

## IWS Workplace Series Explores Social Issues

The before and after a presidential election is always filled with chatter. The financial implosion of 2008 was front and center during the final weeks of the campaign, forcing other issues to the sidelines. Immigration, unionization, globalization, healthcare, and rising college tuition received scant attention despite the obvious need for new policy initiatives.

In an effort to jumpstart dialogue on such overlooked topics, the Institute for Workplace Studies is sponsoring a colloquium series entitled "The Voice of the ILR School: Conversations on Six Social Issues." The lecture and discussion series features presentations by faculty and friends of ILR, and is dedicated to the memory of Joseph R. Rich (ILR'80, MS'86), a generous and active alumnus who was chairman of Pearl Meyer & Partners, a compensation consulting practice, before his passing in 2007.

Of the six scheduled events, four are still forthcoming. Gary S. Fields, John P. Windmuller Professor of International and Comparative Labor, will lead a panel presentation on January 29 concerning the effects of globalization on the working poor. Prof. Fields will focus on opportunities to boost wage employment and improve wage scales for low-wage and unskilled workers in developing economies. Luís-Felipe López-Calva (Cornell PhD'99, Economics), head of Latin American programs at the United Nations Development Program, and Edward Potter (MILR'72), vice president for workplace rights and global labor relations at Coca-Cola, will join Prof. Fields.

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## Charisma Goes Only So Far: Leadership Is All About the Skills

HE WORD "LEADERSHIP" IS OFTEN TOSSED ABOUT in daily discourse, typically in reference to someone in a position of authority, be it an executive, a politician, a school principal, or a team coach. Terms commonly used to describe what sets these individuals apart—indeed, what elevates them to leadership status—include "winning personality," "visionary," and "inspirational." But these are vague and abstract notions that don't provide any specifics, let alone hints, about what leaders actually do when they lead.

"I tell my students charisma is good for five minutes," says Samuel Bacharach, McKelvey-Grant Professor at **ILR** and director of the *Institute for Workplace Studies*. "The rest of the time a leader has to be smart about micro politics and micro management."

Leadership, according to Prof. Bacharach, is all about getting something done with and through people. It requires one set of skills to mobilize people, build coalitions, and sell your ideas, and another set to execute the program and sustain the momentum. In other words, as a leader you must first "get them on your side" and then "keep them on your side." (*Editor's note*: Prof. Bacharach recently wrote two books published by Platinum Press with these very titles.)

Prof. Bacharach has been exploring the leadership realm for several years, first as a hobby and then as researcher, lecturer, and observer. His early thinking about the topic was informed by his work on negotiations and the politics of organizations. Later, he was influenced by Doris Kearns Goodwin's book, A Team of Rivals, which discusses President Abraham Lincoln's radical decision to invite three politicians who had challenged him for the presidency to join his cabinet. (A suggestive foreshadowing, perhaps, of President-elect Obama's decision to invite former rivals Senator Joseph Biden, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, Governor Bill Richardson, and others to join his administration.) Other tomes about luminaries such as Lyndon Baines Johnson (Master of the Senate by Robert A. Caro) and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox by James McGregor Burns) only confirmed Prof. Bacharach's conviction that leadership involves small tactical moves that attract supporters and then sustain their active commitment.

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# Cornell University ILR School Institute for Workplace Studies

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A newsletter on workplace issues and research from the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University

#### Learning to Lead

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In focusing on the nuts and bolts of leadership, Prof. Bacharach insists that good leaders are made, not born. This assertion informs the undergraduate courses on political leadership in organizations that he offers to ILR students enrolled in semesterlong internships in New York City and, through distance-learning technology, to students in Ithaca. It is the starting point for nine courses Prof. Bacharach has developed and produced for eCornell that are

Framing the concepts

into knowable skills

integral components of leadership training programs at several Fortune 500

companies. And it is the motivating theme of the interactive workshops he leads for activists, executives, and academics, all of whom must marshal the enthusiasm and ongoing commitment of their teams to execute an agenda, which in turn helps ensure the viability of the movement, or organization, or institution they lead.

