



Cornell University
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School
DigitalCommons@ILR

Articles and Chapters

ILR Collection

3-1-1980

Trends in Selection and Training of International Union Staff: Implications for University and College Labor Education

Lois S. Gray

Cornell University, lsg7@cornell.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles>

 Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [International and Comparative Labor Relations Commons](#), and the [Unions Commons](#)

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.

Support this valuable resource today!

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ILR Collection at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact hlmdigital@cornell.edu.

Trends in Selection and Training of International Union Staff: Implications for University and College Labor Education

Abstract

[Excerpt] Reflecting increasing complexity of functions, American labor unions are turning to technically trained specialists for a variety of staff functions and giving increased support to education for staff. What are the implications for university and college labor education centers?

Keywords

ILR, Cornell University, American, labor union, specialist, staff, support education, education center, college

Disciplines

Higher Education | International and Comparative Labor Relations | Unions

Comments

Suggested Citation

Gray, L. S. (1980). Trends in selection and training of international union staff: Implications for university and college labor education [Electronic version]. *Labor Studies Journal*, 5(1), 13-24.
<http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles/65>

Required Publisher Statement

Copyright by *Labor Studies Journal*. Published version posted with special permission of the copyright holder.

Trends in Selection and Training of International Union Staff: Implications for University and College Labor Education

Lois S. Gray

Reflecting increasing complexity of functions, American labor unions are turning to technically trained specialists for a variety of staff functions and giving increased support to education for staff. What are the implications for university and college labor education centers?

Hiring "Outsiders"

A recent survey of international unions¹ indicates that most (the vast majority of the respondents) employ technically trained specialists from outside the membership for positions in national union headquarters. Among the functions listed were some that are traditional in unions and have been, even in earlier years, filled from "outside": research, education, publications, legal counsel, accounting, economic analysis, and public relations, along with others of more recent vintage: industrial engineering, pension, insurance, legislation, political action, industrial hygiene, electronic data processing, and training materials development.

1. The survey prepared and analyzed with the assistance of Walter Malakoff and Paula Traffis is described in greater detail in a forthcoming article for the *Monthly Labor Review*. Response to the survey supplemented the interview, included unions representing 80 percent of the membership of organized labor in the United States. The survey instrument may be obtained from the author.

Lois S. Gray is associate dean of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University. This paper was originally presented at an Eastern Regional meeting of the University and College Labor Education Association.

For staff positions assigned to organizing, collective bargaining, and union administration, the survey confirms our impression that most unions continue to select from within their own membership, choosing from among those who have demonstrated leadership at the local level. On the other hand, a surprising number currently recruit outside union ranks.² In response to our inquiry, the following unions indicated "flexible" hiring criteria for all union staff positions with no requirement of prior union membership: Hospital and Health Care (1199); Garment (ILGWU); Clothing and Textile (ACTWU); Mine (UMW); Office and Professional (OPEIU); Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks (BRAC); Teachers (AFT); State, County and Municipal (AFSCME); Teamsters (IBT); Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), and National Education Association (NEA). Several additional organizations are known to recruit through university and college placement offices: Service Employees (SEIU); Airline Pilots (ALPA); Broadcast Technicians (NABET); Committee of Interns and Residents, and unions in the entertainment industry. Unions that recruit "outsiders" for technical positions are representative of the broad spectrum of organizations in the American labor movement—industrial, craft, white collar, blue collar, public as well as private sector. An outside talent search for specialists has become a normal pattern in American unions. Atypical are those that rely solely on internal recruitment to fill all positions, including technical and professional specialties. These unions are generally small organizations with limited resources.

