Conference to Explore Effects of Incarceration On Children and Families

While law-and-order politicians trumpet the need for more money to build prisons, an upcoming conference at Northwestern will focus on the social costs of these hard-line policies.

The May 5 conference, sponsored by IPR and supported in part by the Russell Sage Foundation, will examine effects of the nation's skyrocketing incarceration rates on the families and children of ex-felons and current inmates.

Since 1980 the U.S. incarceration rate has tripled, and approximately 2 million Americans are behind bars. Even more disturbing are Bureau of Justice statistics that show 55% of state prisoners and 63% of federal inmates have children under age 18, and that 7% of black children had a parent in prison in 1999.

The conference will bring together academics, practitioners, advocates, and activists to share empirical research, theories, and experiences in an effort to understand the costs and consequences of these high levels of imprisonment. Five IPR faculty, including conference chair Mary Pattillo-McCoy (African-American Studies/Sociology) will moderate panels that will explore (continued on page 3)

Study Finds Illinois’s Low-Income Families Show Progress After Welfare Reform...

Welfare recipients in Illinois are surprisingly upbeat about their lives after sweeping reforms of the welfare system compelled them to find jobs and move toward self-sufficiency, according to a report issued in November by the Illinois Consortium on Welfare Reform headed by Dan Lewis (IPR-Education and Social Policy).

More than half of the former recipients are working and report job satisfaction and improved financial situations. Nearly all said they expect to be working within a year. A sizable portion reported stable housing conditions and satisfaction with their neighborhoods. And nearly all approve of the welfare reforms.

These findings emerged from the first phase of the Illinois Families Study, an independently funded six-year panel study by university researchers at Northwestern, Northern Illinois, Roosevelt, and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Despite these positive findings, many current and former recipients worry about having enough money in the future. They continue to struggle with low wages, few employer-sponsored benefits, confusion about the new welfare rules, and services and education programs that many find unsatisfactory or inaccessible.

The results come from a unique partnership between universities and the state of Illinois that was mandated by the legislature in 1997. Funded by five foundations, the study’s goal is to discover how Illinois families have been faring since the state began the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program and other welfare reforms.

“The study will provide information to the legislators, the Governor’s office, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and advocacy organizations that they can use to assess the progress of welfare reform and (continued on page 16)

...But Reform Effects Mixed for Children

The welfare reforms of 1996 have had mixed effects on children based on their ages, which means policymakers need to consider the different developmental needs of children when crafting legislation, according to research by RLindsay Chase-Lansdale and Greg Duncan (IPR-Education and Social Policy).

While caseload counts and political rhetoric have dominated news about welfare reform, information on children’s well-being and development has been somewhat lost in the shuffle.

“Despite the professed child-based goals of the reform legislation, remarkably little attention has been paid to tracking and understanding its impacts on family functioning and child well-being,” the researchers suggest.

Duncan and Chase-Lansdale presented their findings in February at a conference on the “The New World of Welfare” sponsored by the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. The conference assembled the nation’s top experts on welfare to assess the effects of the 1996 reforms (continued on page 6)
Conference Considers Issues Beyond Pregnant Chads

Lawyers, Journalists, Academics Make Sense of Election 2000

The chaotic and contentious 2000 election has ended, but analysis of the events and actors in the 36 days following Nov. 7 is well under way. To that end, legal experts, journalists, students, and the public gathered at Northwestern for a two-day conference, “Election 2000: The Role of the Courts, the Role of the Media, the Role of the Diamond” (IPR-Political Science, Northwestern, Medill School of Journalism, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, and the Joyce Foundation).

Washington Post columnist David Broder opened the conference as the keynote speaker. Broder said U.S. citizens are questioning their system of government, and many states are replacing representative government with ballot measures, in which citizens directly vote for policy.

“This is the generation that decides whether we keep our type of government,” Broder said. National ballot measures may come next, Broder said, with the United States scrapping its representative government—bypassing the system of checks and balances for rule by simple majority.

Public confidence in government may have hit a low after the voting fiasco in Florida. On the second day of the conference, Craig Fox, associate professor of management at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, and Ken Shotts, assistant professor of political science at Northwestern, discussed the voting patterns in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Susan Herbst (IPR-Political Science) moderated the discussion, which also included a Justice Department representative and an election reformer.

Fox and Shotts presented statistical data that showed the poorly designed “butterfly ballot” and confusing voting instructions in Palm Beach County caused Al Gore to lose the election.

Fox estimated that Gore lost 11,000 votes because of the Buchanan mix-up, 2,000 votes because of confusing ballot instructions, and 2,000 votes because voters didn’t mark any boxes. Shotts compared the absentee ballot vote to the butterfly ballot vote in Palm Beach County. Regression analysis showed the irregularity of Buchanan’s support: He received the most support from heavily liberal parts of the county.

Craig Donsanto, director of the U.S. Justice Department’s election crimes branch, predicted that the Supreme Court will require uniform standards, most likely through new voting machines. He downplayed the idea of “e-voting,” or voting via the Internet, because of potential hackers and the public mistrust of online security.