The message Prof. Bacharach seeks to impart is simple. A leader's political skill set requires building coalitions by understanding others' needs and goals, anticipating what they will say, identifying who is with you and who is likely to resist. At the same time, leaders must establish their credibility, justify their actions, and specify the benefits that accrue to going with the program. The management skill set—vital to sustaining the requisite momentum-involves giving subordinates just the right amount of autonomy, allocating resources, clearing away the bureaucratic bottlenecks, determining an evaluation process, and adjusting to developments as they arise. Additional competencies include nourishing the coalition, creating a problem-solving culture, setting priorities, and keeping the end goal

"I'm not telling anyone anything new," Prof. Bacharach demurs. "I just try to frame the concepts into executable, knowable skills."

An invitation to participate in the 2008 Cultural and Economic Forum in New Orleans opened a new phase of Prof. Bacharach's research. "It suddenly occurred to me to ask if I could validate my ideas and tell stories about leadership through the narratives of other people," he says. So he set out to answer that question by interviewing (on videotape) some 20 attendees at the forum, each of whom

was a proven leader cut from a nontraditional cloth. For example, one woman imports textiles woven by peasants in

Cambodia; a chef has lived on the same street in New Orleans his entire life, appeared on the television show "Iron Chef," and built a small empire of high-end restaurants; and a reggae musician made his first album into a national hit. "It's what you do, not who you are," Prof. Bacharach asserts.

Early on in the process, Prof. Bacharach found that these individuals use language similar to his when talking about their objectives and how they hit their target. The stories provided him a fresh set of anecdotes that will enliven his lectures and workshops and writing; he is now compiling the videotapes into a DVD to be shared with his audiences. "These interviews have given me a different voice, one that supplements my research voice," Prof. Bacharach notes. "Although my way of speaking is embedded in my academic core, it's taking on the nuances of the people I've been meeting."

What gives Prof. Bacharach the greatest satisfaction is knowing that the framework for leadership he has laid out is applicable in any setting. "Leadership is found not just in organizations or in politics," he asserts, "but in life all the time. It is nothing more than a group of skills that make people more proactive. And that we can teach."

#### Social Issues

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The February 12 colloquium will explore the rising costs of higher education. Ronald G. Ehrenberg, the Irving M. Ives Professor of Industrial and Labor Relations and Economics and director of the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute, will share the podium with Cornell University President David J. Skorton. The speakers will suggest policy approaches that could help colleges and universities contain costs without sacrificing educational quality.

Two ILR faculty members will address the crisis in the American health care system at the session scheduled for April 23. David B. Lipsky (ILR'61), the Anne Evans Estabrook Professor of Dispute Resolution and director of the Scheinman Institute on Conflict Resolution, and William J. Sonnenstuhl, associate professor of organizational behavior and associate director of the R. Brinkley Smithers Institute for Alcohol-Related Workplace Studies, will join Ruben J. King-Shaw, Jr. (ILR'83), founding partner of Pan American Risk Management, LLC in diagnosing the health system's ailments and suggesting several cures.

The ties that bind—that is, people's commitments to small groups, work organizations, communities, and nations—are the subject of a presentation by Edward J. Lawler, Martin P. Catherwood Professor of Industrial and Labor Relations, on May 14. The former ILR dean will speak about the social transformations that threaten and weaken the type of group belonging that underlies social stability and order.

Colloquium sessions on immigration and labor policy were held during the fall. Vernon M.Briggs, Jr., an emeritus professor at ILR, and Robert S. Smith, professor of labor economics and associate dean for academic affairs, debated the effect of illegal immigration on the U.S. labor market. Harry C. Katz, Kenneth F. Kahn Dean and Jack Sheinkman Professor of Collective Bargaining, and Thomas A. Kochan, George Maverick Bunker Professor of Management at MIT's Sloan School of Management, discussed the need for a new national labor policy and the obstacles that could frustrate efforts to reach that goal.

Contact Katie Briggs at (212) 340-7931 or kb41@cornell.edu for details.

### **Health Care Breaks Out at ILR**

NE OF ILR'S BEST KEPT SECRETS is its wide expertise in the work-related aspects of health care. Faculty members who pursue research or projects related to the health care field have worked in relative isolation and received little institutional recognition. Students have had few opportunities to learn about this vital workplace and policy issue.

With the introduction in 2007 of a new course entitled "Work, Health, and Health Care," the topic is finally getting its due. About a dozen faculty from the resident and Extension divisions are jointly teaching the course, which will be reprised for the third time this spring. Several faculty members are collaborating on a proposal to have ILR host a conference on healthcare and the workplace in the 21st century. Others are sharing the fruits of their research and field work and have recently discovered colleagues with similar interests. A web site for all things health care at ILR is under discussion.

