



Annual Report
2023-24

Weissberg Program

in Human Rights and Social Justice

Empowering students to take
informed action to address
complex global issues

Beloit
College



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Beloit College thanks the Weissberg Foundation for their generous support of the Weissberg Program in Human Rights and Social Justice. Learn more about the Weissberg Foundation at weissbergfoundation.org

Student Excellence & Leadership students visiting the Weissberg Foundation during a Spring Break immersion trip to the Washington DC area.

Theme for 2023-24

Misinformation and Media Literacy in the Digital Age

The programmatic theme for the Weissberg Program in Human Rights and Social Justice in the 2023-24 year was Misinformation and Media Literacy in the Digital Age. In the era of fragmented media, fake news, and disinformation campaigns on issues from public health to elections, the burgeoning of artificial intelligence, and increased data collection on the internet, this topic could not have been more timely.

Building from the incubation retreat in January 2023, led by Prof. Michael Dango in English and Media Studies, the program secured three experts as our resident scholars, focusing on the power of gaming in social justice, understanding artificial intelligence and future policy implications, the way algorithms shape our consumption of information, and the nature of social media manipulation.

With the help of student program assistants, the campus community enjoyed regular campus newspaper articles on the thematic topic and graphic digital and print resources on how to spot fake news.

This year, the program launched a new Course Integration Grant to incentivize faculty to incorporate the programmatic theme and residencies into their courses. Twelve faculty were selected for this grant, and most required the students in their classes to attend the lectures. This led to an unprecedented attendance rate, with full houses for all events, ensuring a broad swath of students benefited from the content. This also created a defined pool of students and faculty that the program could survey to assess the impact of the program.

Our assessment shows that students consider the issues raised by the theme to be more important after this year of educational programming, with those rating this issue as “very important” going up from 54% to 91%. Comments from students included, “Misleading information nowadays is getting trickier and trickier to decipher if it is true or false and I think it is very important to inform people, of any age, so that they are less taken advantage of.”



Artwork: Jennifer Moore, Monaluna Design

Writing about Joan Donovan’s Spring ‘24 Weissberg Chair residency, one faculty member reported: “Uniformly, students loved Joan! They were impressed with her knowledge, they enjoyed her sense of humor, and they found the material she discussed to be compelling and timely.” Another faculty member, commenting about Ivan Stone lecturer, Joseph Keller’s visit, wrote, “One of the most interesting pieces of feedback that I got was from a student who asked about taking technical information and making it more understandable for non-technical audiences. Dr. Keller told this student that you have to tell your audience a story and learn how to frame it in a way that is both engaging and informative. The student came back to me and said that this answer was incredibly helpful.”

Campus Events

Ousley Scholar-in-Residence - September '23

Ashlyn Sparrow, Assistant Director of the Weston Game Lab at the University of Chicago, was this year's Ousley Scholar-in-Residence, spending two days on campus. Sparrow teaches undergraduate, graduate and K-12 students how to design their own games while uncovering the sociopolitical implications of their designs. In her previous role as the Learning Technology Director of the Game Changer Chicago Design Lab, she created game-based health interventions supported by funding from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation.

On the Beloit campus, Sparrow ran a 24-hour live simulation game that she designed called Tracked, aimed at raising student awareness of the way the internet tracks their every habit and uses that data for various commercial and surveillance purposes. In addition to visiting several classes, she delivered a keynote address to a packed auditorium on the topic of "Game Mechanics, Real Dynamics: Designing for Equity and Social Justice."



Ousley Scholar-in-Residence Ashlyn Sparrow, kicking off the 24-hour simulation game, Tracked.



Ivan Stone Lecture - November '23

This year's Ivan Stone Lecture on International Studies was Joseph Keller, visiting fellow in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institute. Keller is a sought-after national commentator on artificial intelligence. He spent much of his time on campus addressing the very current topic of governmental policy responses to the rising power of AI. His keynote lecture was titled, "Truth & Technology: Centering Humanity in an Evolving Digital Landscape," where he delineated the ways in which human intelligence will still be relevant in the future. He also offered workshops on "Careers in Policy and Research" and on the "Politics of Artificial Intelligence," in addition to visiting classes.

During Dr. Keller's visit, US governmental agencies were, coincidentally, meeting to firm up policies around the governance of artificial intelligence, allowing students to engage the current events with a policy expert in real time.

Ivan Stone Lecturer Dr. Joseph Keller during a lunchtime discussion with students about careers in policy.

