Cultivating the Liberally Education Mind Through A Signature Program

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Working Paper No. 16-18

This paper can be found at the College of Business and Economics Working Paper Series homepage:
http://be.wvu.edu/phd_economics/working-papers.htm
Cultivating the Liberally Educated Mind through a Signature Program

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Abstract

In this paper we describe the Miller Upton Programs, launched by the Department of Economics at Beloit College in 2008. The Miller Upton Programs aim to advance student understanding of the nature and causes of wealth and well-being. After describing core elements of the program, we discuss the ways in which they leverage economic discourse as a means to advance liberal learning. We argue that programs of this kind advance liberal learning by cultivating the skills required to engage the great questions of human flourishing, by fostering the development of a students’ economic imagination, and by enhancing students’ ability to engage in genuine intellectual discovery. So that readers can identify specific elements of the program that may be appropriate to replicate at their home institutions, we provide details on the history and resource commitments associated with various aspects of the program.

Key words: economic education, pedagogy, liberal education
JEL codes: A22
INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Department of Economics at Beloit College launched the Miller Upton Programs, which include five distinct, though interrelated, programmatic elements, including an annual forum and week-long residency of a leading figure in the economics discipline, a semester-long senior seminar course built around the annual forum, a speaker series, a student research colloquium, and an annual volume, *The Proceedings of the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations.*

The overarching intent of these programs is to advance students’ understanding of the nature and causes of wealth and well-being. As the programs have developed, we have identified particular ways in which programming of this kind can leverage economic discourse toward the growth of skills essential to liberal learning. After providing a brief history of how the programs developed, we describe these connections. In particular, we focus on the ways in which programming of this kind cultivates the skills required to engage the great questions of human flourishing, fosters the development of the students’ economic imagination, and enhances students’ ability to engage in genuine intellectual discovery. So that readers can identify aspects of the program they may wish to replicate, we also include a section on costs and resource commitments necessary to carry out these programs.

HISTORY OF THE MILLER UPTON PROGRAMS

The sixth president of Beloit College, Miller Upton, believed that the liberal arts college was the ideal place to engage the great questions and to set the standard for civil discourse in an open society. In 1965, he sought to demonstrate the importance of discourse through a series of written remarks with the College’s Dean, William Kolb. Upton, an economist, and Kolb, a

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1 There are two further features associated with the Miller Upton Programs, one of which pre-dates the Programs (Econ Day) and the other which has developed since 2008 (the endowed internship awards).
sociologist, were friends and regularly engaged in lively debate. Their ongoing discourse asked the great questions within and wrestled with the great tensions between the two disciplines. This dialogue, they concluded, was too important to keep between them. As President Upton wrote, “dialogue is difficult… but it should be possible on a college campus where people … have mutual respect for one another and where there is … the possibility of finding some area of common ground and of mutual modification of beliefs.” He was an advocate of the ideals of the liberal society—political freedom, the rule of law, and the promotion of peace and prosperity through the voluntary exchange of goods, services, and ideas.2

In the mid-2000s, faculty members in the Department of Economics (with the blessing of the Office of External Affairs) initiated conversations with alumni, individual donors, and foundations about the prospect of building a program that would honor Upton’s legacy. In addition to honoring Upton, the department wanted to find ways to leverage and continue the development of a robust economics alumni network—“The Network”—that had been cultivated for more than two decades by the department’s chairman.3 The Network has served as a vital source of professional advice, internships, and employment opportunities for the department’s current students and recent graduates. Over the years, the annual gathering of The Network has also become a resource for alumni seeking new opportunities. And importantly for the development of the Miller Upton Programs, The Network includes successful alumni who are in a position to financially support emerging programs.

2 As a board member of the Foundation for Economic Education, President Upton understood that economics plays a critical role in cultivating the liberally educated mind.
3 Every spring the department organizes a day-long event in Chicago (Econ Day) for current majors. The trip includes a morning visit to a company with which we have an alumni connection (e.g., Groupon, Legacy.com, Chicago Mercantile Exchange). In the afternoon two panel discussions are held at the University of Chicago’s Gleacher Center. The first panel features senior alumni who lend their insight on how their industries relate to “the great questions” students are considering in their classes. The second panel typically features junior alumni, who provide basic job and career advice. After the panel discussions, the students and panelists meet approximately 50 additional alumni for a structured networking session followed by hors d’oeuvres and libations.
Initially, conversations with prospective donors focused on establishing a $1M endowment to provide funds for a high-profile annual speaker series to round out other endowed speaker series at the College in creative writing, philosophy, and human rights. A member of the Board of Trustees intrigued by the idea challenged the department to think bigger. Worrying that external speakers tend to have little lasting impact on students, the trustee asked the provocative question, “What could you do if you doubled, tripled, or quadrupled your fundraising goal?” This line of questioning was the start of a more ambitious endeavor with multiple complementary elements that would weave through the curriculum and beyond-the-traditional-classroom modes of learning.

