

"It is an affront to treat falsehood with complacency." Thomas Paine

CAMPUS REPORT

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VOODOO DEBUT

By: Emily Ham

Christopher Warden, author of Accuracy in Academia's up-and-coming textbook, *Voodoo Anyone? Economics for Journalists*, says that many professionals fall short when it comes to understanding the economy.

With money at the heart of almost every economic, social and governmental issue that affects Americans on a daily basis, today's journalists should be aware of how economics shapes the world we live in.

But Christopher Warden, author of Accuracy in Academia's up-and-coming textbook, *Voodoo Anyone? Economics for Journalists*, says that many professionals fall short when it comes to understanding the economy. A journalism professor at Troy University in Alabama, Warden formerly ran the National Journalism Center under NJC founder M. Stanton Evans, and later served as editorial page editor of Investors Business Daily (IBD).

Journalists seem to spend time "looking for quotes to fit their template without ever really looking at the underlying economics," Warden said, adding that his new book cuts through economic jargon, which makes the topic more approachable and easy to understand.

At AIA's book forum at the National Press Club on July 30, Warden introduced his audience to a way of drawing economic understanding from everyday life.

"[Economics] is what you do, it's how you live," Warden said. "If you just look around to think about what you would do in a certain situation, you're probably going to come up with an answer," he added.

"You say that word and people think 'Oh my gosh, it's dismal science. I don't want to learn it.' But the thing is, we learn it the minute we start bartering. You know, as a kid it's, 'Gimme, gimme, gimme.' 'No, I'll trade you.' Economics. But that doesn't sort of translate into people's thinking," Warden said.

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According to Warden, many stories leave out the economics of certain issues because the journalist covering the story does not understand certain economic elements.

Warden has done his fair share of economic reporting and said he has theories about why certain subjects aren't covered.

"[Journalists] miss the economic aspects of these stories because they don't understand a lot about economics and more specifically, they don't understand the very simple concept of price and what price is. And that's a lot of what my book is about—is to explain what prices do, how they affect policy and how people react to them," Warden said.

Warden said that after looking into many issues and trying to find economic ties within different areas of life, he found that almost everything had a price factor.

"Price doesn't have to be money oriented. It could be what you pay in time or pain, and an example that I give in one of the chapters is marriage," Warden said.

"In the '60s, a number of states, led by California, began instituting no-fault divorce policies. Before then, you really had to prove adultery or abuse. It had to be pretty solid proof. Well, after that, they said just cite irreconcilable differences and you can get a

divorce."

"Well, what does that do to the price of divorce? It lowers it, right? You don't have to get all this information and gather all these facts and have these private eyes and everything. You just say a couple of words and get divorced. Very low price for getting a divorce. Well, what happened to the divorce rate?

"That low price encouraged the demand for divorce. It's an odd way to think about price, but that's what it is. It's the price of divorce," Warden reasoned.

Warden cited education as another example of a subject many journalists do not fully understand in terms of economics.

"All the coverage of education is 'it's for the children. We need more of it. Hang the costs.' Well, if you think about that system, public education is free, isn't it? Well, it's not really free, but it's free to the person using it. So the person using it has a lot of demand for it, they want free education, but sooner or later somebody has to pay for it. And when those costs get too big, what happens? Governments can't afford it. They can't raise taxes—people would revolt. So they cut back," Warden explained.

"The journalistic community basically does not take into account that low, zero price when they report on it. They like to report on it politically,



**Chris Warden, Emily Ham,
M. Stanton Evans, Mal Kline.**

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they like to report on it from the standpoint of ‘it is for the children,’ but they don’t understand the repercussions of having a free good that people will want but somebody has to pay for, and sooner or later, they won’t be able to,” he added.

“Now there are other aspects of economics that are important to know, but if you know just about prices, you will have 80 or 90 percent of economics understood,” Warden said.

According to Warden, one truth is evident when looking at the price of goods. People will take advantage of anything that’s free. To prove this point to his audience, he compared the Medicare program to shopping, an activity all people can relate to.

“For instance,” said Warden, “in the Medicare program, think of this. Someone gives you a credit card and says, ‘Okay, this is for your clothing budget. We’ll pay for it, but you have to be careful with how you use it, but we’ll pay for the clothing budget.’ What do you think you’re going to buy? It isn’t going to be Walmart, is it? Could it be Armani and so forth? ‘I’m not paying for it.’ Well, that’s the Medicare system.”

Warden said the current system tells people, ‘We’re going to give you senior citizens free healthcare.’ As a result of a zero cost to those who are eligible for Medicare, the demand has

fueled the cost.