On the other hand, unions that look outside to staff collective bargaining and organizing are not typical. They tend to fall into two extremes based on the type of membership they represent: (1) well-paid professional and technical and (2) relatively low-paid semiskilled and unskilled. In the case of the former, outside recruitment is explained by the fact that members are dedicated to their occupational goals and, therefore, reluctant to assume full-time union leadership roles (e.g. actors, doctors, pilots). In contrast, unions that represent mainly low-skill workers with limited formal education sometimes report that it is difficult to recruit "qualified" representatives from the ranks. Rapid growth also impels unions to look outside to meet their staff needs. Leading examples are public employee organizations, which constitute the principal growth sector of the American labor movement. The pressures that come from inexperience and the demands of

2. In 1956 when Harold Wilinsky (*Intellectuals in Unions*) analyzed the role of technically trained specialist in unions, he found relatively few "outsiders": these were employed in a narrow range of functions.

expanding membership are reflected in continuing staff recruitment by NEA, AFT, AFSCME, and AFGE.

The significance to university and college educators of the trend to employ "outsiders" is the market that it provides for graduates of resident³ and nonresident degree programs. Harold Wilinsky in his pathbreaking study *Intellectuals in Unions* in 1956 noted that union leaders were concerned with the drying up of old sources of union staff, such as Brookwood Labor College and radical political parties.⁴ Some even reported advertising in commercial newspapers and calling employment agencies to fill staff positions.⁵ On the other hand, most were suspicious of the products of universities, reporting that industrial relations degree programs tend to "corrupt" the students with a management bias or produce graduates with a know-it-all attitude disruptive to union organization.⁶

It appears that leadership attitudes may be changing and that universities are becoming more acceptable as a source of union staff recruitment. Several unions have established internships for college students and a few use this device for staff recruitment. Notable is the placement record of the master's degree program of the University of Massachusetts. Designed to provide professional training for union staff positions, its required internships provide an effective link between the classroom and union experience. As a result, 40 to 50 percent of its graduates secure positions in unions and the remainder in labor-related government or private agencies.

Labor studies degree programs for part-time adult students, which have been mushrooming in recent years, are potential replacements for Brookwood and other early sources of union staff recruitment. The students, mostly union activists, acquire credentials and technical expertise that, in combination with their union experience, may qualify them for staff positions. The majority of current students enrolled in labor studies credit courses are local union officers and active members.⁷ Although limited information is available concerning the career path for graduates of these recently established programs, fragmentary evidence suggests that many

3. For example, the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, reports an increase in union placement in recent years. It should be noted that the number who find jobs in unions still represent less than two percent of total placements.

4. Wilinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 254-5.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7. Gray, Lois S., "Labor Studies Credit and Degree Programs: A Growth Sector of Higher Education," *Labor Studies Journal*, May 1976; "Organized Labour and Community Colleges," *Labour Education*, International Labour Office, October 1976, and "Academic Degrees for Labor Studies—A New Goal for Unions," *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1977.

achieve recognition in their unions through appointment to full-time positions.⁸ In any case, this source has potential for the future.

The typology of union positions available to college graduates has curriculum implications for colleges and universities. The vast majority of openings for "outsiders" are specialist positions for which a general industrial relations or even labor studies education may not qualify the applicant. For example, occupational safety and health positions may be filled by graduates of public health schools, pension and insurance experts and actuaries may be drawn from business schools, labor educators may come from schools of education, economists from departments of economics, editors from schools of journalism. If Labor Studies degree centers want to prepare their graduates for the growing number of technical positions in unions, it will be necessary to include specialized course concentrations through linkages to other departments of the college or university.

For students who want to qualify for positions as organizers and negotiators, practical experience is the key. Therefore, students who enroll in labor studies with little or no union and bargaining experience (for example, resident students who enroll directly from high school and younger workers registered part time) will need substantial field experience.⁹

Staff Training

A growing number of union staff members are involved in training programs, both inside and outside the union. In 1968, Larry Rogin and Marjorie Rachlin, in their comprehensive survey of labor education in the United States,¹⁰ found eighteen national unions sponsoring some form of staff training. In response to our 1978 survey, there were thirty-seven, more than double the earlier figure (see Table I for a listing of unions with staff training programs in 1966 and 1978). Almost all of the unions that sponsored staff training in 1966 have continued this form of activity, and a sizable number have initiated new programs of staff training in the intervening years. While the earlier sponsors were mostly large industrial unions, newcomers to the field include many craft unions.