Two distinguished alumni of the department agreed to serve as chairs for a $4M campaign. Along with the faculty leadership, the fundraising team identified and represented three constituencies of donors who would find the Miller Upton Programs attractive: 1) those who were friends of Miller Upton and would want to be part of an initiative honoring his 21-year presidency, 2) alumni who were grateful for what the department had done for their later success and wanted to enhance this impact for future graduates, and 3) individuals and foundations inclined to support a program emphasizing ideas on wealth and well-being in the tradition of Adam Smith. Careful consideration was given to how each group of prospective donors would be contacted, and there was a deliberate effort to rely on existing social networks. For example, the two alumni chairs approached their fellow alumni. The faculty leadership who had ties to foundations interested in classical liberal ideas represented and developed grant proposals for the third category.

The team identified five areas of potential underwriting support: 1) a $2-$2.5M endowed chair, the earnings of which would provide funds for programming and partial salary support for
a faculty member within the department who would direct the annual Upton Forum on the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations and, as part of this person’s annual teaching load, the instruction of the senior seminar course that is built around each year’s Upton Scholar, 2) a $1M endowment to support the keynote lecture of the annual forum, 3) five $50,000 endowments to support high-impact internships, and 4) $240,000 in start-up support for the first three years of the program.

A local foundation provided annual operating support of approximately $80,000 per year for three years while the campaign to endow the programs was in process. This allowed the program to begin while pledges came in and prevented the department from having to deplete funds before the fundraising goal was reached. Two major gifts came from the first constituency of donors, friends of Miller Upton who were interested to honor his legacy. In 2007, the Elbert Neese Professor of Economics was established through a sizable endowment gift from the Neese Family Foundation and gifts from recent alumni, friends, and family of Miller Upton. It is the Neese Professor who directs the Miller Upton Programs and teaches the accompanying senior seminar. In 2009 the June and Edgar Martin Memorial Lecture was established with a $1M endowment. Over time, six endowed internships were established, some by individual donors, others through affinity groups (such as the 50 graduates who had served as principals in the department’s market research firm over the course of 25 years), and winners of departmental awards. On February 18, 2011, the campaign co-chair announced the successful completion of the campaign at the 25th anniversary of the annual gathering of The Network.

One way to interpret Beloit’s experience is that the alignment of interests and resources—a legacy presidency that donors wished to honor, a robust alumni network that

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4 The fact that the gift was for a fixed number of years made the request for the foundation easier to accommodate as few major foundations give to endowments.
wished to see the department succeed, and network connections to key foundations that would support the ideas—was so fortuitous that it is hardly generalizable to other institutions. We would argue, on the contrary, that Beloit’s experience demonstrates how small places and under-resourced places make big things happen. Specifically, what is required is a solid commitment to building upon the distinctive strengths of the department, patient and persistent development of relationships that serve students directly and that may, over time, mature into philanthropic support, and a deliberate strategy that leverages the diverse network connections of both senior and junior faculty. Seen in this light, we believe that Beloit’s experience has general lessons to offer departments seeking to advance their own signature programs.

**THE MILLER UPTON PROGRAMS AS LEVERS OF LIBERAL LEARNING**

In developing the Miller Upton Programs, our intent was to engage the great questions of the economics discipline, such as, what drives human progress? Why do some societies prosper while others remain poor? What economic institutions and policies are essential for the good society? We ask students to consider these questions in the context of academic discourse, and we challenge them to consider these questions outside of the classroom in the context of the for-profit private sector and civil society.

As the programs developed, we recognized that the suite of opportunities that make up the Miller Upton Programs—particularly the program’s annual forum, the accompanying senior seminar built around the forum, the year-round speaker series, and the student research colloquium—represent a set of distinct pedagogical practices that support liberal learning. In
particular, these core elements of the Miller Upton Programs cultivate the skills required to engage the great questions about human flourishing that are at the center of the discipline, foster the development of students’ economic imagination, and enhance students’ ability to engage in genuine intellectual discovery. After describing the principal elements of the program, we describe how these complementary elements advance essential skills of liberal learning.

