

## Annual Highlights

### Labor Education Reaches Workers Across Iowa



Labor Short Course 2013 graduates deliver public speaking presentations

Labor Center continuing education programs reached 2,337 workers and union leaders over the past year, including participants from 60 different Iowa counties.

Off-campus classes reached 2,051 Iowans in communities from Sioux City to Keokuk, while 286 workers spent one to five days on the UI campus attending intensive non-credit seminars.

Course participants came from workplaces ranging from factories to post offices, con-

struction sites, railroads, call centers, and schools. They studied subjects ranging from financial record-keeping to collective bargaining, grievance handling, the Family and Medical Leave Act, health care reform, and many others. They shared a common desire to seek education to improve their abilities to fulfill important responsibilities as workplace representatives and community leaders.

The program year concluded with the 62nd annual Labor Short Course, a week-long

residential program designed for new and emerging labor leaders. The course provides an introduction to labor and employment law, labor history, and principles of contract administration and bargaining, while interactive sessions provide opportunities to practice core communication, representation, and leadership skills.

As one attendee put it, “I’m leaving very informed! The course provided the guidance I needed to be active and motivate others.”

### Immigrant Worker Education Initiative Spawns New Community Engagement Project



UI students discuss civil rights issues with local immigrants at a recent Center for Worker Justice forum

As a three-year project to provide education on workplace non-discrimination rights of immigrants winds down, a new community engagement project focused on low-wage and immigrant workers is just getting started.

Starting in 2010, the Labor Center and UI Center for Human Rights received funding from the U.S. Department of Justice to help workers, employers, and unions understand worker non-discrimination rights under federal immigration law. The

project resulted in a new popular education curriculum, an interactive bi-lingual DVD reviewing common challenging scenarios, and 85 separate outreach events.

Outreach events quickly revealed widespread community concern with a lack of resources to address the challenges faced by new immigrants in eastern Iowa. Events also provided opportunities for Iowa organizations and UI faculty and staff working on various facets of Iowa immigration and labor issues to

connect, often for the first time.

In Iowa City, these new connections gave rise in 2012 to the Immigrant Voices Project (IVP), led by local immigrants of African, Asian, and Latin American origin. With assistance from Labor Center staff and other university and community partners, IVP leaders conducted a community survey of immigrant residents to identify priority issues, and then began to form committees devoted to work on major

See Immigrant Worker Education, p. 4



Midwest School plenary session on the global economy.

*"The impact it has had on me is a landmark in my life. And there will be more landmarks!"*

*-2012 Midwest School for Women Workers graduate*



Midwest School instructor Elissa McBride introduces the concept of Action Research.

## Midwest Summer School Boosts Women's Leadership

The Labor Center kicked off its 2012-2013 programming year as host to the Midwest School for Women Workers, which drew a diverse group of 50 students and 10 guest instructors from six states to the UI campus.

Midwest School attendees kept the IMU abuzz with activity for five days. Along with intensive, hands-on course tracks on subjects ranging from Communications to Collective Bargaining, the program included labor history, theater, film, and trivia nights.

Reflecting on the summer school experience at the end of the week, many participants described it as life-changing. As one put it, "The impact it has had on me is a landmark in my life. And there will be more landmarks! I hope to remember this experience as something I need to make sure happens for others."



Women also committed to sharing their new knowledge with peers back home: "I have learned so much this week," said one, "I will encourage and mentor more women to get involved."

The Midwest School annually provides education, skills, and networking opportunities to women workers pursuing lead-

ership roles in their unions, workplaces, and communities. The annual summer schools have been a joint project of university-based labor education programs and the United Association of Labor Education since 1975.



*Midwest School for Women Workers  
University of Iowa 2012*

## “Forging Hope” Conference Brings Diverse Iowa Groups Together to Discuss the Future of Work

Iowa immigrant, labor, faith, and racial justice groups joined UI researchers, educators, and students for “Forging Hope: Local Alliances for Good Jobs and Racial Justice,” a one-day Labor Center conference held February 9.

Keynote speaker Saket Soni, executive director of the National Guestworker Alliance and the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice, shared examples of how workers are using innovative approaches to confront exploitative conditions.

According to Soni, “Work

looks different in the 21st century, and organizing will need to change with it.” He illustrated how for the 60 million contingent laborers in the U.S., new “chains of subcontracting” often raise the legal and moral question of “Who’s the boss?” when workers try to address workplace conditions.