Ronnie Dugger, founder of the Populist movement Alliance for Democracy, suggested election reforms, including holding elections over two days or over the weekend, declaring a national “election holiday” with mandatory time off work, setting nationwide opening and closing times for polls, eliminating the electoral college, and permitting same-day voter registration.

In the second panel, political science professors debated the merits of the electoral college.

David Abbott, retired from Brooklyn College, called the system “undemocratic and loaded with booby traps.” A state vote for electors is unfair, he said, because of the diverse interests and subgroups within each state. Abbott suggested a direct election with no runoffs, the system used in most gubernatorial races.

Arguing for the electoral college, Judith Best at State University of New York, Cortland, said the system forces candidates to build broad coalitions of voters. Best said the framers emphasized states’ rights and crafted the Constitution to avoid majority tyranny that would result from a nationwide popular vote. Best did advocate eliminating the actual electors, many of whom are bound by law to vote as the majority in their state.

On election night, confusion reigned both on the airwaves and in newspapers, the topic of the third panel. The headlines of the St. Petersburg Times’ four editions tell the story: 1) Photo finish; 2) Too close to call; 3) Bush wins; 4) Recount. Lucy Morgan, the paper’s Pulitzer Prize-winning Tallahassee bureau chief, said she felt uneasy when the networks called Florida for Gore early in the evening. As did Beth Foughy, executive producer of CNN’s political department, but that didn’t stop the network from making the mistake, and then later that night calling the state for Bush. “We are not in the business of making bad calls on the air,” Foughy said. “It’s something we will have to live with for a long, long time.”

Marty Plissner, former political director of CBS, predicted the media would not abandon its fervor to report election-night results. “States themselves are putting up numbers on Web sites,” he said. “The information is out there, and to tell American people that the only place it’s not available is network TV is ridiculous.”

In the fourth panel, law professors and a judge squared off on legal strategy and the role of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Elizabeth Garrett at the University of Chicago Law School said the Supreme Court should have exercised judicial restraint. “The federal courts should stay out of controversies that have political ramifications... (In Bush v. Gore) you could clearly discern which party would be helped by a particular decision.”

Richard Posner, Chief Judge of the 7th Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals, said the court had to step in. “These judges had conflicts of interest, but so what?” he asked. “Suppose I’m right and Supreme Court intervention confers benefits on society. Should they refrain because of a conflict of interest? Would that be fair?”

“We are not in the business of making bad calls on the air.”

Beth Foughy
Executive Producer
Political Department, CNN
Spring Conference Offers Comparative Perspectives On Advanced Welfare States

IPR is co-sponsoring a conference on May 18 that will offer comparative perspectives on the American welfare state and other advanced democracies. It will examine the role of political-economic institutions, partisan electoral strategy, decentralized initiatives, ideologies, and changing gender relations.

Scheduled speakers include Theda Skocpol, Harvard University, who will address trends in the United States, and John Stephens and Evelyne Huber, University of North Carolina, who will look at broad trends cross-nationally. Desmond King, Oxford University, will compare workfare in the United States, and John Stephens and Evelyne Huber, University of California, Berkeley, will discuss welfare state decentralization.

Conference organizers Kathleen Thelen (IPR-Political Science) and Ann Orloff (IPR-Sociology) are arranging the event in conjunction with Northwestern's Center for International and Comparative Studies.

The conference will be held at Norris University Center in Evanston.

Vote of Felons, Ex-Felons Would Have Changed Election Outcomes

Consider the political costs of laws barring current and former felons from voting:

- Al Gore would have won the 2000 presidential election if ex-felons had been permitted to vote.
- Democrats would have made key gains in the U.S. Senate, controlling it through the 1990s if felons had been permitted to vote.
- John F. Kennedy would have lost the 1960 election to Richard M. Nixon if contemporary levels of felons disfranchisement were the same then.
- These are among the findings of a recent study by Jeff Manza (IPR-Sociology), Marcus Britton (IPR graduate fellow), and Christopher Uggen at the University of Minnesota. The authors examine specific U.S. Senate elections to test whether the inclusion of felon voters would have altered the balance of power, and whether applying contemporary rates of disfranchisement to past presidential elections would have changed the outcomes. The results strikingly show the political consequences of laws that disfranchise felons and ex-felons.

More and more citizens have temporarily or permanently lost the right to vote as incarceration levels have risen. Since the early 1970s, the number of people imprisoned has grown by more than 500%. Currently, 47 states bar felons from voting, and 15 of those states also bar many ex-felons from voting. The authors estimate that more than 4 million citizens are ineligible to vote because they are felons or ex-felons.

As incarceration rates and the number of ex-felons rise, it seems clear that disfranchisement will play an increasing role in deciding elections. Both political parties have set a law-and-order agenda, but because felons are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of racial minorities and the poor, groups that have historically voted Democratic, disfranchisement laws are likely to benefit Republican candidates.

Testing this belief, the authors developed a methodology for determining election results had felons voted. In Senate elections from 1970 to 1998, seven elections might have been overturned if felons had been allowed to vote. Since incumbents—once elected—overwhelmingly retain their seats, the authors speculate that Democrats would have controlled the Senate throughout the 1990s.