**Principal Elements of the Program**

The centerpiece of the Miller Upton Programs is the annual forum on the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations. (Table 1 lists the Upton Scholars from 2008-2016.) The Upton Forum brings to the College distinguished, internationally recognized scholars for a week-long residency every fall. In addition to the formal presentations made by the Upton Scholar, the Forum fosters active participation among students, faculty, alumni and members of the surrounding community in a dialogue around the ideas and institutions of a free and prosperous society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Upton Scholar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Douglass North, co-recipient of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Economics, Spencer T. Olin Professor in Arts &amp; Sciences (emeritus), Washington University in St. Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Hernando de Soto, President of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy in Lima, Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Israel Kirzner, Emeritus Professor of Economics at New York University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Elinor Ostrom, the 2009 co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, Arthur F. Bentley Professor of Political Science at Indiana University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Timur Kuran, Professor of Economics and Political Science and Gorter Family Professor of Islamic Studies at Duke University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>James Gwartney, Gus A. Stavros Eminent Scholar Chair at Florida State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Robert Stavins, Albert Pratt Professor of Business and Government, Harvard University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yasheng Huang, International Program Professor in Chinese Economy at the MIT Sloan School of Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2016 Deirdre McCloskey, UIC Distinguished Professor of Economics, History, English, and Communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago

Note: Due to illness, Professor Ostrom had to delay her visit. Joel Mokyr of Northwestern University graciously delivered the keynote address in her stead. Professor Ostrom was able to visit and present along with a select group of seniors in March of 2012.

Over the course of the Upton Forum, events range from informal discussions and meal-time conversation between the Upton Scholar, students, faculty and alumni to guest lectures in economics, political science, anthropology, international relations, and history, to the more formal panel presentations made by our invited scholars and the keynote address (the June and Edgar Martin Memorial Lecture). When appropriate, we offer events targeted directly toward local community groups such as the Rotary Club, in order to reinforce the point that ideas matter, not just on college campuses, but in the arenas of commerce and civic life.

In the days that lead up to the keynote address, we hold a series of panel discussions. “The Ideas and Influence of [Upton Scholar]” panel features prominent scholars who work within the intellectual tradition of the Upton Scholar. The panels organized around the work of Douglass North, for example, featured Barry Weingast of Stanford University, John Nye of George Mason University, Peter Boettke of George Mason University, and alumni Carolyn Heinrich (’89) of the University of Wisconsin Madison, Wendy Olsen (’82) of the University of Manchester, and Virgil Storr (’96) of George Mason University. The panelists describe their own research, how their work relates to the work of the Upton Scholar, and answer questions posed by the moderator and by the audience. The papers prepared for these scholarly panels and the Upton Scholar’s keynote address are published as part of *The Annual Proceedings on the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations* volume.

In recent years, we have also organized a panel of Beloit College faculty who offer further insight on the general theme from their particular discipline and research area. For
example, as part of the 2015 Miller Upton Forum featuring as the Upton Scholar Yasheng Huang, Professor of Global Economics and Management at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, Beloit College faculty with expertise in Chinese literature, history, and culture, served on a panel titled, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Entrepreneurship in China.” When the theme offers an appropriate point of connection, we also feature alumni panel sessions. The 2015 alumni panel, for example, featured entrepreneurs and business consultants who have developed their careers in China after graduating from Beloit. The faculty and alumni panels provide a diversity of disciplinary perspective, connect non-economics students and faculty to the program, and demonstrate the importance of the ideas of the Upton Scholar beyond the academy.5

A complementary pedagogical component of the Miller Upton programs is the department’s senior seminar, required of all economics majors. Every fall, the department’s senior seminar course is recreated around the ideas and influence of that year’s Upton Scholar. The first two-thirds of the course are dedicated primarily to the discussion of classical and contemporary texts that have influenced or have been written by the Upton Scholar. In these discussions, the instructor provides context and poses some initial questions, but the discussion is otherwise driven by the students’ interrogation of the assigned texts. By the time the Upton Scholar arrives at the end of October/beginning of November, students will have read several of his or her books and research by other scholars who have been influenced by these writings. The final third of the course follows the Upton Scholar’s residency and is dedicated to developing an original piece of research related to the Upton Scholar’s work.6

