

A Short History of the Harvard Trade Union Program 1942-2012

The Labor Education “Experiment”

During the founding era of the Harvard Trade Union Program, it was commonly called “an experiment.” For much of the early twentieth century, workers’ educational movements had themselves greeted the idea of study at elite universities with skepticism and sometimes derision.

At the turn of the century, Great Britain had pioneered one of these efforts, with the founding of Ruskin College near Oxford University. Though neither controlled nor financed by Oxford University, Ruskin College sent some workers to the university to attend lectures, and others could undergo the exam for the University Diploma in Economics and Political Science. Fred Bramley (1874-1925), the Secretary General of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), warned the Ruskin College principal not to expect much from his medieval neighbors: “Oxford is a center in which university training has been the monopoly of the sons of the rich.” J. Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937), the first Labour Party Prime Minister, once equated the venerable university with rank whoredom: “Oxford is a painted lady of whom labor can expect nothing.” [Marius Hansome would later reply in *World Workers’ Educational Movements* (1931): “This opinion, be it noted, did not deter MacDonald from sending his own son to become educated in that institution.”]

In the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal early on promoted worker education partly as a means of putting unemployed teachers back to work as well as helping workers to become better citizens and trade unionists. In 1934, in response to the Great Depression, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) gave support for 16 educational training units targeting teachers planning to carry out worker



A member of the Women’s Trade Union League and a union card-carrying member of the American Newspaper Guild, Eleanor Roosevelt as First Lady became a strong advocate for worker education programs during the 1930s and 1940s.

education projects, with one of the programs based at the Harvard Summer School. Esther L. Swensen, who led the Affiliated Summer Schools for Workers at Bryn Mawr and Barnard Colleges, helped coordinate the Harvard effort to train teachers in worker education. As a member of the Women’s Trade Union League, Eleanor Roosevelt worked closely with one of the founders of the Affiliated Schools for Workers, Hilda Worthington Smith. A former dean at Bryn Mawr, Smith persuaded FERA director Harry Hopkins to put significant effort into worker education after she had learned that some European governments funded worker schools. According to historian Brigid O’Farrell in her biography of Eleanor Roosevelt called *She Was One of Us*, “By the spring of 1935, almost 45,000 men and women were attending 1,800 classes taught by 480 instructors in 570 communities.”

Certain political currents greeted the news with outrage. Headlines shrieked in the *Washington Herald* (24 February 1935) that “Reds Rule FERA Schools.” Soon Congressman Martin Dies, Jr. and the early version of the House Un-American Activities Committee made accusations that the worker education programs were dens of subversion. Nevertheless, the ongoing growth of the labor movement during the Depression kept up momentum for worker education initiatives, despite the backlash from anti-New Deal forces.

With the Ruskin experiment at Oxford several decades old and the various New Deal efforts having borne fruit, Harvard University proposed a new approach to labor education. In Fall 1942, Harvard and labor union officials announced what was first called “the Harvard University Trade Union Fellowship Plan.” Initially designed to bring 15 labor leaders to Harvard for nine months, the Plan had several unusual features, including no formal academic requirements such as a high school diploma. According to a Harvard statement at the time, “[the] more important qualifications are general intelligence, capacity for leadership, and devotion to the labor movement.” Indeed labor unions would select the fellows to insure that the recipients are people “who have proven their ability to serve the labor movement.”

Labor unions greeted the news with high hopes. Kenneth Taylor, Secretary-Treasurer of the Massachusetts Federation of Labor, called the Plan “very, very good – if the men don’t come out of there with a Harvard accent.” In fact, Robert J. Watt, the former Secretary of the Massachusetts Federation of Labor and a reputed socialist, had first floated the plan in Spring 1941. Watt had previously taught at the Harvard Summer School program for worker education. Sumner H. Slichter, Lamont University Professor at Harvard and one of the most influential economists of his era, then played a crucial role in galvanizing support throughout the university.

Slichter and his academic allies stressed several themes. In the first place, 1941 had been a year of escalating strikes and labor unrest, and the intensifying international crisis called attention to the need for higher productivity via more harmonious labor-management relations. In late September

1942, labor union officials and Harvard educators announced the Harvard Trade Union Fellowship Plan as “a momentous first step in the direction of better American labor-management relations.” Paul H. Buck, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, told the *Christian Science Monitor* (23 September 1942) that he hoped the program would contribute to bringing labor and industry together in the eventual aftermath of World War II. In formulating the early curriculum, Harvard investigators fanned out throughout the land during a two-month period, “gathering background information on scores of strikes, some routine, some spectacular, and including the Allis-Chalmers layoff of defense production workers in 1941,” explained the correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*.