8. Reports on graduates of Empire State College Labor Division in New York City.

9. A survey of NYSSILR graduates reported in an unpublished paper by RaeAnn O'Brien and Marilyn Nicholas, "Employment of College Trained Professionals in Labor Unions," June 1978, indicates a strong student demand for "practical" classroom and field training.

10. *Labor Education in the United States* by Lawrence Rogin and Marjorie Rachlin, National Institute of Labor Education, September 1968.

TABLE 1
International Union Staff Training Program,
1966 and 1978

	<u>1978</u>	<u>1966</u>
Allied Industrial	X	X
Auto	X	X
Bakery & Confectionery	X	
Barbers	X	
Brick and Clay Workers		X
Carpenters	X	
Cement, Lime	X	
Chemical	X	X
Clothing and Textile		X (1)
Communications	X	X
Distributive	X	
Education (NEA)	X	
Electrical (IUE)	X	X
Electrical (IBEW)	X	
Firefighters	X	
Government (AFGE)	X	
Graphic Arts	X	
Hospital and Health	X	
Ladies Garment	X	X
Machinists	X	X
Meatcutters		X
Mineworkers	X	
Molders	X	
Newspaper Guild	X	X
Office and Professional	X	
Oil, Chemical and Atomic	X	X
Laborers		X
Operating Engineers	X	
Painters	X	X
Paper	X	X (2)
Printing and Graphic	X	
Rubber and Cork	X	
Railway and Airline Clerks	X	
Retail Clerks	X	X
Slate, Tile and Roofers	X	
State, County and Municipal	X	X
Steelworkers	X	X
Teachers	X	
University Professors	X	
Upholsterers		X
Utility Workers	X	

(1) Textile prior to merger

(2) Pulp, Sulphite and Papermill Workers prior to merger

1978 data from survey conducted by Lois Gray with Wally Malakoff and Paula Traffis.
 1966 data from Lawrence Rogin and Marjorie Rachlin, Labor Education in the United States, National Institute of Labor Education, 1966.

The most significant development since the earlier survey was the establishment of the first AFL-CIO center for staff training, the George Meany Center for Labor Studies. Fred Hoehler, Jr., the director, reports 5,000 union staff participants in an eight-year period. Even more remarkable is the widespread support that has been demonstrated by AFL-CIO

unions. He notes that 94 out of 106 affiliated organizations have been involved in the center's program.¹¹

While union-sponsored staff training programs vary in form and content,¹² there are several common characteristics. Collective Bargaining and Labor Law are the principal subjects covered both in the George Meany Center curriculum and in the programs sponsored by individual unions. These subjects are, of course, basic to the professional role of the union staff. What is new is the official acceptance of the role of education in providing staff with this type of expertise. Traditionally, union officials acquired knowledge of collective bargaining through experience.

While demonstrated competence is still expected, as reflected in the widespread experience criterion for selection of international staff, unions increasingly supplement experience with classroom training. Courses in communications skills—reading, writing and speaking—are popular at the George Meany Center and are also included in a few of the programs sponsored by individual unions, for example, Retail Clerks and Ladies Garment Workers. Behavioral science courses such as transactional analysis, management by objectives, and sensitivity training, long popular with management, are featured in a few of the union-sponsored staff courses, notably Communications Workers (CWA), Operating Engineers (IUOE), Government Employees (AFGE), Steelworkers (USW), and National Education Association (NEA).