The felons vote would also have affected the presidential races of 1960 and 1976. Both elections won by Democrats. Under current levels of disfranchisement, 2.3 million voters would have been barred from voting in the 1960 race (the actual number then was 700,000). Taking away these votes based on turnout and party preference, the authors show that Kennedy would have lost the election by almost 500,000 popular votes. In the 1976 race, Jimmy Carter would still have won, but by a narrower margin of victory.

Although the authors do not report details of their preliminary analysis of the 2000 election, they note that “the Republican electoral college majority... would have been reversed, even if only ex-felons were granted the right to vote.”

The authors speculate that the impact would be more dramatic for mayoral or city council races because of the heavy concentration of felons in urban areas.

Beyond political costs, barring felons from voting also has social and legal costs. The authors ask whether disfranchisement laws are appropriate for ex-felons and those on probation and parole when these citizens are working on rehabilitation and re-entry into society. They also consider whether the large numbers of minorities who are felons put such laws at odds with the 1982 Voting Rights Act amendment that bars voting laws that discriminate against minorities.
Study Explores Political Feelings of Non-Voters, Finds They’re Like Voters

Last November, in one of the closest elections ever, nearly half of eligible voters failed to come to the polls. Why so much at stake, why was this the case?

Jack Doppelt (IPR-Journalism) and Medill Professor Ellen Shearer, continuing their research on non-voters, found that most non-voters said they didn’t vote because they weren’t registered. If they had voted, however, their choices would not have affected the outcome of the election.

In the weeks following the election, Doppelt, Shearer, and a team of Medill graduate students, along with the Campaign Study Group, interviewed 859 people who said they voted and 1,053 individuals who said they failed to vote. Respondents discussed their reasons for voting or not voting, their political beliefs, their knowledge about issue positions of the candidates, their news consumption habits, and their demographic backgrounds.

Among non-voters, the top reason given for failing to vote is not being registered. Thirteen percent cited their dislike of the candidates, 8% said they were working, 8% cited unplanned travel, and 5% said they had no interest in politics.

When asked whom they would have voted for, 37% of the survey respondents picked Bush, 37% chose Gore, 5% chose Nader, and 2% picked Buchanan.

The survey results were released in a report in early March, and the Medill News Service has put out several print and broadcast stories based on the results that specifically address why youth in particular did not vote. The Pew Charitable Trust funded the research.

Non-voters generally are younger, less-educated, and make less money than voters, the results show. More non-voters (40%) identify themselves as political independents than do voters (27%).

But voters and non-voters share many attitudes about politics and social institutions, and non-voters identified certain strategies to make them more likely to vote in future elections.

Non-voters and voters agree on the country’s most important problems. Four of the five issues defined by voters as “the most important problem facing the country today” also make the top five list of concerns among non-voters—a lack of ethics and values in American society, infighting within the government, concerns about the health of the economy, and crime. Education, which made the top five list of problems named by voters, ranked sixth on the list by non-voters.

Doppelt and Shearer conducted a similar survey of non-voters after the 1996 election, which led to their book, Nonvoters: America’s No Shows. What’s surprising is how similar the data from two such different elections looks.

In 1996, the incumbent, President Bill Clinton, won re-election easily, and that foregone conclusion seemed to justify a low voter turnout. The 2000 election, however, had no incumbent, and the candidates ran a close race that the media covered extensively.

“All of the factors should have given a much higher turnout” in 2000, Doppelt said. This indicates that “the problems (of low turnout) are beyond individual candidates or race.”

Doppelt’s team found encouraging data in that “non-voting is not necessarily a chronic disease,” and past voters can be motivated to return to the polls. Among non-voters in the past election, 34% say they frequently vote and only 25% admit to never voting.

“Before we had made the assumption that if half of America doesn’t vote, we’re talking about the same people each time who aren’t voting. That’s only true for half of non-voters,” Doppelt said. “They’re really a moving target.”

Non-voters suggested allowing same-day voter registration, holding elections over two or three days, expanding the absentee voter system, or voting via the Internet would motivate more of them to vote. Of those options, Doppelt recommended same-day registration as the easiest to accomplish.

However, the report notes that these changes might not result in huge increases in turnout. When asked what they would do to raise turnout if they were in government, only 21% cited procedural changes. Thirty-one percent responded that they did not know and 12% said that nothing could be done.

Cook Ends Tenure As President of Society on Aging

In November, IPR Director Fay Lomax Cook ended her year-long tenure as president of the Gerontological Society of America at its annual meeting in Washington, D.C. The gathering culminated in Cook’s testimony before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging.

Throughout the year, Cook emphasized the year’s GSA theme: “Linking Research to Policy, Practice, and Education: Lessons Learned, Tasks Ahead.” She challenged scholars to understand the implications their research has for social policies, social programs, and education. About 3,000 gerontologists gathered for the event.

As the 2000 presidential election showed, policies that affect older people—Social Security, prescription drugs, Medicare—are at the forefront of national concern.

Before Congress, Cook gave the opening remarks for a presentation on “Living Longer, Living Better: The Challenges to Policymakers.” The challenge “is not to add more years but to add better years,” she said.