Hope Mendoza Schecter, HTUP Class of 1948.
ILGWU member.

Secondly, labor unions had grown in complexity, a reality conveyed by Fannia Cohn, Secretary of the Educational Department of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union: “The trade union no longer confines itself to purely trade union problems: it is entering the fields of banking, insurance, health work, research, building, co-operative housing, etc.” The ILGWU had a strong presence in the Harvard Trade Union Fellowship Plan of the 1940s, including several women: Bernice (Taylor) Segal, Frances DiMartino, Maxine Rose Mungal, Hope Mendoza, and Gertrude Van Nort. While overall the HTUP had only a few women, these female pioneers were a courageous reminder that in most of Harvard University, women were flatly locked out, denied the right to admission.

Finally, the proponents of the program noted that labor had surged in power during the New Deal. According to Walter Galenson, a leading labor scholar who taught in the Trade Union Program before moving to the University of California/Berkeley: “Some of the leading statesmen of the AFL were high in New Deal counsels.... The fact that a dozen American trade unionists had ready access

to the president of the United States, that they could call upon him in an emergency, was a critical element in organizing success.” Between 1934 and 1939, union density had spurt from 11.5 percent of the U.S. workforce to 27.6 percent. After a mild slide, the spurt resumed in the war years between 1942 and 1945, with unionization advancing from 25 percent to 34.2 percent of the workforce. Donald K. David, Dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Business, openly conceded in September 1942 that the Fellowship Plan represented “recognition of the major role labor is playing in the world today.”

Thus Dean David and the Harvard Business School decided to host the program. A segment of the HBS leadership of the era understood that the institution had been training an army of MBAs who would hold senior management positions in heavily unionized manufacturing industries, such as steel and automobiles. It would be important that HBS faculty and key students understood the role of unions in an advanced economy. During the 1950s, union leaders participated in joint classes with corporate managers in the Advanced Management Program. The assistant secretary-treasurer of the International Association of Machinists M.R. Stearns explained in 1955 that the labor leaders had a difficult challenge in seeking to enlighten corporate managers about the working reality of most unions: “We were told that many of these top management men had never before met a labor official. From some of the questions asked about the ‘goon squad’ tactics of labor, etc., I am sure that all they knew about labor was what they read in our reactionary papers.”

In other words, there was a certain expectation that the labor leaders would deliver valuable knowledge to the professoriate, research fellows, and the rest of the Harvard community. During the 1990s, former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich expressed this notion of academic reciprocity more graphically when he joked that this was the one program in which the faculty should pay for the

privilege of teaching in it. According to Reich, the instructors often gathered in so much knowledge from the union leaders that it was not always so clear who was the pupil in the arrangement.

Curriculum Reform over the Decades and Internationalization

One of the first major debates over the program surrounded its nine-month length. Several labor leaders expressed that the long session had afforded them the opportunity to achieve intellectual growth and mastery of new skills. However, other unions judged that it was not possible to lose key leaders for so long a period. Certain prospec-

tive students feared that they would lose influence within their unions if they were gone for most of the year. Enrollments dropped. A major turning point came with the U.S. Congress’s passage of the Taft-Hartley bill in 1948. Explicitly designed to curtail the gains unions had achieved during the New Deal era, Taft-Hartley put labor leaders on a heightened state of alert. Serving as a regional director for the United Steel Workers of America, William Donovan regretted in a letter to Harvard officials that he simply could not “spare one of his staff.” Fannia Cohn of the ILGWU also started to throw her weight behind