He described the slow process by which joint community and labor organizing is beginning to raise standards in some regions and industries, and also predicted that in the next century the U.S. will need to “reimagine the safety net” which for many low-wage, un-

employed, or contingent workers has all but disappeared.

Other panel sessions brought conference themes home to Iowa, examining the growth of low-wage work, experiences of low-wage and immigrant workers, and community coalition efforts under way in the region.

Attendees ended the day with an energetic networking session. Small mixed groups of academics, workers, and advocates focused on generating ideas for future community projects and partnerships.



“Forging Hope” keynote speaker Saket Soni.

“Work looks different in the 21st century, and organizing will need to change with it.”

-Saket Soni



## New Resources from the Labor Center

The Labor Center’s *Iowa Workers’ Rights Manual* is now available for free download on our web site.

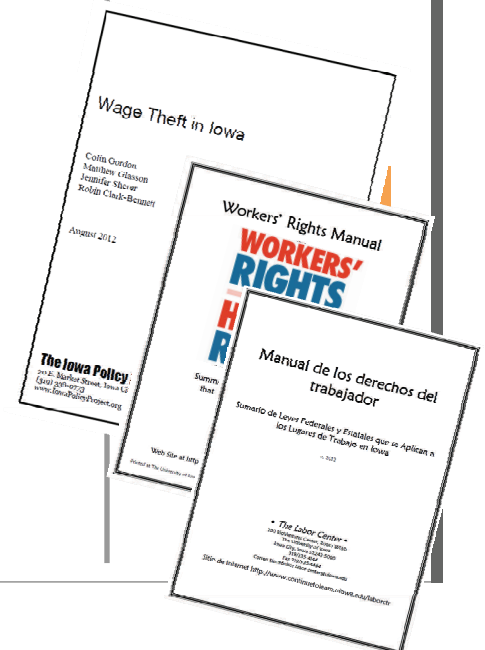
The manual summarizes key provisions of state and federal laws that apply to Iowa workplaces. A Spanish-language version is also available.

Other new resources include guides for workers on the

Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”) and Davis-Bacon, which requires “prevailing wage” provisions on some federally-funded construction projects.

Updated versions of several popular Labor Center guides on subjects like FMLA, ADA, and workers’ compensation now include recent legal changes.

Labor Center staff also co-authored (with Colin Gordon) a fall 2012 report published by the Iowa Policy Project on “Wage Theft in Iowa.” The report details how and why Iowa workers are missing out on an estimated \$600 million annually in unpaid wages.



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## About the Labor Center

The Labor Center is a unit of The University of Iowa's Division of Continuing Education. Since 1951, the Center has acted as a bridge between the University and Iowa's labor community. Our mission is to provide educational programs and resources to Iowa workers and their unions.

The Center annually conducts a series of **open-enrollment, non-credit short courses and seminars** for union members on the UI campus, and regularly **travels to communities across Iowa** to provide classes on a range of topics tailored to the needs and interests of Iowa workers.

Our staff also provide **research assistance and technical information** to worker organizations, serve as a **resource for UI faculty, staff, and students** interested in labor studies, and disseminate information on labor issues to the public.

## Immigrant Worker Education & Community Engagement

**Continued from p. 1**

concerns such as housing, job quality, and relations with law enforcement.

The group has since evolved into a permanent non-profit organization, the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern

Iowa (CWJ). CWJ's mission is to "unite low-wage workers in Eastern Iowa across race and immigration status to achieve social and economic justice through education, organizing, direct services and community alliances."

The group has attracted over 200 members to date. Iowa City resident and CWJ Board member Marcela Marquez says she became active because "I obviously want to improve my quality of life—but I know that means we must work to improve the quality of life for all people in our community." Mazahir Salih, a Sudanese immigrant to Iowa City, says she joined because "it is especially important for members of the immigrant community to know their rights."

Labor Center staff have provided research support to the initiative and helped to coordinate CWJ's first community education series held this summer, covering subjects

such as workplace health and safety, civil rights, tenants' rights, and health care.

Faculty and staff from the UI College of Law, Non-Profit Resource Center, Center for Human Rights, and School of Social Work have also contributed valuable expertise.

The project has already provided graduate and law students opportunities to learn first-hand about popular education, applied research, and community organizing with diverse, multi-lingual populations. The coming year will provide new opportunities for students to design research, service, or translation projects related to CWJ priorities.



**Immigrant Voices Project members meet with Iowa City Mayor Matt Hayek to discuss local law enforcement policies and procedures**