Campus Events

Weissberg Chair - March '24

In March, Beloit College hosted Joan Donovan, a leading national figure on the topic of media manipulation and misinformation on the internet. Donovan is an Assistant Professor of Journalism and Emerging Media Studies at Boston University. She leads the field in examining internet and technology studies, online extremism, media manipulation, and disinformation campaigns. She is the coauthor of *Meme Wars: The Untold Story of the Online Battles Upending Democracy in America*. Dr. Donovan's research explores how media manipulation is a means to control public conversation, derail democracy, and disrupt society.

Twenty-two faculty and staff members participated in the weeks leading up to the residency in a reading group to read Donovan's book. The group shared a dinner with Donovan to discuss the book in depth.

Donovan's residency featured an exhibit at the Wright Museum of Art, "Memes at War: 20th Century Propaganda," curated by Prof. Michael Dango and featuring Beloit College's collection of propaganda posters



Weissberg Chair Joan Donovan leading a workshop. Below, Donovan attending the museum exhibit, Memes at War.



from Europe and Asia from the early 20th century. Text interpretation was provided by faculty and students in Japanese, Russian, Spanish, and Political Science.

Donovan offered a student workshop on imagining technology in the future, titled, "The Future Will be Terrible," and a lunchtime workshop on careers in communications. She delivered a keynote address entitled, "Misinformation, Meme Wars, and Media Manipulation" to a standing-room-only audience in the Weissberg Auditorium. She visited multiple classes that had built the topic and her scholarship into the course syllabi.

Student Success, Equity & Community Programming

Beloit College's Office of Student Success, Equity and Community presents programming to enrich our campus by providing events for meaningful dialogue and the celebration of cultural and social diversity. The events are platforms where students and staff have a voice and can share their personal insights and advocate for their communities. The discussions encourage participants and attendees to have a deeper understanding of intersectionality and cultural diversity in our global society. The Heritage celebrations provide spaces to share cultural traditions and build a sense of community. The programming supports Beloit's commitment to fostering a welcoming and inclusive learning environment where students, faculty and staff can celebrate and support each other.

Unity Day - April '24

Unity Day, a new event held this April, was held to foster a sense of community, unity and inclusion on campus. It was highly impactful, consisting of a panel discussion and engaging breakout sessions that provided opportunities for students, faculty and staff to share their perspectives and learn from one another. A recurring sentiment was the importance of "showing up" to events, not only to support one another but also to gain valuable insights and experiences.



The breakout sessions were filled with informative conversations around residence life, brainstorming ways to get more students engaged, and fostering comfortable discussion spaces in the classroom. One student reflected on an engaging conversation with Dr. Sonya Johnson, highlighting the significance of connecting with members of the Beloit faculty and staff and discussing issues of unity.

Black History Month - February '24

Black History Month was a time to honor and celebrate the impact, contributions and legacy of African American activists, civil rights leaders, inventors, leaders in industry and everyday citizens. With a month of programming, faculty, staff and students were invited to join in the celebration of Black culture.

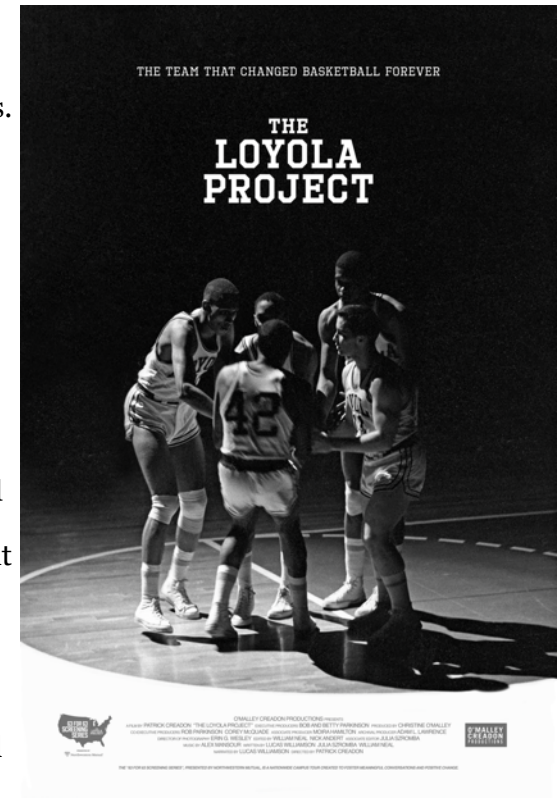
This year's programming included:

History of Black Students. Fred Burwell, Beloit College Archivist, and SSEC presented the history of Black students and aspects of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements at Beloit College during the 1960's.

Screening of "The Loyola Project." The film tells the story of the 1963 Loyola basketball team that broke racial barriers during the civil rights movement, followed by a post film panel discussion.

