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## Broadening the Mission: Research Activity among University Labor Education/ Labor Studies Professionals

### Abstract

[Excerpt] This study examines research activity among university and college labor education/labor studies professionals. Using data gathered in a survey of faculty employed in the field, the paper presents information concerning the extent and focus of these research activities, the methodologies employed, the outlets for the research products that result, and the factors limiting such work. The findings of this study indicate that research, of both an applied and scholarly nature, is an increasingly significant part of the work of labor education/labor studies professionals. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications this trend has for the labor education/labor studies field, with special attention being given to the role research activity can play in meeting the needs of unions, union members, and union leaders.

### Keywords

ILR, Cornell University, college labor, education, labor studies, professionals, research, study, union, union members, union leaders

### Disciplines

Education | Labor Relations

### Comments

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# Broadening the Mission: Research Activity among University Labor Education/Labor Studies Professionals

*Paul F. Clark and Lois S. Gray*

This study examines research activity among university and college labor education/labor studies professionals. Using data gathered in a survey of faculty employed in the field, the paper presents information concerning the extent and focus of these research activities, the methodologies employed, the outlets for the research products that result, and the factors limiting such work. The findings of this study indicate that research, of both an applied and scholarly nature, is an increasingly significant part of the work of labor education/labor studies professionals. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications this trend has for the labor education/labor studies field, with special attention being given to the role research activity can play in meeting the needs of unions, union members, and union leaders.

The field of labor education/labor studies<sup>1</sup> has a venerable history dating back to the early part of this century.<sup>2</sup> It is, however, a relatively new arrival to the academic scene, with most university and college

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1. While members of the University and College Labor Education Association (UCLEA) have debated, at some length, the appropriateness of the terms labor education and labor studies, both will be used here. The principal reason has to do with the great diversity of functions (e.g., traditional labor education, resident labor studies degree programs, extension labor studies degree programs) performed by both the individuals and the programs listed in the UCLEA directory. For the sake of brevity, the term labor educator will sometimes be used to describe those involved in the labor education/labor studies field.

2. Richard Dwyer, "Workers' Education, Labor Education, Labor Studies: An Historical Delineation," *Review of Educational Research*, 47 (1977): 179-207.

programs having been established since World War II.<sup>3</sup> The last 30 to 40 years have, consequently, been a formulative period marked by continual change as the field has grown and adapted in its relationship with the labor movement and in its role within higher education. During this period, many aspects of the field's evolution have been examined in some detail and debated at length.<sup>4</sup> In particular, questions have been raised about the conflict between the field's commitment to the labor movement and its increasingly academic orientation. One aspect of this trend toward academization, neglected in the literature to date, is the role of research in university labor education/labor studies.

This study examines current research activity among university and college labor educators. Using data gathered in a survey of faculty employed in the field, this article presents information concerning the extent of research activity among labor education/labor studies professionals. Special attention is given to the manner in which the amount of time devoted to research has changed in recent years. Information is also presented concerning the focus of these research efforts, the methodologies employed, the outlets for the research products that result, and the factors limiting the research efforts of labor educators. The information gathered in the course of the study is analyzed and discussed in terms of its implications for the field and for the labor movement.

## Background

Research has always been a part of the work of labor education/labor studies professionals.<sup>5</sup> For example, materials development, an integral aspect of the field, requires labor educators to gather information from original and secondary sources and convert it to a form appropriate for classroom use. While most labor education/labor studies faculty traditionally

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3. The University of California was the first to enter the field but discontinued its service in 1935. The only university to offer a labor education program prior to World War II was the University of Wisconsin. In 1948, 52 universities were reported to be offering some form of labor education service. For a more detailed discussion of this period see Caroline Ware, "Trends in University Programs for Labor Education, 1946-1948," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 3 (1949): 54-69.

4. Dale Brickner, "Some Questions of Scope and Credibility," *Labor Studies Journal* 1 (1976): 60-67; George V. Boyle, "Goals of Unions and Universities in Labor Education," *Labor Studies Journal* 1 (1976): 157-161; George V. Boyle, "The Functions of University Labor Education Programs," *Labor Studies Journal* 2 (1977): 139-144; Mil Lieberthal, "On the Academization of Labor Education," *Labor Studies Journal* 1 (1977): 235-245; Al Nash, "The University Labor Educator," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 32 (1978): 40-55.