She introduced a discussion by four experts on the areas of work, income, health, and family.

Past federal policies that affect the lives of older Americans have separately addressed these areas, but Cook argued that Congress members should use an integrated approach when making policies that affect older adults. For example, prescription drugs most obviously deal with health, but as older adults seek ways to pay for the medication, both family and income become affected.

Cook also continued the society’s strategic planning. As the study of aging has grown over the past 20 years, many academic disciplines have launched research branches that deal with aging. The GSA is reasserting itself as the center for interdisciplinary research on aging.
Debunking the Myths

Three claims have dominated popular rhetoric about “saving” Social Security: The public is growing less confident about its future, less supportive of the program, and more in favor of privatization and incremental reform.

Extensive public opinion research by Fay Lomax Cook and Lawrence Jacobs at the University of Minnesota suggests these claims are “either false or substantially overstated” by policymakers who fail to back up their assertions with hard data.

In a paper presented at the annual conference of the National Academy of Social Insurance in January, they offered results of a review of hundreds of separate public opinion survey items through the year 2000. Though only half of the public expressed confidence about the future of Social Security, the data show people were more confident in 2000 than they have been in nearly a decade. In fact, confidence rose by 15 percentage points compared to similar surveys in 1998.

Also, rather than diminishing, public support for Social Security “is remarkably high and unchanging,” their study found. National Opinion Research Corporation surveys from 1984 to 2000, for example, showed 90% of the general public supported Social Security and that trend hardly varied. Similar findings were reported by the University of Michigan’s National Election Studies and the Gallup Poll.

This does not imply the public is not concerned about Social Security, but it is certainly not panicked about its imminent collapse. Only a third of the public believes the system will run out of money if no changes occur.

When asked a simple question about their support for privatization, a majority of those polled said they favor investing a portion of their Social Security taxes in stocks and bonds. But that support evaporated when respondents were asked a “balanced frame question” that also reminded them of the risks and costs of a privatized system, including increased taxes.

Cook and Jacobs suggest that policymakers consider several options the public appears more inclined to accept: Create a supplemental system outside of Social Security in which individuals could invest in stocks and bonds, and reduce the benefits of the affluent. Beyond these measures, the public appears evenly split in its support for gradually raising the early retirement age from 62 to 65 for partial receipt of benefits. And though people are opposed to payroll tax increases, they are more supportive of raising the income ceiling on which payroll taxes are based.

Given a stark choice, they prefer tax increases to benefit cuts.

(A version of Cook and Jacobs’s paper, “Assessing assumptions about Americans’ attitudes toward Social Security: Popular claims meet hard data,” may be ordered from IPR’s publications department.)

Proponents (Mis)Quote Public Opinion On Social Security

An examination of statements by the president and by witnesses at congressional hearings has revealed that policymakers increasingly are using public opinion to bolster support for their policies. This trend may indicate a more responsive democracy, but in most cases policymakers are making general—and not always accurate— claims (see box).

IPR Director Fay Lomax Cook, former IPR graduate fellow Jason Barabas, and Benjamin I. Page (IPR-Political Science) came to these conclusions after investigating the issue of Social Security in their IPR working paper, “Invoking public opinion: Polls, policy debates, and the future of Social Security.” The connection between public opinion and this specific public policy should give a better understanding of elite behavior and the inner workings and degree of democratic responsiveness in the United States.

The public should expect that political leaders and policy experts would draw upon polling data to inform themselves about public opinion—perhaps to respond faithfully to the public or to prove that their own positions are consistent with the popular will. The public also might expect that any claims they make about public preferences would be accurate, backed by evidence. To test these expectations, the authors catalogued the ways policymakers invoked public opinion about Social Security from 1993 to 1999 and compared their claims with relevant public opinion data from the archives of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

Social Security became a signature policy issue of President Bill Clinton, and during his tenure he increased both his references to Social Security and public opinion on the issue. Policymakers’ claims about the issue had to do with confidence in the future of Social Security, the public’s desire for reform, the program’s popularity, and support for presidential initiatives and positions. But when the president invoked public opinion, the majority of his claims about public opinion (70%) were general, as were those of congressional witnesses (73%).

For an issue to be given high priority on the national agenda, a case must be made that it deserves attention. Most policymakers who invoked public opinion on Social Security claimed that confidence in it has declined. Clinton and those at congressional hearings claimed that low confidence in the future of Social Security indicated a need for change. But polling data indicates that while public confidence was low, it has been that way for some time—since the 1970s. The most frequently cited claim—that young people are more likely to believe in UFOs than to believe they will receive Social Security when they retire—rests on weak polling data and has been challenged by other polls. Yet the statement’s shock value made it an attractive sound bite to politicians eager to prove a need to reform the program.

It is clear that policymakers will continue to use public opinion data as they promote their specific policy reforms. To ensure they use that data responsibly, the authors call for an impartial body to make sense of public opinion data and make recommendations for the kinds of questions that might be asked to better understand what people think.
Early Nurture Spurs Child Development

For policy purposes, the developmental window between birth and age 3 begins too late and ends too early, according to a National Research Council study released last fall by a committee of 17 scientists that included Greg Duncan (IPR-Education and Social Policy).