With a few exceptions, staff education programs conducted by international unions are generally offered in a format that might be characterized as "briefing sessions." They provide an orientation to union functions and a structure for new staff or an updating on current union policy for all staff. Earlier attempts for longer staff training sessions (one year at ILGWU; six months for CWA) have been abandoned. CWA, with its required six weeks program, is followed by ILGWU and Steelworkers with three weeks. In other unions, training sessions usually consume one week or less. Union education staff and other headquarters specialists are the instructors. Rarely are "outsiders" used as teachers. Lecture with discussion is the normal format. Deviations from this pattern are programs dealing with the behavioral sciences, in which academically trained consultants are employed.¹³

11. Hoehler, Fred K., Jr., "Staff Training Programs" *Proceedings of the Annual AFL-CIO Education Conference*. March 5-8, 1978.

12. Reported in more detail in article for *Monthly Labor Review*.

13. Al and Mae Nash in *Labor Unions and Labor Education*, University Labor Education Association monograph, point to the contrast between management education, which they characterize as

The George Meany Center, in contrast to staff training programs of individual unions, is staffed by full-time faculty who are qualified both by union experience and academic credentials. The center also utilizes the services of a number of outside specialists in its year-round teaching program. Its programs are carefully designed to include a wide variety of participative methods of teaching—programmed instruction, case studies, role plays, simulations, and audio visual presentations, in addition to the traditional lecture and discussion format.

How does the upsurge of interest in, and support for, union staff training impact on colleges and universities? At the time of the Rogin-Rachlin survey, few universities reported that they were engaged in union staff training. The only significant ongoing staff training activity in higher education at that time was Harvard University's Trade Union Program. Initiated in 1942, it aimed to "provide training for executive responsibility in the unions and to help unions play more useful and important roles in the labor movement and in the life of the community."¹⁴ Over the years, Harvard has continued to attract a relatively small number of union staff members from the United States and abroad to its thirteen-week course of study. The program features Harvard faculty as instructors and utilizes the case method of teaching.

Other universities provided staff training in 1966. The University of Wisconsin offered courses in industrial engineering in cooperation with AFL-CIO; Roosevelt University conducted tailor-made programs for the Amalgamated Meat Cutters; the University of Michigan cooperated with the Communications Workers in their 12-week "liberal arts" program; and several offered occasional training courses on request of unions or initiated workshops for union staff located in a particular area, for example, Cornell in New York City. Perhaps the most significant involvement of higher education in union staff education at the time of the Rogin-Rachlin Survey was the experimental programs of social science education for union staff offered under the auspices of the National Institute of Labor Education. Unfortunately, these were discontinued when foundation funding ran out.

Our 1978 survey indicates that union staff training is still a marginal activity in university and college labor education centers. A minority of respondents to our questionnaire to University and College Labor Education Association affiliates reported involvement in programs of union staff

"innovative" because it employs academically trained specialists and deals with the behavioral sciences, and labor education, which they characterize as "traditional: because it deals with history or past practices taught by 'insiders.'"

14. Quote from brochure describing the program.

TABLE 2
University Programs for International Staff
of Unions, 1978

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Unions Served</u>	<u>Subjects</u>
U. of Alabama	Chemical Workers (ICWU) Steelworkers District (USWA) Open Enrollment	Collective Bargaining and Arbitration Arbitration Arbitration
Cornell U.	By Invitation Open Enrollment State, County (AFSCME) Machinists (IAM) Farm Workers Health & Hospital Workers (1199) IATSE Open Enrollment	Duty of Fair Representation Labor & International Economic Issues Arbitration Arbitration Education Methods Union Administration Union Administration Urban Planning & Land Use
Florida Int. U.	Firefighters (IAFF) Open Enrollment	Political Action Legislative Lobbying
Georgetown U.	Communications (CWA) State, County (AFSCME) Teachers (AFT) New Jersey Machinists (IAM) Open Enrollment	International Labor International Labor International Labor International Labor Labor & Developing Countries
Harvard U.	Bricklayers Open Enrollment	Current Problems Trade Union Programs
U. of Houston	Electrical (IBEW)	Leadership
U. of Missouri	Electrical (IUE) ILGWU Organizers ILGWU Managers Skilled Trades	Organizing Organizing Staff Training Apprentice Instruction
Oakland U.	Auto (UAW)	Staff Training (new staff)
Pennsylvania State U.	State, County (AFSCME)	Grievance Arbitration Collective Bargaining
Rutgers U.	Textile (ACTWU) District 65, Distributive Electrical (IBEW) Professional Engineers (IATPE)	Organizing Role of Organizing Contract Administration Organizing in Public Sector
U. of Wisconsin	Wisconsin Building Trades State, County (AFSCME) WEA Council Education (NEA) AFL-CIO Industrial Engineering Inst. George Meany Center	Labor Law Current Problems Collective Bargaining Arbitration Labor History Union Operation Collective Bargaining Industrial Engineering Testing & Employment Selection Procedures