"We're working hard internally to get some cohesion," explains William Sonnenstuhl, associate professor in the organizational behavior department. "There were people around working on health care and no one recognized it. We want to find a way to raise ILR's visibility in this arena." (Editor's note: The health care system in the U.S. is the featured topic for the April 23 IWS Workplace Colloquium Series; see story on page 1.)

The genesis of all this activity was a call for collaborative projects involving both resident and Extension faculty issued by then-dean Edward Lawler in 2005. Prof. Sonnenstuhl, whose early training was in medical sociology and more recently has been studying workplace-related substance abuse, saw a gap in the curriculum and teamed up with a former associate in ILR's Employment and Disability Institute to develop an upper level course on health care. They quickly found other professors and Extension associates across the spectrum of social science disciplines at ILR who were keen to join the effort.

The resulting course is a prime example of what ILR does best. It blends theory and practice, draws on history and current events, takes an international and comparative view, and engages students in their own learning. With the role of work and employment in the delivery of health care as the unifying core, the topics explored range from the evolution of America's employment-based health care system to nurses on the front line, insurance plans, occupational health and safety, state experiments with universal health care, evidence-based medicine, and wellness and employee assistance programs. Half the course is devoted to detailed analysis of the health systems other countries have adopted.

Students are required to write a paper on a topic of their choice in a style geared to inform future coworkers about the issue.

"We've had very good response from the students," Prof. Sonnenstuhl says. "They like the variety of faculty voices and perspectives. Most importantly, they come to understand how deviant in some ways the American system is and how simplistic our notions are about other countries' systems."

Success breeds other initiatives, of course, and several faculty members are already planning new programming for the school's nascent focus on health care. One likely course will tackle the health care workplace, with a particular emphasis on nurses. Another potential course would cover organizational change within the context of the health care system (i.e., hospitals). These courses could conceivably be offered as half-semester

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RE YOU LOOKING FOR INFORMATION about veterans' benefits or backdating of options? How about global employment trends for women or international labor migration in Asia? Maybe you need data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1888 or a study of the minimum wage issued by the AFL-CIO in 1995.

Not to worry; a few clicks on your keyboard will retrieve these documents and then some. The Key Workplace Documents collection on the Catherwood Library website contains a trove of useful reports. Stuart Basefsky, information specialist and instructor at the library and director of the *IWS* News Bureau, posts documents that are "born" in digital form and need a permanent home so students, researchers, practitioners, and citizens can access them now and into the future. Mr. Basefsky carefully selects the most compelling workplace-related documents from among the non-copyrighted materials issued by the U.S. and state governments, international organizations, labor unions, and law firms.

Key Workplace Documents (http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/keydocs/) are just one component of DigitalCommons@ILR (http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/). This repository also houses digital copies of published articles and working papers by ILR faculty, the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, collective bargaining agreements, conference proceedings and speeches, and newsletters. All told, DigitalCommons contains more than 7,000 documents. The repository is easy to navigate and enables the user to customize email alerts and full-text searches, and to personalize saved searches.

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#### **Health Care**

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modules that would combine with the original course to make a year-long package of health care studies. The centrality of the workplace in this pedagogical approach neatly showcases **ILR**'s unique contribution to the understanding and analysis of health care systems.

Faculty are also seeking funding for a conference that would be held in spring 2010. The conference would focus on the health care workplace and feature **ILR** faculty along with presenters from other Cornell units, such as Policy Analysis and Management (School of Human Ecology) and Weill Graduate School of Medical Sciences. If the proposal finds support, the organizers would invite faculty from the European School of Management, an **ILR** partner institution based in Paris,

whose faculty teach health care administration and patient care. There is also talk about collaborating on research grants and the possibility of creating an institutional structure within **ILR** that would facilitate grant-writing and other joint activities revolving around health care.

Given the upcoming transfer of power in Washington, D.C., the economic meltdown, and the enormous number of Americans lacking health insurance (more than 45 million and counting), ILR's surge of energy around health care issues could not be more timely. It may take a while to fully develop synergies among the faculty and to generate financial backing for these efforts, but Prof. Sonnstuhl is optimistic about the long run. "We're building the foundation first and then opportunities will open up," he confidently predicts.

#### GO TO

www.ilr.cornell.edu/iws to explore the new Institute for Workplace Studies website.