“The predictions on the cost of Medicare when it was started in ‘65 was it was going to reach \$9 billion in 1980. It had reached somewhere in the order of \$200 billion because people said, ‘Hey, it’s a free thing. I’m gonna use it.’ And they did,” Warden said.

“But the journalists didn’t report on that. They saw it as ‘this is good for the common man or the older person or low-income person and as a consequence, we have Medicare and Medicaid just ballooning the federal budget,” he added.



Ziba Ayeen of the Atlas Foundation with Chris Warden

Warden said knowing how economics works also helps out journalists when it’s time to ask questions about the topic at hand.

Warden said that during the Clinton years his understanding of economics was useful when covering press conferences.

“I remember a press conference where the Republicans were trying to garner PR, and Phil Graham, one of the only economists in Congress at the time, one of two, and another couple of senators had a plan to put in private savings accounts which brings incentives in the right place – there’s price considerations and so forth,” Warden said.

“And he stood there and the media berated him, literally berated him and

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debated him. ‘How can you do this? You can’t do that! This is terrible for the working class! This is terrible for the poor! Don’t you have any compassion at all?’ I mean, this is the media –the so-called objective media.”

Warden said as he stood listening to his fellow journalists follow one another in what was turning into a stoning of sorts, he was finally able to apply his understanding of economics and how it would play into the plan Graham and his fellow senators were presenting.

“I got my hand up and said, ‘Your plan has this high deductible, but once you hit the high deductible, won’t people want to use a lot of health care after that? So you really haven’t changed that desire to want to use health care once you hit that point.’ I thought it was a reasonable question. And he looks at me and goes, ‘Where did you say you were from?’ and I said, ‘Investor’s Business Daily.’ [He said,] ‘Hmm, good question.’ And then he proceeded to answer in a somewhat reasonable way. But he was not used to that kind of thoughtful question or a question beyond being berated and debated. So, if a journalist takes the time to

understand that stuff, they can ask great questions and have great stories to come out of it,” said Warden.

And understanding the concept of economics isn’t difficult at all if it’s presented in the right way, he added.

“Marginal utility, elasticity of price... that’s a problem isn’t it? Once it’s translated it makes sense, but if you think back in common sense terms, all that stuff, you don’t need those terms. I probably tick off a lot of our econ

professors on campus but it’s boring – it’s just boring, the way it’s taught,” he said.

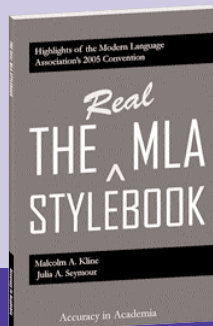
“You live economics. You instinctively know economics. You just don’t call it that. So, if somebody sort of brings that to bear and says,

‘This is what economics really is. It’s what you do in your life,’ then that’s a good thing in my view,” Warden said.

“If you start thinking that way about a lot of things, gee, the world clears up—at least it did for me. And that’s what I’m hoping my book will do,” he added.



Chris Warden talks to students after the AIA event at the National Press Club



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SQUEAKY CHALK

By Deborah Lambert



TROUBLEMAKER

From Fred Siegel, in a review of Chester Finn's history of modern school reform in the June, 2008 issue of Commentary magazine, comes the following:

"Each successive generation since the mid-60s has read less, mastered a smaller body of knowledge, and possessed a more meager vocabulary than its predecessors. What makes the members of the current generation different is that they appear unembarrassed by their ignorance.

"The products of a school system devised and maintained by the process-oriented professors of the education schools, they are all, in effect, postmodernists; for them, everything is a matter of opinion, and no one's opinion is better than anyone else's."



LIBERAL EDUCATION'S RIGHT TURN?

Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick has stunned his (soon-to-be-former) pals in the teachers unions by proposing a brave new idea for "readi-

ness schools" as part of his ten-year plan to overhaul education.

According to Boston.com, the "readiness schools" would "combine features of the state's charter schools and Boston's experimental pilot schools" and play a large part in the radical transformation of public education.

"They would be allowed to deviate from state curriculum guidelines and experiment with teaching practices," an idea that has not exactly taken teachers union members by storm, especially those who helped elect Governor Patrick.

"We're open to new ideas, but we're interested in protecting collective bargaining rights," said Thomas Gosnell, who heads up the American Federation of Massachusetts Teachers. He might be studying the more controversial parts of the plan that "limit collective bargaining to salary and benefits and due-process dismissals."