Prenatal conditions are crucial for healthy development, and there are many examples of successful interventions beyond age 3.

Over 2½ years, the group of experts from neuroscience, medicine, and the social sciences evaluated interdisciplinary research about the nature of early experiences on the development of young children. Their findings are contained in the book, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development (2000), co-edited by Jack Shonkoff at Brandeis University and Deborah Phillips at Georgetown University.

The book stresses the central importance of early relationships for children's social, emotional, and intellectual development. It points out that more than four million children under age 5 are living in poverty, which puts a heavy burden on their development. Children in families at the deepest poverty levels are at the highest risk for developmental problems, Duncan said. This is especially true for those deprived of at least one caring parent who has been compelled by welfare reform to join the labor force.

Despite dramatic changes in society, the book finds young children's needs are not being met and advocates a comprehensive look at policies that affect them. For example, linkages are weak between the nation's social and mental health streams, and between the early intervention systems of welfare agencies and juvenile justice. It also says more attention must be paid to mental health, the caliber of child care workers, and working mothers with young children.

There is good evidence that appropriately designed early intervention programs for high-risk children can make a difference, Duncan said. “Emotional self-regulation and social development may be as important as cognitive learning.”

The book recommends that government strive to alleviate economic hardship of the poorest families (e.g., through tax policies, the EITC, minimum wage laws, and subsidized child care), raise child care standards, and provide intervention services for children with special needs.

Businesses, by more lenient leave policies and flexible work schedules, can support parents' efforts to develop healthy relationships with their children. Parents must deal with preventable problems, such as poor nutrition, specific infections, and prenatal exposure to environmental toxins and drugs. In addition, they should give newborns sufficient auditory and visual stimuli.

Finally, to produce the best possible outcomes, the researchers would like to see child development research become more integrated with molecular genetics and neuroscience.

The book may be viewed or ordered at http://www.nap.edu.

Reform Effects (continued from page 1)

and to frame the policy debate that is emerging around reauthorization of the federal legislation for fiscal year 2003.

Based on their analyses of five welfare-reform random-assignment experiments conducted during the 1990s, the researchers found that programs requiring a 30-hour work week and providing financial supports for working families had positive effects on preschool and elementary-aged children.

On the negative side, Chase-Lansdale and Duncan found poverty, maternal depression, domestic violence, and children's developmental problems "alarmingly common" even for families benefiting from generous work supports. In addition, while working mothers introduce routines into their children's lives, make more money, and serve as role models, they have less time to spend with their children and cannot monitor their behavior so well.

In contrast to the positive effects on preschool and elementary-aged children, adolescents were more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking and smoking and have poor school achievement and behavior. Research on the effects on infants and toddlers was inconclusive. Welfare programs that mandated work but did not offer wage supports did not seem to help or harm children.

Though less definitive, some evidence indicates that factors operating outside the family—such as childcare and after-school programs—appeared to have more influence on favorable child outcomes than positive changes within the home environment.

In their report, Duncan and Chase-Lansdale urge policymakers to cast a wide net when researching welfare legislation.

Policymakers should “abandon the search for THE answer to how welfare reforms are affecting children's well-being. Reforms will simultaneously help some children and hurt others. It is the distribution of impacts—both good and bad—that will tell the complete story of welfare reform's impacts on children.”

Based on their analysis, Duncan and Chase-Lansdale made the following policy recommendations:

- Implement better work supports for mothers, which may include income supplements and childcare subsidies
- Create more after-school and community programs to provide children with enriching activities while their parents may still be at work
- Encourage fathers to become or stay involved in their children's lives by removing penalties for fathers who live with mothers and children
- Provide safety nets such as Medicaid and food stamps for families with barriers to stable, full-time employment (for example, maternal depression, domestic violence, disabilities).

Three-City Study Finds Welfare Reform Takes Toll on Struggling Families

First findings from a $20-million “Three-City Study” of welfare reform in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio are similar to early results from the Illinois Families Study (see page 1) but dig deeper into the diversity of former and current recipients. Both studies report the majority of former TANF recipients are working and strongly support work requirements but are somewhat confused about rules. A sizable number have been cut off from benefits caused by noncompliance, and some are struggling with less than adequate incomes.

The Three-City Study is tracking 2,400 families over a four-year period to determine the consequences of welfare reform on the well-being of children and families. The six co-investigators, including IPR’s P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale (Education and Social Policy), have released three policy briefs in the past few months, which are summarized below. The full texts can be found online at www.jhu.edu/~welfare.

What recipients know about the new rules. Most current and former recipients were aware of time limits on cash assistance and a majority in two of the three cities knew how long it was. But when researchers pressed further, they found widespread uncertainty and inaccuracy about the details of the rules.

Large majorities in each city favored work requirements. Contrary to prevailing stereotypes, these welfare recipients share other Americans’ sense of the importance of the work ethic, even when they are required to go out and find jobs. However, opinion was mixed about time limits, although a plurality in each city felt they were a bad idea.

