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Student's Research Indicates Arts' Economic Impact Exceeds \$6 Million

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Student's Research Indicates Arts' Economic Impact Exceeds \$6 Million

Aug. 6, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Ever since she began playing trumpet at age 10, Michelle Riechers '16 (Grant Park, Ill.) has focused most of her musical attention on the performer's side of the stage – how well she's playing and how the music moves her.

Today she's looking at the arts from the financial aspect. As an **Eckley Scholar** studying the economic impact of seven arts and culture organizations in McLean County, Riechers now understands the dollars and cents many artists don't always fully appreciate.

"As performers, we can get really caught up in what we're doing and not realize how our art affects those who are paying their money to see us perform," said Riechers, who is majoring in both **economics** and **music**. "If people aren't attending arts and culture events or state funding is cut even further, this change in economic activity will be felt throughout the region."

The Eckley Scholars & Artists Program allows meritorious students to remain on campus over the summer to conduct research or engage in artistic activity under the guidance of a faculty mentor. Intrigued by the possibility of combining her loves of both music and economics, she turned to Associate Professor of Economics Diego Mendez-Carbajo for advice. He suggested a study of the economic impact of the arts in the local community utilizing IMPLAN, a software widely used for estimating arts and cultural organizations' economic impact.



Associate Professor of Economics Diego Mendez-Carbajo mentored Michelle Riechers '16 in her summer research.



Michelle Riechers '16

Under the mentorship of Mendez-Carbajo, Riechers has found the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, the Illinois Symphony Orchestra, the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts, U.S. Cellular Coliseum, Children's Discovery Museum, McLean County Arts Center and McLean County Museum of History combined have an average direct impact of \$6.2 million annually. When considering indirect and induced effects, these organizations contribute, on average, an additional \$2.3 million to the McLean County economy, the researchers said.

"I received a small amount of experience on the business side of music as the manager of the Illinois Wesleyan Wind Ensemble," she explained. "Through that experience I learned about the importance of promotion to get people to come to our concerts, but this project has really opened my eyes to how much music and economics can relate to each other."

"I was thrilled to work with Michelle on this project, as it capitalizes on her talents across two majors," Mendez-Carbajo said. "This is an

example of the liberal arts at work that we like to see at IWU."

Riechers said she is grateful for the opportunity to spend the summer immersing herself in her two majors. "During the school year I take the classes I need for my two degrees and that's really all I can fit in, along with rehearsals for the Illinois Wesleyan Civic Orchestra and the Wind Ensemble," she said.

The project has enhanced Riechers' knowledge of professional organizations such as a symphony orchestra. Ultimately she aspires to join a company after earning a master's degree in trumpet performance.

The Eckley Scholars & Artists program was established by President Emeritus and Mrs. Robert S. Eckley before President Eckley passed away in 2012. The program is designed to develop and deepen a student's creative and research competencies under the guidance of a faculty member. Eckley Scholars receive a \$4,000 stipend and on-campus housing.