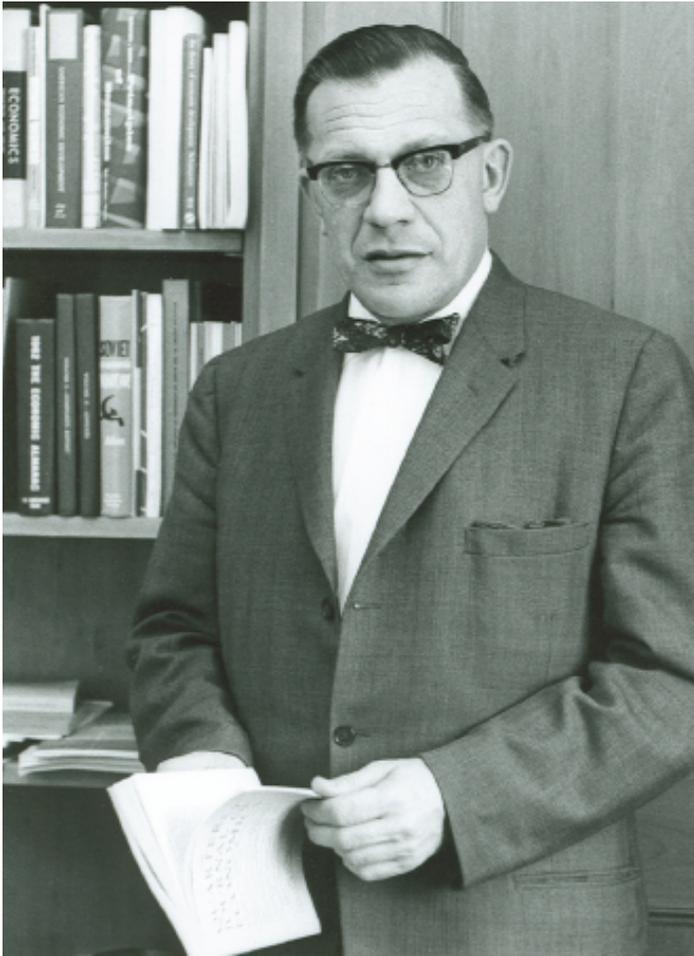
proposals for a more compact training program.

Breaking with the formula of a nine-month fellowship that had prevailed from 1942-1948, Harvard switched to a single annual session of 13 weeks in 1948 and then to two annual sessions of 13 weeks by 1952. Despite lingering resistance before the TUP’s advisory committee from Frank Fenton of the AFL and Harold Ulrich of the Brotherhood of Rail Clerks, the change went through and soon met with success. The new intensive session of 13 weeks featured these courses and faculty by the mid-1950s:

- “International Labor Problems” – Taught by Clinton S. Golden (1888-1961), a former eastern regional director for the Steel Workers and the



Archibald Cox (left), special procecurator in the Watergate case, taught Labor Law at the HTUP in the 50’s. He is pictured here with Elliot Richardson waiting for the start of Senate Judiciary Committee hearings in 1973.



Economist John T. Dunlop, taught for the HTUP beyond its 60th anniversary. He was also Secretary of Labor for the Ford administration.

TUP Executive Director from 1950-1955, this course sought to “acquaint union representatives with the labor movements of other countries and their role in fostering international cooperation.” In the climate of the early cold war, Golden took up the challenges confronting “Labor Attaches to the various U.S. Embassies abroad and as Labor Advisers to foreign economic and technical aid missions and in other capacities.” He had served as Chief of the Labor Division of the American Mission for Aid to Greece. Co-author of *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy* (1942) and co-editor of *Causes of Industrial Peace under Collective Bargaining* (1955), he also addressed the “ever increasing importance of the International Labor Organization, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions in preserving and fostering freedom throughout the world....”

- “Problems in Labor Relations” – Exploring unionization and labor relations at the plant level, James J. Healy, the director of the Trade Union Program from 1942-1950, brought corporate elites from the Advanced Management Program at the Harvard Business School into the classes with the union members. His course sought to explain “the social, psychological, and interpersonal” ways in which unions transform the workplace.
- “Economic Analysis” – Stanley Jacks provided both basic economics and a presentation of the shortcomings of many commonly cited labor, business, and government indices.
- “Labor Law” – Harvard Law School professor Archibald Cox handled the intricacies of the legal system for the program and developed a reputation as the nation’s top expert on labor law. Formerly a clerk for the legendary judge Learned Hand and chair of Harry Truman’s Wage Stabilization Board, Cox later became the Solicitor General for JFK and then the lawyer in some of the most important cases on civil rights to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. Appointed Special Prosecutor during Watergate, Cox found himself sacked by Richard Nixon in the legendary “Saturday Night Massacre,” orders implemented by a then obscure federal judge named Robert Bork
- “Arbitration” – Saul Wallen presented the history of arbitration and even served as an arbitrator in class as he had the trade unionists prepare cases based on real problems in their various industries.
- “Methods of Wage Determination” – Economist Donald J. White explained the methods for job evaluation, wage increases, and pension plans. Later a popular dean at Boston College, White also happened to be a leading expert on the fishing industry.
- “American Labor History” – Economist John T. Dunlop delivered this instruction, but soon switched in the late 1950s to teaching “Administration and Organization.” Joseph P. O’Donnell (see below) then provided the course on “Labor