Interested parties will have to wait until the Governor unveils this plan in January, 2009, but hopes run high among non-union voters that he means business



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Ask about internships at the American Journalism Center, a joint program of Accuracy in Media and Accuracy in Academia. The AJC offers 12 weeks of research, reporting and writing experience in our nation's capital. Stipends or scholarships are available to program participants that range from \$50 per day to \$3,000 for the three-month internship. For more information, e-mail Mal Kline at mal.kline@academia.org or visit us at www.aimajc.org

EXPANDED LEARNING TIME OR MONEY?

By: *Rachel Paulk*



The Center for American Progress recently held a panel pushing for the implementation of and lauding the benefits of expanded learning time (ELT) programs in schools nationwide. Most programs involve either lengthening the actual school day or increasing the number of days in a school year; to date, mostly charter schools and some elementary and middle schools have been able to integrate a functional ELT program into their curriculum.

Proponents assert that the added time helps teachers expand and further expound on core classes like reading and math, though the added time is most often used to add “hands-on enrichment activities” and programs on values. As Gretchen Bueter, panelist and Principal of Grove Patterson Elementary School in Toledo, Ohio, stated, “enrichment is important because that’s what fulfills the children.” Bueter’s elementary-through-middle school implemented an ELT program about eight years ago.

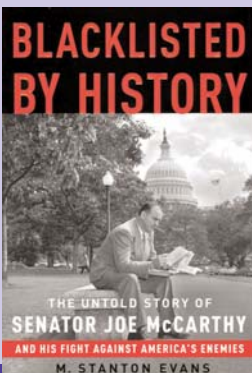
Critics of the ELT movement assert that instead of expanding the time children spend in school, the curriculum should be focused on the core “R’s”— reading, writing, and arithmetic. The ELT program also comes with some significant strings

attached—Elena Rocha, education consultant and author of the newly released CAP report, “Expanding Learning Time in Action,” noted that “teacher burnout is a legitimate concern.” Also demanding attention are the changes in time for the bus drivers, additional salary for the supporting faculty, and the effects of the time change on members of the general community.

Marguerite Roza, a Research Associate Professor at the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, noted in her newly released CAP report that the financial aspects of implementing an ELT program typically resulted in 16% additional spending or an increase between \$280-\$720 per pupil. Though, she asserted, that “compared to a lot of reforms” a 16% increase in spending for a 30% increase in time was “sort of a good deal.” To cover the increased costs, she recommended loosening strict caps on class sizes and reducing elective offerings, among other measures.

To date, none of the panelists could offer any statistics to prove the ELT programs were improving students’ learning or test scores. Bueter’s school had a state rating as “Effective” for the last 3-5 years. The highest state rating possible in Ohio is “Excellent.”

Rachel Paulk is an intern at the American Journalism Center, a training program run by Accuracy in Media and Accuracy in Academia.



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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

By *Malcolm A. Kline*



September, 2008

Dear Reader,

By the time that you receive this report, our interns from the summer of 2008 will have finished up. Emily Ham, who wrote the cover story, was one of these students. A rising senior at Troy University, Emily wrote more than a half a dozen in-depth pieces for us which are posted on www.campusreportonline.net. In addition to Emily, eleven interns filled out the roster of the summer program of the American Journalism Center, which AIA runs jointly with Accuracy in Media:

- ♦Robin Beshear, a recent graduate of the Miami University of Ohio, joined the AJC as a public relations/marketing intern as did;
- ♦Sandy Linczer, a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin.

Most of the interns at the AJC were on the straight journalism track, as Emily was. Her peers included:

- ♦Ben Giles, a rising senior at Virginia Wesleyan;
- ♦Santiago Leon, a graduate student at Regent University;
- ♦Emily Russo Miller, a recent graduate of George Mason University;
- ♦Rachel Paulk, a rising junior at Rollins College;
- ♦Brooke Reider, a recent graduate of Brigham Young University;
- ♦Daniel Smith, a student at the University of California at Riverside;
- ♦Audra Taylor, a rising senior at Duquesne;
- ♦Jeff Waldmann, a student at Albion College; and
- ♦Melinda Zosh, a rising sophomore at Liberty University.

One of Rachel's articles appears on page 6. She logged in more than 20 stories in three months time, as did Ben and Melinda, whose work has also been featured on these pages. A story a week is not unusual for AJC interns, with our emphasis on substantive work. These apprentices, in turn, were up to the challenge. Indeed, they broke stories that veteran reporters with many decades of experience missed. With your help, we will continue to provide this training to others. Doing so will, to paraphrase our liberal friends, make the media world better than when we found it.

All the best,

Mal Kline
Executive Director

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