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5 Further, the return of alumni panelists offers students valuable networking opportunities and reconnects those alumni who are distant and/or have been disengaged from the campus.
6 When the research shows promise, students will often continue working on the paper in the spring term as part of the student research colloquium (discussed in greater detail below) or as part of the College’s annual Student Symposium. A few students per year produce research that is eventually worthy of publication in some form.
To further amplify the forum and senior seminar, we also run a year-round speaker series that typically brings in junior scholars who work within the theme of the “Wealth and Well-Being of Nations” to present their work. Not all speakers are connected to the current year’s Upton Scholar, however, we do make an effort to select guest speakers who tie in to the research of previous years’ Upton Scholars if not the current year. We typically bring in between three and five speakers per year. The presentations attract between 25-100 students, with additional students being reached through classroom presentations and informal conversations over meals with the speaker. The speaker series also is an opportunity for professional development and networking for the faculty member organizing the series, as they select the speakers.

In some years we also run a research colloquium that gives 10-12 students the opportunity to read and discuss seminal articles aimed at deepening their understanding of the market process.7 Unlike the senior seminar course, the research colloquium is not required. Students are selected by the colloquium director, based on their demonstrated interest in deepening their understanding of economic ideas and developing as a researcher and writer. Some research colloquium students are selected out of the fall’s senior seminar course, with the aim of developing their paper into one that is publishable in an academic journal or policy research venue. The research colloquium also includes students who are earlier in their career at the College. These students typically focus their efforts on shorter pieces of writing such as book reviews and opinion editorials, both with the goal of publication. The heavy emphasis on publication means that colloquium participants receive close mentoring from the colloquium director. This includes one-on-one conversations following each draft, written exchanges for needed improvements, and in some cases, co-authorship. For their participation, students earn the

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7 The research colloquium depends on annual external funding and the availability of a faculty member willing and able to lead the program.
equivalent of one-fourth a full course credit. The faculty member leading the colloquium earns a stipend while maintaining his or her full teaching load.

**Advancing the Principles of Liberal Learning**

**Exploring the Great Questions:** Paraphrasing Kronman (2007), Colander and McGoldrick (2009) note that the great questions that are in many ways unanswerable in totality are “teaching questions.” Colander and McGoldrick identify the great questions (or, as they say, “big think” questions) in economics as those “questions such as whether capitalism or socialism is preferred, what the appropriate structure of the economy is, whether the market alienates individuals from their true selves, should one accept consumer sovereignty and do statistical significance tests appropriately measure significance?” (2009, 6). Colander and McGoldrick explain that “struggling with these ‘big think’ questions helps provoke a passion for learning in students, and hence can be a catalyst for the student to go more deeply into those areas. Teaching ‘little think’ questions too often involves uncritical acceptance of assumptions upon which the research is built” (2009, 6). In other words, engaging the great questions challenges students (and their instructors) to interrogate the paradigms that shape the knowledge they possess entering into the conversation; paradigms that often operate without the knower being aware of their influence. Moreover, by offering students the opportunity to consider diverse viewpoints about the great questions—diverse in the sense of ideological underpinnings, methodological approaches, and scale and scope of the questions under investigation—we give them further means to interrogate their own knowledge. Because they lend a critical eye on prior assumptions and base knowledge that often go unexamined, exposure to diverse perspectives and counter-arguments on the great questions allow the knower to “see” what is otherwise unseen, and to question what is otherwise
not questioned. This ability to interrogate one’s own knowledge, we submit, is therefore among
the most emancipating elements of a liberal education.\textsuperscript{8}

The Upton Forum, senior seminar, year-round speaker series, research colloquium, and
\textit{Annual Proceedings} volume create multiple interconnected spaces in which some of the great
questions of human flourishing can be considered. Upton Scholars are those who have developed
their career in the realm of the “Big Think,” those who have shifted the direction of economic
discourse in some meaningful way. The senior seminar course, therefore, has some heavy lifting
to do to ensure that students are caught up with the history of thought sufficiently to understand
the impact and importance of the Upton Scholar’s work, introducing critical works by the Upton
Scholar, as well as works that extend and/or challenge their central arguments. With this heavy
lifting in mind, some instructors have used the summer to assign readings that prime the pump
for engaged discussion as early as the first week of class.