Screening of Bob Marley: One Love. Biopic on Bob Marley's message of unity.

Soul Food Luncheon. Fifty faculty, staff and students engaged in conversation about the history of Black cuisine while enjoying the tastes of "soul food."



Diversity Panels

Panel: Biracial Experience - November '23

Beloit college students discussed their experiences as biracial youth and what intersectionality meant to them.

Panel: Native American Heritage - November '23

Beloit College students and staff discussed their experiences as members of or working with and advocating for Native American communities.

Panel: Cultural Transition Forum - February '24

This dialogue aimed to foster understanding, support, and a sense of community among freshmen and upperclassmen students to navigate the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment.

Panel: Transgender Experience - March '24

Student panelists discussed their trans experiences, campus allyship, and intersecting identities, followed by a Q&A.

Cultural holiday celebrations

Cultural holidays were celebrated to provide a platform for a broader discussion on human rights and social justice. The celebrations showcased various cultural traditions and practices and created a space for discussion about global challenges such as religious discrimination and political oppression. These celebrations also highlighted cultural identities, appreciation and solidarity, while fostering a deeper understanding of the struggles that intersect with those identities.

Nowruz - Persian New Year - March '24

In March, Students Farah Tolu-Honary'24, Hasti Hairy'24 organized a cultural meal and celebration of Nowruz, or Persian New Year. Originating from Zoroastrian tradition, it is a cultural and religious celebration of the first day of spring and the rebirth of nature. It is celebrated beyond Iran by many other ethnic groups across Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, regardless of religion.

The event attracted a very diverse audience who were encouraged to wear their cultural attire. Farah commented that "currently Iran and Afghanistan face significant social and political oppression, so it was important to include advocacy in our Nowruz event."

Bengali New Year - April '24

In April, Student Helmi Kawsar'27 organized a meal event for Pahaha Boishakh, the Bengali New Year. This event is celebrated by Bengalis from Bangladesh and India. It allowed students to demonstrate their culture, festivities, share food with other students on campus, and have a space for everyone to gather together and have fun.

Iftar - April '24

Anthropology professor Gana Ndiaye organized an Iftar dinner, a breaking of the fast during Ramadan. There were 21 students and faculty members that participated in this event.



*Professor of Anthropology
Gana Ndiaye with the
participants in the Iftar
breaking of the fast in April.*

Learning Beyond the Campus

Student Excellence and Leadership (SEL) Hits Washington DC

Eight Beloit College student members of Student Excellence and Leadership (SEL), pictured at right, spent their spring break exploring social justice and career networking in Washington, DC. SEL is a Federally-supported TRiO program on campus serving students underrepresented in higher education, including students of color, low-income, first generation students. Led by junior Rebeca Galindo'25 and SEL director Daryl Saladar, the group participated in an alumni networking event, visited the Weissberg Foundation, NGOs in DC, and museums. The visit offered a transformative immersion experience for these students to make connections between their studies and potential career fields. Ricshawn Adkins Roane and others at the Weissberg Foundation put the students fully at ease, making their experience all the more memorable because of the openness to their questions and to them as individuals.



SEL students with Ricshawn Adkins Roane (left) and Nina Weissberg '84 (right) visiting the Weissberg Foundation.



Martu Kollie'24 at the International Academic Forum Conference in Hawaii.

Students Present at Conferences

Martu Kollie'24, pictured at left, traveled to the International Academic Forum Conference on Humanities and Arts at the University of Hawaii to present her research on statelessness in Africa. The project grew out of a special course offered in fall of 2022 on statelessness as part of the Weissberg Program's focus on Citizenship, Migration and Belonging.

Moon Sum'24 traveled to Harvard University in February to attend the Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations. The HPAIR conference is a prestigious gathering that brings together young leaders from around the world to engage in discussions and collaborate on a wide range of global issues. Moon's working team took first prize for their policy proposal.

Post-graduate Fellowship

The post-graduate fellowship is awarded to outstanding students with a track record of engaging in human rights and social justice and who have a clear plan for working in related fields after graduation. The awards are granted based on students' track record for engaging in issues of social justice and human rights in their studies, their long-term career goals, and their plans immediately following graduation. This fellowship provides a bridge to help secure substantive experience to build their career portfolio.

The 2024 Fellows, pictured, from left to right, are:

Kristin Larson'24 (seated), Education and Youth Studies, Studio Art. Accessibility and inclusion on the Beloit College campus.

Martu Kollie'24, International Relations, Environmental Justice & Citizenship. Internship with the Chicago Refugee Coalition.

