Road would create conflict between bikes and game traffic on busy Saturdays or Sundays | Does not work with the clients goals of using this route as a connection to Vermont | Pavement |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total: 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Loop Route
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROUTE OPTIONS</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS</th>
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<td>1=accessible 5=inaccessible</td>
<td>1=feasible 5=infeasible</td>
<td>1=least cost 5=most cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Around Driving Range”</strong> (1)</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> (i) Avoids uncapped landfill (ii) Minimal tree clearing (iii) Sewer easement already leveled</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> Avoids cutting through Taconic Driving Range</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> Easily accessible from Cole Ave &amp; Southworth neighborhoods, college</td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong> (i) Net needed (ii) Ends at Syndicate Road</td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong> (i) Dissenting neighbors (ii) Sewage easement floods frequently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 11
Route Comparison

- Around Driving Range: 11
- Uncapped Landfill Route: 12
- No Disturbance of Area: 13
- Through Driving Range Route: 15
- Loop Route: 15
Economic Considerations

- Massachusetts Scenic Byway Grant: $302,706.61
- Funding in place for the initial permitting and a 25% design plan
- Estimated total cost for the project is 4.7 million dollars
- Federal transportation improvement plan can account for remainder of costs
Around Driving Range
Recommendations

● “Around Driving Range” route
  ○ Minimal environmental impacts
  ○ Safety concerns
  ○ Community accessibility
  ○ Highest technical feasibility
  ○ Lowest cost
  ○ Need to keep land natural for walking path
Riverwalk Agenda

- Site Description and History
- Survey Results
- Evaluation Matrix
- Law and Policy
- Economics
- Progress and Recommendations
Site Description

- Estimated 10 acres of woodlands
- 6,300 ft of accessible walking trails
- Abundant flora and fauna
  - Beaver, eagle, white-tailed deer, American robin
  - Red maple, common winterberry, silky dogwood, Black cherry
Site History

1960-1972: Rubbish disposal area by sanitary method
1980s: Boy Scout Troop first attempted to maintain trails
1990s: Trails maintained by HooWRA
2011: Flooding of area by Hurricane Irene
2014: Williams College ENVI 302 Students take on the Riverwalk
Campus Survey: 498 Responses!

- Goal of Survey:
  - Assess overall awareness of existence of trails, prioritize improvements
- Campus survey distributed to Williams College community over 2 weeks
  - CES listserv, postings on Daily Messages, WSO
- Respondents: 341 students, 52 faculty, 105 college staff
Survey Opinions

“Keep it wild!”

“Keep it a special place.”

“It’s not a Wal-mart.”

“Hidden gem of Williams.”

“Keep it natural!”
How interested are you in the following improvements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Highly Interested</th>
<th>Interested</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disinterested</th>
<th>Highly Disinterested</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Informational signage</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trail map</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Improved trails</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Clearer access points</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Scheduled campus event (picnic, etc)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Addition of fire pits, benches or picnic tables</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Beach access</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Increased access for WOC events</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Results

Evaluation of Riverwalk Improvements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Support Index</th>
<th>Trail Map</th>
<th>Clearer Access Points</th>
<th>Improved Trails</th>
<th>Onsite Informational Signage</th>
<th>Addition of Fire Pits, Benches, Picnic Tables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Improvement #1: Trail Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST VS. EASE OF UNDERTAKING</th>
<th>DESIRABILITY / SURVEY SUPPORT (1.00-5.00)</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro: (i) Easy to produce (ii) High need (iii) Spread awareness</td>
<td>Pro: (i) High demand (ii) Partnership with WOC &amp; Williams Wellness</td>
<td>Pro: Online version saves paper and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con: (i) Priority of having river on paper version of map (ii) limited space allowed for print versions</td>
<td>Con: Increased use leads to decreased natural environment</td>
<td>Con: Potential for paper version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>Survey support: 4.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Improvement #2
## Clearer Access Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST VS. EASE OF UNDERTAKING</th>
<th>DESIRABILITY / SURVEY SUPPORT (1.00-5.00)</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro: (i) Minimal clearing required (ii) Increase awareness (iii) Can easily be made more welcoming</td>
<td>Pro: (i) Accessible for canoes, kayaks, etc. (ii) activity spot for community</td>
<td>Pro: (i) Removal of some invasive species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con: (i) Required funding for clearing</td>
<td>Con: Clearing of natural environment along river</td>
<td>Con: (i) Alteration of existing area (ii) Some clearing of trees necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$$</td>
<td>Survey support: 4.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey support: 4.26
#3: Improved Trails

honeysuckle

bittersweet

multiflora rose
#3: Improved Trails

honesuckle

bittersweet

multiflora rose
### #3: Improved Trails

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST VS. EASE OF UNDERTAKING</th>
<th>DESIRABILITY / SURVEY SUPPORT (1.00-5.00)</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> Possible to acquire funding</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> Easier accessibility</td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong> Benefits native species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Con:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong> Attractive exotic plants</td>
<td><strong>(i)</strong> Benefits native species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Overwhelming amount of invasives</td>
<td>(ii) Very difficult remediation work</td>
<td>(ii) promotes natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Need for funding/ ecological expertise</td>
<td>Survey support: 3.55</td>
<td><strong>Con:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$$$</td>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Invasive species stabilize the banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) provide substrate for some birds to nest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#3: Improved Trails