5. Larry Rogin and Marjorie Rachlin. *Labor Education in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Labor Education, 1968).

have engaged in this type of “applied research,” they have less frequently engaged in “scholarly research” involving the creation and sharing of new knowledge through the publication of books, journal articles, and other means.

Beginning in the 1970s, concern grew among labor educators about the perceived “academization” of the field. This concern has focused on the movement toward credit courses and degree programs, an emphasis on academic specialization and advanced degrees, and increasing expectations and demands for scholarly research and publication. Opposition to these trends has stemmed from the feeling that such developments would reduce the profession’s ability to pursue its traditional objective of serving the needs of workers and their organizations.<sup>6</sup> Research, particularly scholarly research, has been perceived as having the potential to reduce the teaching and administrative activities that constitute the heart and soul of the field.

A number of studies have documented movement in these directions. Writing in 1976, Gray reported that the number of labor education/labor studies credit courses and degree programs was indeed growing.<sup>7</sup> A 1987 survey by Remington examined evaluation criteria for labor education/labor studies faculty and found an increasing emphasis at many university labor education/labor studies programs on research and publication.<sup>8</sup> And a study by Bennett, also conducted in 1987, found that the percentage of labor educators with Ph.D. degrees rose 35 percent from 1978 to 1987.<sup>9</sup>

These findings suggest that the field has been changing in recent years. Identifying the exact cause or causes of these trends is a more difficult task. While the impetus for these changes, in at least some cases, has developed within the field, clearly some of the changes have been the result of external pressures. As a “marginal” undertaking, the field’s position in the university has always been somewhat uncertain.<sup>10</sup> The desire of academic institutions to impose traditional academic priorities,

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6. Lieberthal, “On the Academization of Labor Education.”

7. Lois Gray, “Labor Studies Credit and Degree Programs: A Growth Sector of Higher Education,” *Labor Studies Journal* 1 (1976): 34–51.

8. John Remington, “The Impact of Evaluation on Professional Standards,” *Labor Studies Forum* 1 (1988): 1–2.

9. John W. Bennett, “The Education of University Labor Educators,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University and College Labor Education Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 1987.

10. Nash, “The University Labor Educator.”

guidelines, and models on the labor education/labor studies programs they host has undoubtedly played a role in these changes. It could well be argued that the level of research activity has been one of the areas most affected by this phenomenon.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study was collected through a survey of faculty in programs affiliated with the University and College Labor Education Association (UCLEA). A questionnaire focusing on research activity was mailed to 269 labor education/labor studies faculty at 47 institutions listed in the 1987-88 UCLEA directory. Substantially complete questionnaires were returned by 158 persons, for a response rate of 59 percent.

The questionnaire utilized in this study included 35 items focusing on the extent of research activity, the type of research (applied vs. scholarly), the subject of research, the methodology employed, outlets for research results, and constraints and limitations hindering research efforts. Items focusing on demographic information concerning degrees held, years employed in the field, and tenure status were also included in the survey.

### **Results**

*Extent of Research Activity.* The results of the survey suggest that research, broadly defined, is an increasing part of the professional lives of the vast majority of labor education/labor studies faculty. In fact, 88 percent of those responding to the survey reported that they currently engage in, or in the past have engaged in, research activities. Fifty-two percent of the respondents indicated that research is required as part of normal job responsibilities.

In addition, there is strong evidence that the demand for research placed on labor educators by their academic institutions has grown in recent years. As the figures in Table 1 suggest, 42 percent of those labor education/labor studies faculty required to engage in research activity felt that the demand for research had increased greatly during the last 10 years and a total of 82 percent of these respondents felt an increase in demand of some degree.

The survey also attempted to gather information concerning the source of this increased demand for research. More than two-thirds of the

**TABLE 1**  
**Level of Research Activity among Labor Educators**

	Increased greatly	Increased moderately	Increased slightly	Remained about same	Decreased
Change in demand for faculty research over last 10 years* (in percent) (n = 84)	42	27	13	18	0
Perceived source of increased demand for faculty research (in percent) (n = 155)					
		Labor education/labor studies program, department, etc.	Intermediate academic unit (college, school, or other)	Remained about same	Top college or university administration
		15	17		68
Agreement with statement: "Labor education/labor studies professionals should engage in research as part of their normal job responsibilities." (in percent) (n = 156)	31	51	15	3	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	

\*among labor educators required to engage in research as part of normal job responsibilities

respondents identified top college or university administration as the principal source. Only 15 percent felt that this increased pressure emanated from their labor education/labor studies program or department.