The first eight to ten weeks of the course focus on the skills of close reading. Although
the hope is that by their senior year students have developed these skills to a high degree, in our
experience, most seniors have not yet fully formed the scholarly habits critical to liberal learning.
For example, close reading requires the reader to think critically about the argument being
presented, but it also requires that the reader balance critical reading with some measure of
sympathetic reading (Peart and Levy 2015). By “sympathetic reading” we mean that close
reading requires that we develop the skill of understanding and taking seriously the author’s
intellectual project, even if we disagree with the conclusions the author draws. Similarly,
students at this stage typically still need reminding that they are expected to read dense and

\textsuperscript{8} Although we do not explicitly discuss multiculturalism and liberal education, the emphasis on understanding
different perspectives certainly can be tied to an argument about how liberal learning and civil discourse help
individuals to navigate interactions with increasingly diverse populations (Aleman and Salkever 2003, Nussbaum
1997).
complicated texts multiple times to gain full understanding, that they need to actively engage the text by taking copious margin notes, that they should review those notes before coming to class, and take note of questions they will bring to the discussion. By explicitly naming the skills associated with close reading, the instructor underscores the importance of the readings for the success of the course. More broadly, by explicitly naming and reinforcing the practice of these skills, the instructor cultivates the habits of the liberally educated mind.

Garnett (2015) argues, for example, that by putting the subject—the text, and the great questions at the heart of the text—at the center of the classroom experience, as opposed to the expert instructor or the novice learner, the instructor creates a pedagogy that is emancipating. (See also Lage et al. 2000.) In contrast to an expert-centered orientation, there is a recognition that students bring important existing knowledge and experiences to the table, and students are asked to exercise agency in determining what that relevant existing knowledge and experience is and sharing it with others. In turn, the subject, particularly a subject that is on the order of the great questions we describe, anchors and disciplines both the expert and the novices in the discourse, ensuring that arguments speak truth to and reveal something meaningful about it. It is also worth noting that when an instructor holds students responsible for the quality of the discourse, student learn how to pose challenges to their peers in face-to-face argumentation and to respond respectfully and effectively to peer critique in the moment. After eight to ten weeks of deep engagement and discussion, students are well-prepared to understand the arguments being advanced in the panel discussions and keynote address, and they can hold their own in informal talks over coffee and meals.

While the keynote address is the highest profile event of the Forum, the panel discussions play a particularly important role in modeling the power of intellectual discourse to advance
liberal learning. The panels highlight, for example, the discursive nature of the economics discipline; that the ideas advanced by the Upton Scholar are the source of ongoing, exciting discussions across universities, research centers, and the private sector. They also demonstrate that intellectual progress comes from challenging prevailing ideas. Panelists are encouraged to challenge the Upton Scholar’s ideas, point to gaps and lingering questions, thereby demonstrating to students what the scholarly enterprise looks like. This is an important lesson given that students are writing a senior thesis. The thesis challenges the student to develop a research question that moves from the big questions to a narrower question and makes a new contribution to the existing literature. Perhaps even more importantly, because they honor the Upton Scholar, in part by challenging his or her ideas and research program, the panels demonstrate, just as Upton and Kolb demonstrated, that discourse of this caliber is fun and offers a robust example of what it means to be a life-long learner (DeNicola 2012).

It is also worth noting that the learning environment of the great questions builds over time. In summer 2009, rising seniors were assigned the 2008 Annual Proceedings on the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations volume, which featured essays on the work of Douglass North, to ground their upcoming discussions of property rights in the developing world, as discussed by Hernando De Soto, who served as the 2009 Upton Scholar. Essays from both the 2008 and 2009 volumes of The Annual Proceedings prepared the ground for a very different take on institutions and governance when Elinor Ostrom served as the Upton Scholar in 2011. While each year is distinct and intellectually coherent on its own, the effect over time is that students and faculty are literally drawn in to the discursive flow of the discipline.
Develop the Economic Imagination: C. Wright Mills coined the phrase “the sociological imagination” in his 1959 book of the same name. By “the sociological imagination,” he meant the ability to see the systematic ways in which social forces shape individual action. A good sociologist, then, is one who has the mental models and appropriate tools to make sense of complex social environments. Elsewhere, Chamlee-Wright (2011) has compared Mills’ sociological imagination with Frederic Bastiat’s (1995 [1848]) essay “What is Seen and What is Not Seen.” As Chamlee-Wright explains,

Bastiat argues that the good economist is one who identifies not only the intended positive outcomes of some policy intervention (that are often easily recognized) but also the costs and the unintended negative consequences that are often much harder to track. Bastiat’s position is helpful in defining what we might call the “economic imagination,” the capacity to anticipate and recognize the systematic (though often unintended) economic effects of social change, political change, or a change in the underlying rules of the game upon which society rests. When we are teaching at our best, we are cultivating the economic imagination in our students (2011, 42).