Veeka Malanchuk'24, Education & Youth Studies, Spanish, Russian. Summer conference with EducationUSA for Belorussian students in Lithuania, building upon her year-long work expanding higher education access for displaced students from Eastern Europe.

Saumyaa Gupta'24, Political Science, Psychology. Arabic courses at UW Madison in preparation for graduate studies focused on refugees in the Middle East.

Moon Sum'24, Political Science, Critical Identity Studies. Internship with Nature at the Confluence, South Beloit, doing community outreach and education promoting environmental justice with marginalized communities.

Farah Tolu-Honary'24, International Relations, French. Internship with Physicians for Human Rights, working on the Horn of Africa region.



Weissberg Fellowship recipients at the Honors Day celebration in May, 2024.

Summer Grants

Four students received grant funding for internships over the summer aimed at increasing their application and understanding of human rights and social justice in career fields.

Samuel Shobert'26, Political Science, Health & Society, Hertie School, Berlin, Germany: Research Assistant with Hertie School Center for International Security.

Sochea Chhay'25, Quantitative Economics, Summer Research on Public School Student and District Performance with Charter School in Beloit, WI.

Vu Anh Le'25, Mathematics & Political Science. MIT Summer Research Program, performing research on the ethics and regulation of artificial intelligence.

Mina Tolu-Honary'26, Spanish, Education & Youth Studies. Intensive Spanish study course in Argentina, toward greater immersion in social justice issues in Argentina.

Global Experience Seminars in Northern Ireland

In May and June of 2024, twenty-two Beloit College students ventured to Northern Ireland as part of two seminars studying interethnic conflict and the progress toward peace since the 1998 Good Friday accords. Led by faculty in Education and Media Studies, one seminar focused on peace education and integrated schools as an approach to reconciliation, while the other group focused on documentary film and journalism in conflict and post-conflict zones.

The two seminars were led by Prof. Jingjing Lou, in education, and by Shawn Gillen and Joe Bookman in Media Studies, who prepared the seminars during a program development trip to the area in 2022.

Global Experience Seminars are intensive summer study abroad programs that focus on critical global issues facing the world's population. These programs target underrepresented students in their first and second years on campus, building confidence and mentorship around engaging with global learning throughout college and beyond. Twenty-six percent of this year's participants were students of color, seventeen percent were first generation students, and fifty percent were Pell Grant recipients, demonstrating the financial accessibility made possible by the support of the Weissberg Program.

To develop Global Experience Seminars, faculty and staff are invited on site visits that combine program planning as well as research that benefits courses on campus and advising for study abroad.



Students at one of Belfast's "Peace Walls," thirty-foot walls and fences separating Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods. Students held Instagram "Takeovers" to share experiences with students back in the US.

In January, 2024, two faculty and three staff members visited Senegal to develop a Global Experience Seminar for 2026 and to rekindle semester-long study in the country, where participation has faltered since the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing a rich environment for the study of critical global issues such as climate change, migration, health, and rapid urbanization, Senegal is featured in on-campus courses in French, Anthropology, and History, helping to prepare students for substantive study there.

Study Abroad Equity Scholarships

Thirteen low-income students received scholarships to engage with social justice and human rights issues during their study abroad semesters in Argentina, Costa Rica, England, N. Ireland, Scotland, Spain, and Washington, DC. One was Rafaella Pavarini de Souza, pictured below, who studied politics and economic inequality in Argentina for the spring semester. Of her experience there, she wrote, "In short, my experience here has been very enriching. I met great people and saw amazing and also terrible things. Got in touch with nature, with the city, and with both at the same time. Expanded my cultural and linguistic horizons, and I still have a lot to come. The greatest part is that none of this would have been possible without the financial support of the Weissberg Program..."



Rafaella Pavarini de Souza visiting the Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires, Argentina's seat of government.

She-Can Scholar Moon Sum'24, pictured, graduated in May and received the Weissberg Fellowship to carry out an internship in environmental education and social justice in South Beloit, IL.

Supporting Future Women Leaders in Post-Conflict Countries

Two new SHE-CAN Scholars, Nerlyn Velasquez Ramos'27 and Rosmery Coroxón Xep'27 came to Beloit College this year as first-year students from Guatemala. They joined current junior Sochea Chhay'25 and senior Moon Sum'24, both from Cambodia. In fall 2024, two more scholars will join Beloit College: Mouykea Dy'28 from Cambodia and Angela Chacon Aguilar'28 from Guatemala. They are all high academic achievers who aspire to leadership positions to foster positive societal conditions upon graduation and return to their home, post-conflict countries.



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Artwork: "Glitched" by Jaida Wesley'24

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