These results suggest that research has been a part of the work of labor education/labor studies professionals in the past and is, increasingly, becoming an even more important aspect of the normal job responsibilities of many in the field. The results also suggest that this is a phenomenon being imposed from outside the profession. While this situation raises some potentially important questions about the future of the field, it should be noted that 82 percent of those responding to the survey agree or strongly agree that labor educators "should engage in research as part of their normal job responsibility." This suggests that while the imperative to do research appears to come from outside the field, it is an imperative with which many labor education/labor studies faculty apparently are comfortable.

The increasing demands on labor educators to engage in research has inevitably had an impact on how those in the field allocate their efforts. Of those respondents required to do research as part of their normal job responsibilities, nearly 40 percent reported that the amount of time they spend engaged in research has increased over the last five years. These respondents, on average, indicated that they currently spend 24 percent of their work time on research activity.

*Nature of Research.* Clearly, what constitutes research differs across academic fields and disciplines. Historically, professionals in the field of labor education/labor studies have focused most of their energies on providing training programs for union leaders and members. Occurring in a field or extension setting, this kind of endeavor has usually fallen under the rubric of non-traditional education. Faculty who coordinate and teach these kinds of programs are frequently called on to develop original materials tailored to the subject and group involved. They are also sometimes asked to engage in research whose primary purpose is to provide information of practical value to a specific labor group. While the products of this research may not be valued or recognized by some fields or disciplines, it is an integral part of the work of a labor educator. However, the research efforts of faculty in the field are not limited to this kind of applied research. Many labor education/labor studies professionals also engage in scholarly research, involving the creation and sharing of new knowledge through the publication of journal articles, books, and monographs.



Because both types of research appear to have a role to play in the field, and because many labor educators engage in both approaches, for the purposes of this study, research was defined to include both applied and scholarly research. The respective approaches were outlined in the questionnaire as follows:

*Applied Research*—research conducted primarily for the development of original information and material designed to be of practical use to unions or to the labor education/labor studies process.

*Scholarly Research*—research conducted primarily for the purpose of creating and sharing new knowledge through the presentation of formal papers or publication in scholarly journals, monographs, etc.

In an effort to determine the extent to which labor education/labor studies faculty engage in each type of research, the survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of their research activity that fell into each of the two categories. The range across those responding was quite wide, with 28 respondents (20.7 percent) indicating that 100 percent of their research efforts fell under the heading of applied research and only eight (6.0 percent) indicating that 100 percent of their time was spent on scholarly research. The overall mean percentage suggests that the labor educators responding to the survey spend 63 percent of their research efforts on applied research and 37 percent of their efforts on research of a scholarly nature.

Since labor education/labor studies is an interdisciplinary field drawing faculty with a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, respondents were asked to indicate the general topic areas in which their research activity was focused (Table 2). Not surprisingly, more faculty (54 percent) have conducted research in the area of current labor issues than in any other area. Other issue areas of major interest to researchers in the field were collective bargaining (45 percent), labor education/labor studies programs and techniques (45 percent), and labor history (37 percent). Of the 16 topic areas included in the survey, building trades/apprenticeship training attracted the least interest (14 percent). Other areas attracting less interest among labor education/labor studies researchers were minority issues (15 percent), organizing (16 percent), and international affairs (18 percent).

*Research Methods.* In order to gain insight into the research methodologies employed by labor educators, three items addressing that issue were included in the survey. The responses to those survey items suggest that the use of qualitative, institutional research methods are more commonly

**TABLE 2**  
**Research Interests of Labor**  
**Educators Active in Research**  
**(in percent, n = 135)**

Topic area	
Building trades/apprenticeship training	14
Collective bargaining	45
Current labor issues	54
Dispute resolution	26
Economics	23
International affairs	18
Labor and politics	26
Labor education/labor studies programs and techniques	45
Labor history	29
Labor law	29
Minority affairs	15
New technology	22
Organizing	16
Safety and health	29
Union structure, government and leadership	26
Women's issues	23

employed by labor educators than are quantitative methods. Seventy-six percent of the respondents who engage in research reported using the case study approach in their work. Sixty-three percent indicated that they commonly employ survey methodology and 57 percent reported historical analysis as a commonly used research tool. A significantly lower proportion of respondents (38 percent) reported using basic statistical analysis and even fewer (22 percent) commonly employ advanced statistics in their work.