The economic imagination is related to what we refer to as the economic way of thinking. We define the economic way of thinking as Heyne et al. (2003) do, focusing on actions, interactions, and consequences. Whereas the sociologist focuses on social structures, the economist focuses on the individual, adopting methodological individualism. As Heyne et al. (ibid., 7) note, “The problem for economic interactions is the multiplicity of diverse and even incompatible individual projects.” By focusing on economic interaction, we open the door for understanding the price system and how coordination takes place in the market. A focus on consequences draws on our economic imagination, as we make connections between some change in the institutional
structure and how that change brings about certain changes in individual behavior, which may lead to widespread social consequences. To return to Bastiat, the economic imagination allows one to anticipate and locate the systematic effects that remain unseen to the casual observer.

The economic imagination goes beyond the definitions and step-by-step analysis that is often presented in a principles course. For example, in a principles of microeconomics course, we ask students to locate a demand curve, average cost curve, and marginal cost curve on a graph representing a perfectly competitive market. We can take them through the steps of considering what is true of conditions to the left of the MC=P intersection, and what is true if we consider quantities beyond this point. We can ask that they locate areas of profit or loss. These exercises, although important, are regimented. Compare the chalkboard analysis of the perfectly competitive market with a political economy question about the impact of rent control. The economic way of thinking again suggests connecting action to interaction to consequences. Through chalkboard analysis, the student may be able to locate the shortage that results from the rent control. A focus on interaction may shed light on questions of how rental apartments are allocated. The economic imagination requires that the student walk in the shoes of someone operating in a rent-controlled market. The student who has acquired the economic imagination is able to identify less-than-obvious consequences and connect the policy to the larger order. The student may think of a scenario in which a landlord decides to offer apartments only to his friends.

Throughout their time in the department, students are exposed to the economic imagination at work – whether it is the authors of their textbooks, faculty members, or guest speakers. In our experience, the best guest speakers are those who connect basic economic concepts with real life examples. For example, in the fall 2014, Nicholas Snow of Kenyon
College gave a lecture entitled “Rum Runners.” Granted, a lecture on alcohol is almost certain to capture the interest of 18-22 year olds. What made Snow’s lecture especially effective, however, was that he presented his research as the continuous study of how enterprising individuals pursue profit opportunity. Rum runners were presented as entrepreneurs coming up with creative ways to sell their goods in the context of the 1920s alcohol prohibition in the US. Previously unseen social phenomena such as increased violence and a rise in the consumption of hard liquor compared to beer and wine were now seen as systematic outcomes of prohibition.

One potential downside of featuring a high-profile (Nobel caliber) scholar is that the thinking is so big that students can only relate to his or her work as consumers of the ideas. Upton Forum panelists and year round guest speakers, on the other hand, often demonstrate how the economic way of thinking can be put to work to understand a relatively small slice of a complex and complicated world. Repeated exposure to the intellectual work that the economic way of thinking can achieve fosters the growth of students’ economic imagination over time and sets the stage for students to go beyond being consumers of economic research to becoming producers of new ideas, insights, and research conclusions.

Promoting Intellectual Agency and Genuine Intellectual Discovery: In addition to providing opportunities for students to engage the great economic questions that relate to human flourishing and to develop a robust economic imagination, the Miller Upton Programs also support the development of intellectual agency by challenging students to engage in genuine intellectual discovery. Intellectual agency and genuine intellectual discovery are the highest measures of success.
One of the principal learning goals in the senior seminar is to develop in students the analytical and writing skills necessary to navigate uncharted intellectual terrain and contribute substantively to the body of knowledge relevant to that terrain. Embedded within this learning goal are secondary learning goals, such as developing students’ ability to identify relevant puzzles or gaps that require further investigation, consolidate and articulate the state of the relevant debate, and the acquisition of the rhetorical skills necessary to convey one’s argument persuasively to a professional audience. The outcome most closely associated with this suite of skills is the development of an original piece of research that makes a novel and substantive contribution to the economics literature relevant to the course’s thematic content. Students develop their research project through a progressive series of six assignments focusing on 1) identification of an appropriate topic or question and the corresponding academic literature, 2) identification of an analytical lens through which to view the topic or question and an initial attempt at developing a tentative argument/hypothesis, 3) honing the central research question or thesis, 4) developing the substantive outline of the paper, 5) developing the first complete draft with an emphasis on identification and deployment of the relevant empirical or theoretical support, and 6) the final draft with attention to both professor and peer feedback from the previous drafts and oral presentation. This series of assignments has evolved with each iteration of the course.