History.” One of the founding fathers of the HTUP, Dunlop rose to prominence during World War II as a staff member of the National War Labor Board where he worked with such major figures as Clark Kerr (future president of the University of California) and Benjamin Aaron (future director of the Institute of Industrial Relations at UCLA). Dunlop taught in the HTUP beyond its sixtieth anniversary until his death in 2003. General editor of a distinguished library of books on industrial relations for Harvard University Press during the 1950s and 1960s, he shaped the field of industrial relations in the United States. Dunlop went on to become Secretary of Labor in the Ford Administration.

- “Accounting and Analysis of Financial Statements” – Arthur W. Hanson showed labor leaders how to decode accounting reports, including income statements, balance sheets, and operating statements. He showed the tricks with depreciation and how accounting principles could be brought to bear in negotiations.
- “Parliamentary Procedure” and “Public Speaking” – Roswell Atwood taught labor leaders how they could be more persuasive as well as better ways of conducting meetings. In an essay for *Labor Age* (April 1922), Clinton Golden had criticized unions for leaders who “do not understand the rudiments of parliamentary law. Recording secretaries fail to keep an understandable record of the activities of the local union. Important communications, resolutions, and petitions are often ignored because of the inability of the secretary, intelligently and effectively to perform his duties.” When Golden took over leadership of the HTUP, he made better performance of procedural democracy a priority.
- “Contemporary Labor Problems” – A course presided over by Joseph O’Donnell, who served as Executive Director of the HTUP from 1955 to 1983, it gave students the chance to debate and discuss the latest issues in the labor movement. A member of the Catholic Labor Guild who would later in the 1960s receive the prestigious Cardinal Cushing Award, O’Donnell had himself been a student in the HTUP Class of 1950. Sociologically the U.S. trade union movement had

many Catholic leaders, and the HTUP was one of the few institutions at Harvard run by someone from that faith tradition. In marked contrast, for the first 355 years of Harvard’s history (till 1991), all of the University’s presidents were White Anglo–Saxon Protestants (WASPs).

- “Collective Bargaining Seminars” – A weekly afternoon seminar hosted by Sumner Slichter, it brought many of the nation’s most powerful labor leaders to Harvard, including in the first half of the 1950s: Walter Reuther, president of the CIO and the United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America; A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Michael J. Quill, president of the Transport Workers Union of America; O.A. Knight, president of the Oil Workers International Union; and David McDonald, president of the United Steelworkers of America.

The internationalization of the Harvard Trade Union Program became perhaps the most momentous change during the 1950s. Trade unionists from Europe, Asia, Australia, and then Africa and Latin America arrived, many of whom received help from the AFL-CIO and the U.S. State Department. The HTUP’s tradition of sponsoring talks by leading U.S. labor leaders sometimes had a dramatic influence on the international students. David Halberstam in *The Reckoning* (1986) told the story of Ichiro Shioji, HTUP Class of 1960 who went on to lead the Nissan autoworkers. According to Halberstam:

While he was at Harvard, Walter Reuther came to make a speech, and Shioji was awed. Reuther was his great hero. A small hall had been set aside for Reuther’s speech, and it soon became apparent that it was much too small, and people soon scurried around and managed to get access to the Harvard gymnasium. The entire Harvard gym was filled with students.... The idea that a labor leader had so broad a following struck him forcefully. No one in Japan had a following like that.

After Reuther’s presentation, Shioji met the UAW leader at the reception, and they became good friends. Halberstam continues:



Richard B. Freeman. Faculty Co-Director, Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School & Herbert Ascherman Chair in Economics, Harvard University



Benjamin Sachs, Faculty Co-Director, Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School & Professor of Law.



Elaine Bernard, Executive Director, Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School.