Given the recent trend in social science research toward empirical methods, the respondents also were asked to characterize their ability to understand and evaluate work involving statistical analysis. Only 21 percent reported little or no knowledge of statistical techniques, while 36 percent indicated an ability to understand and interpret basic statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) and 43 percent reported an understanding of at least some advanced statistical methods (e.g., correlation and regression analysis, analysis of variance).

A final question on research methods asked those responding whether they agreed with the statement, "Empirical research methodologies, including statistical analysis, have value for the field. . . ." Twenty-eight percent stated that they strongly agreed and 63 percent indicated that they agreed with the statement. Only nine percent expressed either disagreement

or strong disagreement. These findings suggest that faculty in labor education/labor studies are comfortable with the use of at least some of the empirical techniques that have become prevalent in modern social science research.

*Research Outlets.* A fourth area in which information was gathered involved the products of research activity and the dissemination of results. The findings discussed above suggest that, in part, applied research results in instructional material or information communicated directly to labor groups. The products of this kind of research may, however, also take the form of articles in union newsletters, non-academic journals, newspapers, as well as pamphlets and materials published by labor groups or in-house publications series. Traditionally, scholarly research appears in academic journals or as books or monographs published by university or commercial publishers.

Given the fact that labor educators engage in both types of research it is not surprising that those in the field regularly publish their work, and do so in a wide variety of publications. Of labor education/labor studies faculty who engage in research, 76 percent indicated that they have published the results of their work in some form. Sixty percent of those active in research have published at least one article in a scholarly journal and 48 percent have published in professional publications other than scholarly journals, including in-house publications and newsletters. Twenty-nine percent of this group have published in union publications and 26 percent have published in the popular press, including newspapers and magazines.

The survey addressed an additional point of interest related to the dissemination of research results. Seventy-seven percent of the survey respondents active in research indicated that they seek outlets for their work beyond *Labor Studies Journal* and UCLEA meetings, the forums traditionally employed by labor education professionals to share their research. In addition, 64 percent participate (e.g., attend meetings, present papers) in the activities of scholarly and professional organizations other than UCLEA.<sup>11</sup> This is, perhaps, a reflection of the multi-disciplinary nature of the field.

*Research Limitations.* Given the increasing demands being placed on labor educators to produce research, the survey included several items

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11. Fifty-four percent of respondents active in scholarly or professional organizations other than UCLEA held membership in the Industrial Relations Research Association. By a large margin, the organization was listed most frequently. Approximately 50 other organizations representing virtually all of the disciplines represented in the labor education/labor studies field were mentioned in the responses.

dealing with limitations or barriers to research. The most significant barrier noted was "lack of time due to other responsibilities." Eighty-eight percent of the respondents identified this as a problem. In addition, 41 percent of those responding suggested that "lack of financial resources" was a real problem in carrying out research. Much less a limitation was "lack of cooperation from the labor movement," with only 5 percent of the respondents identifying this issue as a barrier to research.

The issue of financial resources was pursued in more detail through questions focusing on the efforts of labor education/labor studies professionals to obtain funding for their work. Of those responding, 62 percent of the labor educators active in research have sought outside support for their work. Forty-six percent of the same group have been successful in obtaining such funding.

One final issue related to support for research addressed by the survey involved the question of research-related sabbatical leaves. Sixty-six percent of the respondent group indicated that they are eligible for such leaves. Only 26 percent, however, have been granted a sabbatical. In terms of professional development, the issue of sabbatical leaves would appear to be significant for the profession.