Based on response to a survey of affiliates of the University and College Labor Association.

training. With the exception of the Harvard Trade Union Program, universities offer staff training only when it is requested by international unions, the George Meany Center, and other departments of the AFL-CIO. (See Table II for listing of educational institutions and unions served.) Rarely do universities initiate staff educational programs on their own. Stewards and

local union officers continue to be the major target population for university labor education.

In 1977-78 eleven universities reported programs that were designed exclusively for union staff. A few additional institutions reported programs enrolling both staff and local officers. In 1978, as in 1966, the University of Wisconsin continued its lead role in the number of staff training programs offered, cooperating with the AFL-CIO headquarters and the George Meany Center as well as with international and regional unions. Specialization in Industrial Engineering and Employment Testing and Selection are unique features of the Wisconsin program. Georgetown University's international affairs courses have been incorporated in the staff training programs of several national unions. The University of Missouri Labor Center has developed a "psychological" approach to training union organizers, which has been adopted by two national unions. Workshops in legislative lobbying are offered by Florida International University. With these exceptions, arbitration and collective bargaining are the dominant themes of staff training both in universities and in unions.

Credit Courses for Union Staff

While the number of university courses for union staff remains small, labor studies credit courses provide another type of training for union staff. Antioch's program in cooperation with the George Meany Center is the only labor studies degree program that caters exclusively to union staff. An external degree, the Antioch-George Meany program reaches a relatively small student population. It is especially suited to self-educated union officials who can acquire credit for knowledge acquired through experience along with an organized program of independent study tailored to their individual needs.

At the local level around the United States, with increasing emphasis on credentialism, credit courses may be expected to grow in importance in the training of actual or potential members of union staff. Respondents to the UCLEA questionnaire reported full-time union staff as participants in their credit and degree programs. For example, in 1978 the Labor College in New York City (Empire State and Cornell) enrolled 50 full-time staff members (15 percent of the students). Community colleges also report union staff among their registrants.

How do unions view university offerings? In response to our questionnaire, a number of union officials expressed reservations about the utilization of universities and college faculty for union staff training. Nonethe-

less, almost half of the respondents reported that their staff had participated in university and college courses during the past year. The unions with the most positive response to higher education as an educational resource are generally those with the most active programs. University resources are apparently utilized to supplement the union's own offerings.

How has the George Meany Center affected university programs? Objectively, the impact appears to be positive. Universities were rarely involved in union staff training prior to establishment of the George Meany Center, and their involvement has increased in the years since it opened its doors. Subjectively, when asked to comment on the impact, university and college administrators had mixed reactions. Most felt that the center had little or no net effect on what they were doing. One indicated that the center's offerings may be competitive with regional educational programs. Several suggested that the center has stimulated union interest in labor education, which spills over in greater demand for all the providers, including universities.

It appears that opportunities for university and college involvement in union staff training have barely been tapped. Given growing interest in, and support for, union staff training, what are potential roles for institutions of higher education? Contributions may take the form of (1) direct educational service and (2) related research.

