Professor Emeritus William (Will) Deakins White died on October 11, 2019 after an extended illness. We at Cornell and Sloan miss him dearly, as do the hundreds of students he educated and mentored along with the faculty he collaborated with. We are grateful for his friendship, passion to improve the health care system, and innovation in health education.

Will was born July 13, 1945, in Philadelphia, the son of the late Gilbert F. and Anne White. Will White received his B.A. from Haverford College and holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University. Raised as a Quaker, Will was a conscientious objector and completed his alternative service at Massachusetts General Hospital, which sparked his keen interest in health care policy.

Prior to coming to Cornell, he headed the program in health management at Yale where he revitalized the program. Prior to this, he was a professor and associate director of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Will was a pivotal member of the “first generation” of health
economists. His seminal research on the economics of health systems, physician practices, and managed care organizations continues to influence the profession and shape our understanding of health care markets. He had many appointments as a visiting scholar including as a Distinguished Academic Visitor at Queens College, Cambridge University; the Judge Business School, Cambridge; Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern; University of Chicago; MIT; and Harvard.

Among his fellowships and awards, Will was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, winner of the Annual Health Care Research Award, National Institute for Health Care Management; Article-of-the-Year Award, Association for Health Services Research; Sodexo Marriott Corporation Health Care Services Faculty Publication of the Year Ward, American Academy of Medical Administrators. He also received numerous grant awards from groups such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), New York State Health Foundation, and the Anthem Foundation. He published a wide variety of academic papers in many prestigious journals and authored or edited all or part of a number of books, organized a number of conferences and made numerous presentations both in the U.S. and abroad. He has also been an expert witness in many cases regarding anti-trust in the health field. His primary research interest is health economics and his professional career focused on the organization and operation of healthcare markets.

Will was a professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management and the Director of the Sloan Program in Health Administration at Cornell University from 2003 through 2014. Through his leadership, vision, and tireless work, Will turned the Sloan Program around. The program is greatly indebted to Will for his extraordinary leadership - his tenure as director was transformational. Under his direction Will attracted many faculty to Cornell (including Sean Nicholson, Julie Carmalt, Nicolas Ziebarth, Brooke Hollis and Colleen Carey), student enrollment nearly tripled, alumni became more engaged, and the program soared from 29th in the U.S. News & World Report ranking of health administration programs to its current top-10 ranking. He taught microeconomics
and the Colloquium course, led several successful and important accreditation processes, and raised the visibility of the Sloan Program externally through his leadership in national health education and administration organizations. His impact on the quality of the program is also reflected in reactions of so many alumni and other leaders in the field who have recruited Sloan graduates to work for them.

Professor White also positioned the program for a strong future by recruiting and developing an administrative team and exploring the potential for an executive M.H.A. program. One of Will’s most important legacies is training hundreds of students who are now helping health care organizations provide high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care throughout the country and beyond. His stewardship of the Sloan Program will continue having an impact for years to come. Among his contributions to the greater Cornell mission, he was the lead author of the health-related portion of the successful Tech Campus proposal.

Will’s other interests included 19th Century political cartoons, history, horse riding, and cross-country skiing. He is greatly missed by his cherished wife Olivia, children Gilbert and Lydia (Giovanni), and sisters Mary White and Frances Chapin.

There are a variety of funds and charities that he actively supported: the Friends Committee for National Legislation. Another is the White/Hollis Sloan Prize Fund at the College of Human Ecology that recognizes Dr. White for his contributions and helps to carry on some of his initiatives that encouraged students to engage in case competitions, hackathons and entrepreneurial activities by providing modest funds for prizes.

Written by Brooke Hollis, Rosemary Avery, and Sean Nicholson