*Demographics.* In an effort to generate additional insight into the issue of research activity, the survey questionnaire included several items focusing on such demographic concerns as degrees held, years employed in the field, and tenure status. One significant statistic related to research activity involves the number of labor education/labor studies faculty with doctoral degrees. The results of this survey indicate that 39 percent of respondents hold doctorates. These results are consistent with recent research by Bennett that found 37 percent of professionals in the field possess Ph.D. degrees.<sup>12</sup> Both figures are significantly higher than the 24 percent level reported by the UCLEA Committee on Salary and Benefits in 1978, indicating that the percentage of labor educators with terminal degrees has increased in recent years.<sup>13</sup>

Given the research orientation of doctoral programs, the entry of an increasing number of doctorates in the field might be expected to have a positive impact on the amount of research undertaken. While proving this cause-and-effect relationship is beyond the scope of this survey, the data

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12. Bennett, "The Education of University Labor Educators."

13. Nash, "The University Labor Educator."

gathered does indicate that, on average, the amount of time spent on research by those responding to the survey is significantly greater for faculty with doctorates (28.8 percent) than for those without (21.3 percent).

Related to the issue of degrees held is the issue of years of experience in the field. The data collected suggests that there is a significant, negative correlation ( $-.21, p < .01$ ) between years employed and the percentage of time spent on research. The finding that faculty newer to the field are more likely to spend a larger proportion of their time on research than faculty with more years experience could be a function of a number of factors. It would appear that this relationship, again, might be related to the entry of more doctorates into the field in recent years.

Another possible explanation for the rising level of research activity in the field is the trend toward placing labor educators on the tenure track.<sup>14</sup> To test the hypothesis that the research demands placed on tenure-track faculty would cause those individuals to devote a greater proportion of their time to research than faculty not on tenure-track appointments, time spent on research was compared for non-tenured faculty on the tenure track and non-tenure track faculty. There was, in fact, no statistically significant difference between the two groups. This finding is somewhat surprising, given that a recent survey of evaluation practices in the field found that programs granting tenure place substantially more importance on research and publication than do institutions which do not.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that while non-tenured, tenure-track faculty ( $n = 22$ ) reported spending 28.6 percent of their time on research and non-tenure track faculty ( $n = 53$ ) reported spending 27.8 percent of their time in this area, faculty with tenure ( $n = 57$ ) reported spending only 19.7 percent of their work time on research activity.

## Discussion and Implications

As suggested earlier, the results of this study indicate that research, both applied and scholarly, is an increasingly significant part of the work of labor educators. And while the data collected suggests that most faculty in the field see the increased demand for research as being imposed by top university and college administration, there also appears to be

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14. Lieberthal, "On the Academization of Labor Education" and Remington, "The Impact of Evaluation on Professional Standards."

15. Remington, "The Impact of Evaluation on Professional Standards."

widespread acceptance of research as an important part of the labor education/labor studies profession. Given the reality of both increasing research demands and increasing research activity, it is important to recognize the potential implications this trend has for the field.

The recognition by the vast majority of those responding to the survey that labor education/labor studies faculty "should engage in research as part of their normal job responsibilities" suggests that many labor educators feel research can make a contribution to the goals of the field. While considerable discussion has been generated in an effort to define exactly what these are, the broadest definition—to serve the needs of unions, union members, and union leaders—might be the most appropriate.<sup>16</sup> Given this goal, it is useful to consider ways in which the research activities of labor education/labor studies professionals can meet these needs.

*Applied Research.* The results of the survey indicate that labor education/labor studies faculty devote a greater proportion of their research efforts to applied research than to scholarly research. This type of research can be of use to unions, union members, and union leaders in a number of ways. As defined in this study, applied research involves "research conducted primarily for the development of original information and material designed to be of practical use to unions or to the labor education process." The key distinction between applied and scholarly research appears to lie in the focus of the research and form of the product that results.

The usefulness to the labor movement of original research by labor educators is generally determined by the relevance of the research topic and by the clarity of the findings reported. To the degree research by labor education/labor studies faculty focuses on problems and issues of immediate concern to unions, union leaders, and union members, that research would seem to be consistent with the goals of the field. However, if the results of such research are reported in a way that shrouds or obfuscates the important findings, such as by emphasizing complex statistics or highly technical research methodologies, its practical value to union practitioners is diminished. Applied research, by definition, should not suffer from this problem.