In response to questions about how people had changed their behaviors because of welfare reform, 14% of recipients said they had been forced to take jobs with less-desirable characteristics, such as lower wages or inconvenient hours. Yet only 5% said they had tried not to have a child in the past two years because of the rules, and less than 1% reported marrying because of the rules.

The diversity of welfare leavers. Similar to findings in other state studies, women in this study who left TANF have an average employment rate of 63%. But this average hides considerable variation across different groups of women who have left welfare.

The study found large differences in employment, household incomes, and poverty rates for leavers with differing social and economic characteristics. Women with lower levels of education, in poor health, with younger children, and who are young themselves have considerably lower employment rates and post-welfare income levels than women with greater levels of education, better health, older children, and who are older themselves.

The picture is also bleak for women who left welfare with a history of greater welfare dependence. These women have considerably lower incomes, receive less earnings support from other household members, and depend more on government benefits. In addition, women who were heavily dependent on welfare are substantially less likely to leave welfare than other recipients.

The researchers suggest that policymakers need to factor in the diversity in welfare leavers when they consider modifications in the programs or design special programs to assist those off the rolls who are in the greatest need.

Sanctions and case closings for noncompliance. Seventeen percent of the sample reported benefits had been reduced or stopped because of noncompliance with the rules. These people tended to have less education, poorer health, greater financial difficulties, and more substance use than non-sanctioned recipients. They also tended to live in lower quality housing, in less desirable neighborhoods, and were less likely to have a telephone or own a car. The most common reasons for losing benefits were missing an appointment with caseworkers or failing to file paperwork.

“Caregivers who had the most complex and challenging daily lives were more likely to have experienced a partial or full loss of benefits,” according to the researchers. “We found that sanctions and procedural case closings appeared to involve families that were experiencing hardships…. For low-income individuals with limited education, daily lives filled with personal turmoil, and employment and family responsibilities to balance, meeting all these demands is more than many can handle.”

Those who could not get benefits reinstated coped with their loss of income by getting a job, cutting back on necessities, or asking family or friends for money.

When welfare recipients fail to comply with program rules they may be having a hard time managing aspects of complex lives: raising a family, maintaining a household, and holding a job. The researchers suggest that instead of letting these families slip through the cracks, welfare departments could use instances of noncompliance to identify them, and offer more careful attention or immediate intervention.

The fourth policy brief, on health policy and welfare reform, will be released this spring, and the fifth, on how children are faring, in early summer.

Chase-Lansdale’s co-investigators are Ronald Angel, University of Texas; Linda Burton, Penn State University; Andrew Cherlin and Robert Moffitt, Johns Hopkins University; and William Julius Wilson, Harvard University.
Kinship Care: Wrapped in Red Tape

A private childcare arrangement where relatives substitute for parents has been adapted into a public system of foster care, forcing parents to sacrifice control over child-rearing decisions and even give up custody so their children receive better benefits and services.

Dorothy Roberts (IPR-Law) describes the dilemma more and more poor, black families face as kinship care becomes a public system of foster care. The research comes from a recent IPR working paper and is part of Roberts' forthcoming book, Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare (Basic Books, Fall 2001).

She concludes that the state can better preserve families by giving them more benefits and services instead of investing as much in foster care.

The demographics of child welfare paint a stark picture:
- In the last 30 years, the number of children receiving child welfare services has dropped dramatically while the foster care population has skyrocketed.
- In 1999, there were 568,000 children in foster care. The vast majority of these children are poor.
- Black children are grossly over-represented in child welfare caseloads: nearly half of all children in foster care nationwide are black, although black children are only 17% of the nation’s youth.

Black communities have long relied on the tradition of “kinship care,” an informal system of childcare by relatives and neighbors. Parents used this system to lean on those close to them for financial support while children stayed in familiar surroundings. “Child rearing by relatives was often a response to poverty and other hardships that made it difficult for parents to raise children by themselves,” Roberts writes. Thus, kinship care was a family-preserving alternative to foster care.

Noting the benefits of keeping children in familiar surroundings, state child welfare agencies increasingly are using kinship care when placing children into new homes. As this once-private arrangement becomes public, families are finding it hard to turn down the increased benefits and services that accompany turning their children over to the state. But some families are unprepared for the battery of regulations and lessened autonomy in child-rearing decisions.

A major advantage that kinship foster care offers families is that it makes financial sense. Foster care stipends are much larger than TANF benefits that parents or kinship care providers would receive. Kin foster parents also are entitled to Medicaid, clothing allowances, and other assistance. Through child welfare agencies, parents may also seek drug treatment, mental health counseling, and housing assistance.

Roberts takes issue with the state’s commitment to foster parents and not biological parents. “Giving up custody to the state has become the price of public support for poor and low-income children. The state then provides to foster parents the very services it denied to the parents. But kin foster parents face a tradeoff between payments and privacy similar to that faced by mothers receiving TANF benefits: “The level of state support for kinship care givers is directly correlated with the level of state intrusion into their lives. The higher the payment, the greater the intensity of state supervision.”