The George Meany Center is, and undoubtedly will continue to be, the major supplier of direct educational service to union staff. Its support by the AFL-CIO—both financial and moral—and its reputation for high-quality programs insures this lead role. International unions will continue to provide their own briefing and orientation sessions. These do not necessarily pre-empt the field. A few universities have demonstrated the potential for carving out their own "turf" through developing a unique or unusual expertise that supplements or complements offerings of the center and international unions. For example, industrial engineering and employment testing are subjects for which unions turn to the University of Wisconsin. Furthermore, when a university develops a "new" approach to an "old" subject—for example, organizing and legislative lobbying—unions are attracted even though they tend to sponsor their own programs. Responding to known union interests, university and college centers might offer specializations that include health, welfare, pensions, retirement, pre-retirement planning, manpower training, worker compensation, social insurance, equal employment opportunity, NLRB rulings and procedures, and statistical and economic analysis applied to collective bargaining. In addition, further attention should be given to developing new approaches

toward traditional subjects of concern to union staff—organizing, negotiation, administration, and political action.

For example, university labor centers might experiment (as a few have) with the application of behavioral sciences to union functions. The fact that several unions have turned to management consultants for this type of expertise illustrates a need that could better be filled by labor-oriented academics.

To be effective in providing for union staff, educational institutions will have to invest resources in faculty with specialized knowledge who can teach at a sophisticated level and develop course materials that provide in-depth treatment of subject matter.

Whether credit and degree programs are the appropriate vehicle for union staff training remains to be demonstrated. More likely is the counterpart of “executive short courses” offered by graduate schools of business.

To date, the range of subject matter offerings in both union and university staff training courses has been relatively narrow. The George Meany Center has encountered resistance to offerings dealing with broader social, economic, and political issues. Universities may make a contribution to breaking out of this cycle. One approach that has proved effective involves the exploitation of issues of local, regional, or national interest. For example, the University of California (Berkeley) enlisted building trades staff in study and dialogue on environmental issues through research that linked environmental controls to local jobs. Cornell has organized a series of conferences involving union staff in analysis of economic developments in their own industries and, at the local level, in their own communities. One of the strengths of state universities and community colleges is this type of local outreach.

Research is another potential contribution of higher education to union staff development. Academic literature is virtually devoid of studies that deal with the structure and administration of unions, much less the functions and problems of union staff. In contrast to the volumes on business organization that line every library shelf, books on the dynamics of union organization are rarely to be found.¹⁵ The functions of business executives, managers, and supervisors have been tracked in detail. Case studies form the basis for management training both in corporations and in academic

15. Among the few books that deal with the structure of union government are Jack Barbash's *American Unions: Structure, Government, and Politics*, 1967, and Derek Bok and John Dunlop, *Labor and the American Community*, 1970. One of the rare journal articles on the role of union staff is “The Role of the Field Staff Representative” by Myron Joseph in the *ILR Review*, April 1959.

business schools. Theories are constantly expounded and tested through experimental and demonstration projects in which academics and business organizations collaborate. How much is known about the role and functions of union-elected officials and staff? How do functions vary by structure, jurisdiction, and philosophy of unions? What performance standards are required? How are these enforced? What knowledge and skills are expected? How are these acquired? How do union officials see their own jobs? What problems do they encounter in relation to local unions, employers, union membership, national leadership, and the communities in which they reside? Research on these and related questions could serve as the basis for developing relevant staff training programs within the unions and defining the appropriate training role of universities.

In short, university labor centers should provide the backup to professional education for union officials that business schools offer to business executive training.

Now that the union door is opening, at least a crack, to "outsiders," academics face new opportunities. University and college labor education programs now have increased opportunities to place graduates in unions. To capitalize on this possibility, changes in curriculum and format may be necessary. Trends toward specialization, increased emphasis on technical training, and staff recruitment from outside union membership ranks challenge college and university labor education centers to (1) develop degree programs tailored to the observed union demand for trained specialists, (2) design training programs that provide in-depth study of relevant subject matter not offered elsewhere, and, perhaps most important, (3) study union structure and functions, building toward the body of knowledge that is required for quality professional education.

In short, university labor centers should provide the backup to professional education for union officials that business schools offer to business executive training.