Another potentially useful research activity engaged in by labor educators involves the monitoring, translating, and communicating of information and findings generated by other sources. Union members and leaders very often do not have either the time or the skills to keep abreast

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16. Boyle, "Goals of Unions and Universities in Labor Education."

of research that might be of use to them or to their union. This is the case particularly with research presented in scholarly journals or at professional meetings. Identifying and translating this research into a form useful for labor education classes or for publication in union newsletters or the popular press provides a potentially valuable service that labor educators can perform. This activity is an example of how applied research can make a useful contribution to the goals of the field.

*Scholarly Research.* While labor education/labor studies faculty focus a considerably smaller part of their research efforts in the area of scholarly research—defined in this study as research conducted primarily for the purpose of creating and sharing new knowledge through the presentation of formal papers or publication in scholarly journals or monographs—work of this kind can also contribute to the goals of the field.

Scholarly research serves to create and add to an original body of knowledge that increases our understanding of a given subject. In terms of subject area, the scholarly research activities of most labor educators generally focus on issues involving unions, union members, and their relationship to employers. Labor education/labor studies professionals are uniquely situated to add to the body of knowledge concerning these topics. The day-to-day involvement of labor educators with the labor movement, and the relationships with union members and leaders that result, often provide access to information and research opportunities not available to other academic researchers. In addition, labor educators should bring increased sensitivity and insight to research in this area. Given these factors, labor education/labor studies faculty can sharpen the picture of the labor movement that emerges in the scholarly literature.

As suggested earlier, applied research is often highly pragmatic and practical, with obvious relevance for practitioners. The relevance of scholarly research, because of its sometimes theoretical and experimental nature, is often less clear. This concern, by itself, does not necessarily mean that scholarly research cannot be of value to the labor movement.

Academic inquiry, particularly of a scholarly nature, differs from the kind of in-house research that occurs within labor organizations. Union research departments, by necessity, most often focus on narrow, day-to-day issues in the bargaining, contract administration, and political arenas. To a large degree freed from the political considerations and expediency concerns experienced by most union researchers, academic researchers are in a better position to explore new, and sometimes controversial, ideas, issues, and programs that might eventually have great

significance to the labor movement. In addition, unions as institutions are unlikely to pursue research that might be critical of long-standing practices and approaches, despite the importance of such information to the organization. While this type of research presents difficulties for labor educators, as well as for union researchers, academics are more likely to be able to pursue such research, in both the scholarly and applied contexts, than are those working within the labor movement.

While it is arguable to what degree labor educators, or other academic researchers, have made the kinds of contributions suggested as possible by this discussion, many examples do exist outside the labor education/labor studies field. For instance, academic researchers unquestionably have played a role in the development of the cooperative approach to labor-management relations. The long-standing contributions of organizational theorists like Chris Argyris, Douglas McGregor, and Frederick Herzberg helped lay a foundation for this concept. The work of more contemporary researchers have helped to refine and extend it. Another relatively new area where a contribution is apparent involves the development of public sector dispute resolution mechanisms. Academic research and experimentation in the areas of fact-finding, mediation, and the various types of interest arbitration have played a role in the establishment of such systems at many levels of government. Labor education/labor studies faculty, particularly those with advanced research skills, appear to be well placed to work on issues of this kind emerging on the frontiers of labor-related research.

*Future Directions.* The recent efforts by the American labor movement to examine current programs and practices and its apparent willingness to explore new directions and approaches suggest that now may be an auspicious time for labor educators to engage in research of both an applied and scholarly nature. The AFL-CIO's report, *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions*, suggests a number of directions in which the labor movement should move in the years ahead, including the implementation of experimental organizing strategies, innovative strategies to encourage participation in union activities, and new approaches to representing workers.<sup>17</sup> Labor education/labor studies professionals may be in a good position to explore and critique these new ideas, as well as to evaluate the performance of on-going programs and activities.

In addition, considerable evidence exists that unions are becoming more open and accessible to experts and consultants outside the labor

17. AFL-CIO, *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions* (Washington, D.C.: AFL-CIO, 1985).



movement who are in a position to provide technical assistance and information.<sup>18</sup> Labor education/labor studies programs have, in the past, acted in consultative capacities with unions. The increased research activity of labor educators, both in the applied and scholarly areas, better equips such programs to meet the labor movement's needs in this regard.