“Kin foster parents must comply with agency rules specifying the type of home and care they provide, and they must allow periodic visits by case-workers to check compliance. They must give the agency access to personal information and may have to undergo psychological evaluations... The family also runs the risk that the agency will move the children to another foster home if the relatives fail to comply with agency demands,” Roberts points out.

The child welfare system’s requirement that parents give up legal custody to secure services for their children points to the dire need for fundamental change in the system. Roberts notes that more money goes toward foster care than toward preserving existing families. “This difference in levels of support reflects the government’s perverse willingness to give more financial aid to children in state custody than to children in the custody of their parents.”

Roberts argues that society should feel more collective responsibility toward children’s welfare: “It is a society willing to pay [billions of dollars] a year on maintaining poor children as state wards outside their homes, but only a fraction of that on child welfare services to intact families.” Instead, child welfare agencies should take a proactive role to help families before parents are in a situation to give up legal custody of their children.

(The working paper, “Kinship care and the price of state support for poor children,” may be downloaded at www.northwestern.edu/IPR.)
An influx of immigrants in a small Minnesota town prompted its residents to organize the “International Friendship Festival” to celebrate its growing diversity. A men’s group in rural California turned an old tavern’s storeroom into a repair shop to fix up bicycles as Christmas gifts for poor children.

These true stories of rural people building on their local assets are among the many told in The Organization of Hope: A Workbook for Rural Asset-Based Community Development, the ABCD Institute’s 11th workbook.

Recognizing the unique circumstances of rural communities, author and ABCD adjunct faculty member Luther K. Snow uses the experiences of nine rural towns to illustrate successful community development projects and draw lessons for other rural communities in their own projects.

The workbook is designed for people who want to maintain their unique rural culture in the face of the realities of rural life—children leaving the community for jobs in the city and corporate farmers gobbling up local land.

Paying too much attention to these realities could make you think the rural glass is half-empty, Snow writes. He prefers to look at it half-full, and when he does, he finds plenty to be upbeat about. “We can easily get out and enjoy nature. We’ve got land and we’ve got space. With rural services, lines are short, hassles are few, and business is easy to take care of…. We are used to getting things done that need to be done, by using what we have on hand.” Rural economies are not exclusively linked to farming, and rural residents are not dependent on outsiders to solve their problems.

The theory behind ABCD is that by mapping a community’s assets—for example, the talents and experiences of residents, the physical spaces of churches and schools, the organization of local associations—it’s possible to organize grassroots efforts to create stronger communities. “By mapping and mobilizing our assets, our quality of life improves—not because we are trying to become more like suburbs or cities, but because we are making more out of our rural strengths,” Snow writes.

For example, the town of Hayfork in Northern California’s Trinity County turned a bleak economic situation into an opportunity for positive community action. When a timber mill closed in 1996, the town lost its main employer and many people moved away from Hayfork to find work. “The town lost more than jobs; it lost community volunteers, childcare workers, Little League coaches, and school board members, leaving holes in the fabric of community life.” Residents joined forces to sew it back together. The Trinity Kids First Collaborative linked schools, churches, individuals, and local businesses to focus on children. One effort involved providing Christmas gifts for the town’s many unemployed families. One group provided toys, another clothing, and another food. A men’s social club restored bicycles in what used to be a local tavern.

A variety of local residents take responsibility for community development in each example. They illustrate two main themes of the workbook: building on assets and “widening the circle.” The town of Hayfork built on its assets by using the talents of local residents. It widened the circle by involving an ever-broadening group of people in the effort to help the children, even residents who normally would not have volunteered.

One Minnesota community learned to widen the circle as it came to celebrate an increase in racial and ethnic diversity. Employment opportunities at a meat processing company brought many new faces to Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, quickly transforming the population to include more than 25% ethnic immigrants.

Town leaders came up with ways to use this new diversity as an asset. They reached out to immigrants to be community leaders, they celebrated the different cultures, and they focused on what old and new residents had in common: schools, churches, the library, parks. One way the town celebrated its diversity was the International Friendship Festival, a major tourist event with food and craft booths from the nations represented in Pelican Rapids. Another effort involved the local library sponsoring art exhibits, and theater and musical performances related to immigration and international culture.

The workbook contains examples of diverse community-development projects, from building the infrastructure to bring water to the colonias communities in New Mexico, to bringing high-tech Internet jobs to Newton County, Arkansas.

“Grassroots, asset-based initiatives are the most effective way to accomplish many public goals,” Snow writes. “We create jobs and economic opportunity more effectively, we develop and build community, and we create hope.”

Look for These Upcoming Publications from ABCD

In coming months, ABCD researchers will produce several new publications that offer more tools to further their asset-based community development strategy. “Seeing Opportunity, Transforming Communities: Learning from Experience,” is the tentative title of an ABCD guidebook designed to help community-based organizations seize new opportunities to stimulate economic development. ABCD is working with Chicago’s Bethel New Life and the Chicago Association of Neighborhood Development Organizations (CANDO) on this project. Future ABCD publications (print or online) will be devoted to community-building by faith-based organizations and youth organizations.
Poverty and Inequality in the New Bush Administration

by Benjamin I. Page

In his address to Congress, President Bush offered two pictures of America, the optimistic one pointing to big budget surpluses, and the pessimistic one of “failing schools, poverty, the stubborn vestiges of racism.” He challenged Congress to work with him to “use the resources of one picture to paint the other—to direct the advantages of our time to solve the problems of our people.”