That summer, after leaving Harvard, Shioji went to Detroit and stayed with the UAW people at Solidarity House, and the Americans became his friends – Reuther and Leonard Woodcock and Pat Greathouse and Doug Fraser.... They were the top people in the union, and they had all treated him as an equal.... When he returned to Japan his confidence was greater; he was now a good friend – an equal – of the most important labor leaders in the world.

The Trade Union Program continued to thrive in the decades ahead. Besides Shioji of Japan, it could claim among its alumni the leaders of some of the most powerful U.S. unions and labor federations (i.e., Gerald McEntee, president of AFSCME; John J. Flynn and James Boland, presidents of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers; John Lyons Jr., president of the Iron Workers; Harold A. Schaitberger, General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters; Michael E. Monroe, president of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades; Thomas J. Scotto and Michael Palladino, presidents of the Detectives’ Endowment Association; Carolyn Doggett, Executive Director of the California Teachers’ Association; Russ Burns, Business Manager of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 3; and closer to home, Robert Haynes and Steven Tolman, presidents of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO), as well as some international political leaders of note (Ankur Henrik Jorgensen, Prime Minister of Denmark, and Barrie Unsworth, Premier of New South Wales) and major international labor officials (i.e., Mark Lennon, Secretary, Unions NSW Australia; Tony Sheldon,

National Secretary, Transport Workers Union Australia; Jo-Ann Davidson, National Secretary, Flight

Attendants Association of Australia; Paul Nowak, Head of the Organisation and Service Department of the Trades Union Congress UK; Manuel Cortes, General Secretary, Transport Salaried Staff Association UK; Simon Weller, National Organiser of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen; Karl Walsh and Jim Christie, presidents of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, Nancy Hutchison, Secretary Treasurer, Ontario Federation of Labour; and Stephanie Smith, Secretary Treasurer, British Columbia Government and Services Union).

Time of Troubles and the Program’s Resurgence

But by the early 1980s, the program finally began to enter into a time of troubles. The U.S. labor movement had continued its slow but largely uninterrupted decline in density since the mid-1950s. Throughout the 1980s, the Reagan Administration adopted a much more combative posture towards unions. Many influential theorists of management such as Peter Drucker began declaring that unions were dinosaurs, the fossilized remnants of an industrial stage of development that was giving way to a post-industrial epoch.

This atmosphere undoubtedly influenced the new leadership of the Harvard Business School, the institution that for decades had hosted the program. The HBS came to recognize that relatively few MBAs were going into manufacturing and other industries with a heavy union presence. Harvard

MBA's increasingly gravitated into financial services, consulting, and high-tech; that is to say, those sectors conspicuous for the absence of unions. The Business School no longer saw a rationale for the program, and its leadership politely asked it to move elsewhere. HBS chose to keep much of the program's endowment, however, a circumstance that became a major financial challenge for those seeking to save the HTUP enterprise.

By the late 1980s, the program began to find a new direction and vitality, developments signaled by the appointment of a new Executive Director Elaine Bernard. Previously the director of a labor program in Canada and president of the New Democratic Party of British Columbia, she tightened the program to an intensive ten-week and then six-week session. With Bernard working closely with faculty co-chairs Richard Freeman, generally regarded as the nation's premier labor economist, and Paul Weiler, the emerging doyen of sports, entertainment, and labor law, this team expanded a whole series of conferences, seminars, and workshops on issues of special concern to the labor movement in both the United States and abroad. The HTUP developed a summer training institute for AFSCME funded by the Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund. The Mellon Foundation in the mid-1990s supported a whole range of explorations into societies undergoing rapid political and economic transitions. The Ford Foundation provided the means to develop programs on myriad topics: global labor standards; work and family issues; and the future of manufacturing. The HTUP hosted the annual African American Labor Leaders' Economic Summit, which regularly brought some of the nation's most distinguished Black labor leaders to Harvard. All of these activities led to the creation of a new, more ambitious enterprise, the Labor

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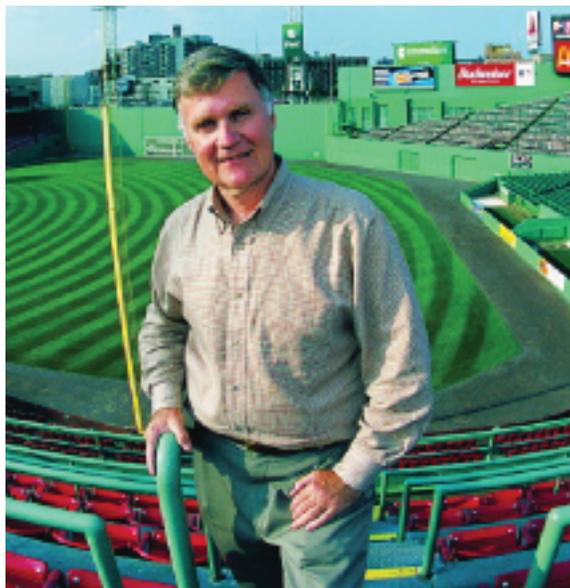
and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School (see below).