Discussion here suggests that the research activities of labor education/labor studies professionals hold potential benefits for unions. If, in fact, this is the case, these benefits can be realized only if unions are aware of this work. Presently, the opportunities for labor educators and other academic researchers to share their work with the labor movement, in a direct and systematic fashion, are limited. There are, however, several relatively new and potentially promising vehicles through which this interchange can take place.

In recent years, Cornell University and the AFL-CIO have held joint periodic conferences which bring together research directors of national unions and university researchers engaged in work on union-related issues.<sup>19</sup> These conferences provide a forum for union and university researchers to share their work and discuss mutual interests. Two relatively new publications also serve to inform the labor movement, and other academics, of on-going research on labor-related issues. *Work Place Topics*, issued periodically by the AFL-CIO, publishes summaries of academic research of relevance to unions.<sup>20</sup> The *UCLEA Resource Directory* includes a listing of the current research interests of labor education/labor studies professionals. Both of these publications have the potential to bring unions and academic researchers into contact with each other.<sup>21</sup>

It would appear, however, that both the academic community and the labor movement need to devote more attention to increasing the opportunities for collaboration between labor educators, academics from related disciplines, and unions. One idea that might have both practical and symbolic value in this regard involves the creation of a visiting scholar-in-residence position at AFL-CIO headquarters. As outlined in a presentation to the organizing directors of AFL-CIO unions, a university researcher-in-residence would be able to assist the federation and member

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18. Kay Stratton and Robert B. Brown, "Strategic Planning in U.S. Labor Unions," Paper presented at the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the Industrial Relations Research Association, New York, New York, December 1988.

19. The first joint AFL-CIO/Cornell University conference was held March 13-14, 1980, in Boston. The program was titled "Perspectives on Labor Research: A Symposium for Academic and Union Researchers." The second conference, titled "Symposium on Economic, Social, and Workplace Challenges for Unions," was held in Linthicum Heights, Maryland on April 2-3, 1987.

20. AFL-CIO, *Work Place Topics*, (Washington, D.C.: AFL-CIO, 1988).

21. UCLEA, *Resource Directory*, (UCLEA, 1988).

unions in conceptualizing and carrying out research projects and in evaluating research proposals developed by the academic community. The creation of such a position would also draw attention to the potential benefits of a closer relationship between labor and academia.<sup>22</sup>

Increased collaboration could also result from the establishment of closer ties between UCLEA and other scholarly and professional organizations. Developing such a relationship with the Industrial Relations Research Association (IRRA), a group drawing membership both from the academic community and from the labor movement, might be an appropriate first step in this direction. Joint programs at national meetings, the sharing of membership data, and the exchange of information concerning research opportunities are possible end products of such a relationship. Initiatives such as these, striving for increased collaboration, appear to be consistent with the goals of the labor education/labor studies field.

The data discussed earlier, however, clearly suggest that labor educators who engage in research face a number of problems and limitations. The two concerns most commonly cited were time constraints and a lack of financial resources. The suggestion has been made that as research and publication become a more important aspect of the work of labor educators, the need for related professional development activities will increase.<sup>23</sup> The field's professional organization, UCLEA, can play a valuable role in providing such opportunities, as well as continuing to provide vehicles for the sharing of research. Specifically, the organization might wish to provide opportunities for labor education/labor studies faculty without well-developed research skills to gain some background and understanding of these techniques. The UCLEA could also step up its activities to inform members of relevant funding opportunities and gather detailed data about the status of sabbatical leaves in the field.

## Summary

The results of this survey suggest that labor education/labor studies faculty are involved in, and will continue to be involved in, research activity. The fact that a substantial majority of labor educators agree that this is an appropriate function suggests that such work can contribute to the goals of the field. This finding does not necessarily suggest that research is an appropriate and necessary function for all labor educators.

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22. Jack Fiorito, "What Do Academics Know About Organizing?," Presentation to AFL-CIO Organizing Directors, Bal Harbour, Florida, February, 1988.

23. Remington, "The Impact of Evaluation on Professional Standards."

Nor does it imply that research should supplant the direct provision of education services as the most important function of a labor education/labor studies faculty member. It does, however, suggest that in the pursuit of the primary goals—to serve the needs of unions, union members, and union leaders—research has an important role to play.