This series of six steps can be thought of as scaffolding for an intellectual endeavor. Hall and Harger (2015) describe the use of scaffolding in an upper-level public sector course. The authors define scaffolding as a step-by-step process that gives the student guidance until the process of formulating and analyzing the research question is clear, at which point the

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9 Elliott et al. (1998) note that the honors thesis may not be appropriate for all students or all institutions and outline a variation of the thesis project in which students research Nobel laureates and tie their contributions to objectives of generation education.
scaffolding can be removed (also see Green et al. 2013). The scaffolding in effect is asking the student to demonstrate intellectual agency through a structured process. Additionally, multiple assignments, or the deconstruction of the larger projects, give weaker students the opportunity to overcome common difficulties such as not knowing the difference between a topic and a thesis; a well-articulated opinion and well-supported argument; and a popular-level policy debate and a substantive academic debate. At the same time, the progressive series of assignments gives stronger students the opportunity to develop a college-level paper into one that meets or comes close to meeting professional academic standards.\textsuperscript{10}

We recognize that the Miller Upton Programs are particularly well-suited to a small liberal arts college community. With a student body of approximately 1,250 and a graduating cohort of economics majors typically in the 20-40 range, the Beloit College context of a residential campus, small classes, and close mentoring relationships between faculty and students is in many ways the ideal setting for initiatives like those described here (Grube and Storr 2015). That said, other types of colleges and universities may benefit from programs like the Miller Upton Programs. For example, if a resident scholar is embedded in a large lecture course, the seminar experience may be achieved by breaking up the large lecture section among smaller weekly discussion cohorts, led, perhaps, by graduate assistants. Similarly, an undergraduate student research experience might be replicated by providing stipend support to a cadre of advanced graduate students, ideally trained in the pedagogy of research and writing, willing to mentor one to two undergraduates in an independent or co-authored research project. More

\textsuperscript{10} As Ehrenberg (2005) notes, this type of activity may also spur an interest in graduate level study. Over a dozen papers that have emerged from the senior seminar and research colloquium have been published or are currently under review (see for example, Nencka (2011), Williams and Hall (2015), and Tarabar and Hall (2016)). The number of students who go on to pursue graduate degrees in fields related to a particular year’s senior seminar (economics, health policy, environmental studies, political science) has been growing and seems tied to the research colloquium, although the influence of the Great Recession makes it difficult to know with certainty.
generally, much of the transformational power of programs like those described here rests with keeping interactions human-scaled and at an unhurried pace. Any undergraduate with an internet connection can watch a world-class lecture delivered by a world-class scholar. But relatively few have the opportunity to discuss their own research ideas with a world-class scholar over coffee. Many undergraduates write a senior-level research paper. Far fewer benefits from a mentored, apprentice-like experience with a skilled researcher over the course of a semester or academic year. To the extent that larger institutions can find ways to scale down and slow down key interactions between students, faculty, mentors, visiting scholars, and fellow students, the greater the transformational impact will be.

RESOURCE COMMITMENTS

Below we discuss the explicit and some of the implicit costs associated with the Miller Upton Programs. The Miller Upton Programs benefited from the fact that a long-serving department chair recognized that an engaged alumni base could be a distinctive strength of a department. The alumni network that had served as an important source of career advice and employment opportunities for graduates eventually matured to a point that it could also serve as a critical source of donor support. This kind of maturation process does not happen without a level of commitment that goes well beyond the usual duties assigned to a department chair.

It is important to recognize that departments wishing to initiate programs like those described here need not pursue them all, nor do they need to construct programs such that they recur annually. Any of the events that we describe as part of our annual cycle could be offered with less frequency. For example, a department might invite a resident scholar every two or three
years, embedding that scholar’s work into an elective seminar course that is not required for graduation. Such an arrangement alleviates the need to recreate the course and host a major series of events annually. Below we provide more detail on the resource commitments required for each of the various programs.