The Founding of the Labor & Worklife Program, and The HTUP in the Twenty-first Century

The Harvard Trade Union Program underwent an historic transformation. Seeking to meet the challenges of labor education for the twenty-first century, the HTUP became part of a broader institution for understanding labor issues, the Labor & Worklife Program at Harvard Law School.

The Labor & Worklife Program (LWP) is Harvard University's forum for research and teaching on the world of work and its implications for society. Located at Harvard Law School, the LWP brings together scholars and policy experts from a variety of disciplines to analyze critical labor issues in the law, economy, and society. The LWP provides unique education for labor leaders throughout the world via the oldest executive training program at Harvard University, the Harvard Trade Union Program.

As a multidisciplinary research and policy network, the LWP organizes projects and programs that seek to understand critical changes in labor markets and labor law, and to analyze union, business, and government responses to those changes. By engaging scholars, students, and members of the labor community, the program coordinates legal, educational, and cultural activities designed to improve the quality of work life. Current faculty co-chairs Richard Freeman and HLS Professor Benjamin Sachs continue to pursue research agendas in the social sciences and legal thought that tackle pressing challenges for workers and the labor movement.



Paul Weiler. Faculty Co-Director Emeritus, Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School & Professor of Law.

The faculty, staff, and research associates of the Program include some of the nation's premier scholars of labor studies and an array of internationally renowned intellectuals. The executive training program HTUP works closely with trade unions around the world to bring excellence in labor education to trade union leadership. The LWP regularly holds forums, conferences, and discussion groups on labor issues of concern to business, unions, and the government. A vehicle for delivering valuable lessons and sustained inquiry into the pressing social questions of our time, the LWP seeks to open some new chapters in the heritage of the Harvard Trade Union Program.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, the LWP has developed the following projects:

- The Pensions and Capital Stewardship Project – Led by Dr. Larry Beeferman, this project focuses on retirement security, including employment-based retirement plans as well as issues of pension fund governance and management.
- Science & Engineering Workforce Project (SEWP) – With the support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the LWP teamed up with the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) to construct a major network of scholars and policy experts who are focused on the state of the science and engineering workforce.
- Nanotechnology in Society – With funding from the National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI), the LWP worked with a variety of university programs to advance understanding of this expanding field. The LWP is looking at future employment impacts from revolutionary technologies, as well as the possible occupational health effects of nanotechnology.
- PayWizard and WageIndicator – The LWP has partnered with the non-profit WageIndicator Foundation in the Netherlands to create the first U.S. WageIndicator site called the PayWizard (<http://www.paywizard.org/main>). The WageIndicator Foundation has similar websites in thirteen languages and sixteen countries in addition to the U.S.: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, China, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Germany, Hungary,

India, Italy, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, and the UK. The PayWizard provides an internet survey for workers, an information center for employees, and a free salary checker.

- The Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund – Founded in 1982 and celebrating its 30th anniversary, the Wurf Fund was established in memory of Jerry Wurf, the late President of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Its income is used to initiate programs and activities that “reflect Jerry Wurf’s belief in the dignity of work, and his commitment to improving the quality of lives of working people...” In partnership with the LWP, the United Negro College Fund, and AFSCME, the Wurf Fund since 2003 has supported the Union Scholars Program, which in the summer brings undergraduate juniors and seniors to Harvard to learn about the labor movement as well as participate in initiatives to help workers. Wurf scholarships have also assisted AFSCME labor leaders in attending the HTUP, as well as helping government administrators study in the Harvard Kennedy School of Government’s program for senior leaders in state and local government.

Designed during World War II and the early cold war, the Harvard Trade Union Program has continued to evolve. The program’s ongoing reformation is rendering it more responsive to the changing needs of the contemporary labor movement.

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