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<tr>
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<td>Con: (i) Attractive exotic plants (ii) Very difficult remediation work</td>
<td>Con: (i) Invasive species stabilize the banks (ii) provide substrate for some birds to nest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$$$</td>
<td>Survey support: <strong>3.55</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knotweed

Bumblebee on goldenrod

Wren’s nest in barberry bush
## #3: Improved Trails

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST VS. EASE OF UNDERTAKING</th>
<th>DESIRABILITY (1.00-5.00)</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pro: Possible to acquire funding | Pro: Easier accessibility | Pro: (i) Benefits native species  
(i) Attractive exotic plants  
(ii) promotes natural environment |
| Con:  
(i) Overwhelming amount of invasives  
(ii) Need for funding/ecological expertise | Con:  
(i) Attractive exotic plants  
(ii) Very difficult remediation work | Con:  
(i) Invasive species stabilize the banks  
(ii) provide substrate for some birds to nest |
| $$$ | Survey support: **3.55** | |
#4: Informational Signage

- Highly interested: 113
- Interested: 16
- Neutral: 11
- Disinterested: 193

Bar chart showing interests in informational signage:
- Highly interested: 193
- Interested: 113
- Neutral: 16
- Disinterested: 11
- Highly disinterested: 0
#4: Onsite Informational Signage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST VS. EASE OF UNDERTAKING</th>
<th>DESIRABILITY (1.00-5.00)</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro: Contracts and examples from Hopkins Forest and Linear Park</td>
<td>Pros: (i) High need (ii) Adds sense of familiarity/comfort</td>
<td>Pro: (i) Increases awareness of natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con: Detracts from natural environment</td>
<td>Con: (i) Addition of unnatural materials for signage (ii) Alteration of previously untouched area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$$</td>
<td>Survey support: 2.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#4: Onsite Informational Signage

[Image of a sign with information about Black Cherry]

[Image of a large informational sign in a natural setting]
#4: Onsite Informational Signage

as in HMF

as in Linear Park
#4: Onsite Informational Signage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>DESIRABILITY / SURVEY SUPPORT (1.00-5.00)</th>
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<tr>
<td>$$$</td>
<td>Survey support: 2.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#4: Offsite Informational Signage

Possible Activities
- Nature walk
- Bird watching
- Dog walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Canoeing
- Picnicking

About the Trail
Williams College owns roughly 6,300 feet of walking trails within 10 acres of wooded and wetland area along the Hoosic River. The trails are located behind the Softball Field, at the end of the paved path that runs adjacent to the Men's and Women's Soccer fields.

Claiming the Williams Riverfront
Williams College Riverwalk
A scenic nature walk along the Hoosic River behind the Cole Field
## What You’ll See

### Key Plant Species
- Canopy: Red maple, sugar maple, cottonwood, black cherry, quaking aspen, grey birch, sycamore.
- Understory: Morrow’s honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, spicebush, silky dogwood, common winterberry, Japanese knotweed, Ostrich fern, dame’s rocket, sensitive fern, poison ivy.

### Key Animals/ Birds
- Beaver
- White tailed deer
- Raccoon
- Eastern garter snake
- Scarlet tanager
- American robin
- Wood thrush
- Eagle

---

### Coming Soon!
- Picnic benches
- Fire pits
- College events
- Canoe docking
- Trail maps

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**Online Map**
For an online description of the map and to view the trails in relation to Williams College Campus as a whole please visit:

**LINK TO CAMPUS MAP**
#5: Addition of Fire Pits/Benches/Picnic Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro: College owns firepits already</td>
<td>Pro: Destination for events</td>
<td>Pro: (i) No tree clearing (ii) placed on beaches with little disturbance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con: (i) cost of improvements (ii) Flooding/destruction</td>
<td>Con: Maintenance</td>
<td>Con: (i) Unnatural structures interfere with habitat (ii) Potential detriment to river in case of flooding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| $$$ | Survey support: 2.05 | }
Capital Improvement Request (CIR)

- Detailed expense report to acquire college funds
- Relatively low-cost, high-reward improvements
- Economic viability of area
Permits under the Wetlands Protection Act

- Request for Determination of Applicability (RDA)
  - Exempt Minor Activities in Riverfront Areas and Buffer Zones
  - Notice of Intent (NOI)
Final Recommendations: Part I

“Around Driving Range” Route

- Minimal environmental impacts
- Safety concerns
- Community accessibility
- Highest technical feasibility
- Relatively low cost
- Complements Riverwalk
Bike / Walking Path Interference
Final Recommendations: Part II

Prioritized List of Riverwalk Improvements

1. Trail map
2. Clearer Access Points
3. Improved Trails & Invasive Remediation
4. Informational Signage
5. Addition of amenities
Next steps...
Thank you!

- Clients: Lauren Stevens, Todd Holland, Tim Kaiser
- Professor Sarah Gardner and our ENVI302 class
- Interviewees: Andrew Groff (Williamstown Planner), Rebecca Williamson (Greenman-Pedersen Inc.), Drew Jones, Dave Fitzgerald, Fred Puddester, Kate Krolicki, Carl Strolle, and Ralph Bradburd (Williams College).
- 498 survey respondents