The Miller Upton Programs are carried out in a department of six tenure track faculty, each with a 5-course per year teaching load. The department is supported by a part-time Program Coordinator. The Miller Upton Programs pay for additional time from the assistant to manage event planning and logistics pertaining to Upton Scholar and guest speaker contracts and travel. The Program Coordinator also serves as the Managing Editor of *The Annual Proceedings of the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations*. The Neese Professor earns a course release for his/her coordination of the Miller Upton Programs. The instruction of the senior seminar counts as part of the Neese Professor’s annual teaching load. The department chair and Neese Professor share responsibilities pertaining to donor stewardship. The department chair, or another faculty member, takes primary responsibility for cultivating The Network and organizing Econ Day. In addition, another department member directs the year-round speaker series and student research colloquium. The suite of programs are supported by (ideally) three faculty members in the department, however, sometimes it is shared between two faculty members. The primary costs associated with the scholars’ panel are the $3,000 honoraria we pay each scholar, and their travel and lodging. Half the honoraria are paid the week of the Forum; the other half when we receive final revisions of their paper for inclusion in the *Annual Proceedings*. Travel costs range from $500-$2,000 depending on location. We encourage scholars to stay multiple days of the Forum if they are able, hence lodging ranges from $100-$300. Alumni panels are generally less costly as
we only cover travel and accommodations.\textsuperscript{11} If an alumnus or alumna is a scholar contributing a paper to the \textit{Annual Proceedings}, we treat them like any other scholar panelist, providing the $3,000 honorarium and covering travel and lodging. We offer Beloit faculty serving on the faculty panel an honorarium of $1,500 ($750 for their talk at the panel and $750 upon receipt of their \textit{Annual Proceedings} contribution).

The printing and production costs of the \textit{Annual Proceedings} volume are approximately $5,500. In addition to the Upton Scholar’s address and the papers prepared by other participating scholars, we typically invite submissions from one or two guest speakers, for an additional cost of $3,000-$6,000. The Neese Professor serves as the editor of the volume, making recommendations for substantive changes. In her role as Managing Editor, the program assistant serves as copy editor. A primary cost of the research colloquium and speaker series is the time of the director to run the weekly colloquium, organize the speaker series, and work with students.

The costs of the colloquium and the resources fluctuated annually depending upon student interest and other time commitments of the director (such as a new course preparation). In most years the colloquium and speaker series was funded through an annual grant from a foundation. The grant covered the costs of the $250 - $2,500 honoraria paid to outside speakers as well as the cost of their travel, lodging, and hospitality while at Beloit (approximately $9,000 for five speakers). The Program Coordinator provided scheduling assistance and administrative support for these visits given the connection to the broad Upton suite of programs. Funds ($6,000) were also included to help finance journal submission fees and presentation at conferences for the colloquium director and students. In some years the grant paid summer support for the director to organize the speaker series and work with students over the summer.

\textsuperscript{11} In the first years of the Upton Forum, we did provide alumni with honoraria, however, we found that they either did not take the money, or donated it back to the program. Two alumni supporters noted that the true payment was the honor of an invitation.
Departments looking to replicate portions of the colloquium and speaker series can easily adjust on various margins. Summer support is not necessary if the colloquium is small or can be part of the faculty member’s regular teaching load. Outside funding for student travel might not be necessary for institutions whose Provost’s office supports student conference presentations. Institutions located near major cities should be able to find scholars to come and give a public lecture at a lower cost.

The annual network event known as Econ Day, takes place in Chicago in February. The faculty and approximately forty majors in the department take a coach bus to visit a business in the morning and then convene for the afternoon and early evening at the Gleacher Center, University of Chicago. The total budget for the event is typically between $12,000 - $15,000, with most of the budget going toward space rental and food.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have made the case that a signature set of programs can advance core elements of a liberal education. We have argued that by building a required seminar experience around a high-profile scholar who dwells in the arena of the “Big Think,” and by inviting respected scholars to discuss, debate, and advance the ideas of such renowned scholars, we develop students’ ability to engage the great questions of the discipline. Along the way we cultivate the ability and habit of interrogating their own knowledge and previously unexamined assumptions. Further, we have argued that invited guest speakers, particularly those who put the economic way of thinking to work in an effort to render some slice of a complex and complicated world more intelligible, foster the development of students’ economic imagination, preparing them to identify and solve economic puzzles of their own. Finally, we have argued that the suite of
programs described here, particularly the emphasis on research and writing aimed at genuine discovery, advances the liberal learning goal of developing students’ intellectual agency.

Every economics department has something that makes it distinctive. In developing the Miller Upton Programs we did not fundamentally change the department. Rather, the development of this set of signature programs gave us critical levers for advancing what we were already doing. Our hope is that our description of the Beloit College experience provides the reader a framework of how an economics department might go about creating a signature program that accentuates what they already do. The details provided here regarding the history and resource commitments associated with the Miller Upton Programs is not intended to suggest that there is only one way to establish a signature program. On the contrary, the details provide context for how ideas for distinctive programming, potential for growth, and financial support can be home grown if the effort is accompanied by a high level of commitment, patience, and persistence.

REFERENCES