Given the mounting friction in Washington, can the two parties work together to repaint the picture of poverty and inequality the president outlined? If certain pitfalls are avoided, I believe they can. But the concrete proposals in Bush’s budget plan are not entirely encouraging.

Many millions of hard-working people were devastated by the economic troubles of the 1970s and 1980s and then left behind during the billionaire-producing boom of the 1990s. Today some 11.8% of Americans, about 32 million people—including nearly one-fifth of all our children—still live in households with cash incomes below the meager official poverty line of about $17,000 for a family of four. Remarkably, the top 5% of households now receive, on the average, more than 24 times as much cash income as the average household in the bottom fifth. By most measures, the United States has higher levels of poverty and inequality than virtually any other advanced industrial country.

Much of this lies beyond individuals’ control, but it can be affected—for better or for worse—by a variety of government policies. The projected budget surpluses have provided an exceptional opportunity to craft bipartisan policies that will reduce poverty and inequality in economically efficient ways.

Unfortunately, some of Bush’s proposals may make things worse. To abolish the estate tax, for example, which is paid on only the very largest accumulations of wealth, would give a big windfall to those who profited most from the recent boom. It would reduce government revenues that could otherwise help the less fortunate. It also would undermine equal opportunity, reduce charitable contributions, and fail to stimulate the economy as much as a cut for low-income taxpayers.

Similarly, large, across-the-board cuts in the personal income tax would reduce the role of our most progressive tax, give up revenue that could be used for egalitarian purposes (such as keeping guaranteed Social Security benefits up during the impending demographic squeeze), and do less for the economy than a temporary tax cut for low- and middle-income people.

Again, the most prominent Social Security privatization and school voucher plans would tend to increase, rather than decrease, income inequality. True, it is possible to design strongly pro-poor voucher or privatization plans, but this is difficult and their political viability is questionable. Most current proposals would cut the retirement incomes of many vulnerable citizens and undermine public schools.

On a more positive note, education is clearly a promising area for bipartisan action. President Bush, Secretary of Education Rod Paige, and many congressional Democrats and Republicans have expressed strong commitments to enhancing Head Start and improving the public schools that serve disadvantaged students. Such investments would help disadvantaged people earn more over their whole lifetimes, while also increasing their contributions to the economy. I hope we can go well beyond the 11% spending increase proposed in the Bush budget, which is only about one-third as big as the last Clinton spending increase.

If we are really determined to “leave no child behind,” however, we need to do more than provide high-quality preschooling and elementary education. Improvements in the health and nutrition of pregnant women, infants, and children are even more cost-effective for enhancing lifetime productivity. The experience of other countries has shown that more equal access to health care for all citizens can be provided at considerably less cost than our current system incurs. Prescription drug coverage for all the elderly cannot be expected to provide much economic payoff but is indicated for reasons of justice and should be politically feasible.

Even efforts to ensure good health and education for all Americans are not likely to reduce poverty or inequality very much unless jobs at good wages are available for everyone able to work. Many government policies affect jobs and wages. Wage subsidies for low-income people like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) are highly efficient because they encourage work and do not distort labor markets, while reducing inequality. The EITC has won bipartisan support and could be expanded, particularly for childless workers. Welfare-to-work measures that assist with training, placement, transportation, and day care (mostly at the state level, but likely needing more federal help as the economy slows) can help many of our poorest citizens improve their lot.

Improving military salaries tends to raise the wages of low-income workers. So does stimulatory economic policy with low interest rates. On the other hand, unspent budget surpluses tend to slow the economy and hurt these workers.

In the current political climate, neither fervent egalitarians nor members of any other ideological faction are likely to get exactly what they want. But there is room for serious bipartisan action to reduce our high levels of poverty and inequality.

Benjamin I. Page, the Fulcher Professor of Decision Making at Northwestern University and IPR faculty associate, is co-author with James R. Simmons of What Government Can Do:Dealing with Poverty and Inequality (University of Chicago Press, 2000).
Time Was Ripe for Health Care Reform

In retrospect, Bill Clinton probably would like to forget the political embarrassment of his failed national health care plan. But the timing was right for Clinton to pass major reforms between 1992 and 1994 if he had immediately engaged big business as a partner in the process, according to a recent IPR working paper by Peter Swenson (IPR-Political Science) and Scott Greer, political science graduate student.

“Opponents of reform closed a window on an unusual opportunity to establish a universal health care system in the United States. It also closed the window on that model of business-government cooperation in health care,” the authors conclude.

The model first was constructed during the Great Depression with the social welfare reforms of the New Deal. The history lesson the authors draw is that swifter action by the Clinton administration would have passed his plan; by 1988, Chrysler was actually spending more per car on health care than on steel. Employers could not see how to reduce benefits without angering workers. Big business began shoring up support for changes in health care benefits. A survey of Fortune 500 executives at the time found that 53% supported the idea that government should force all employers to pay for their workers’ health care. “Not since the New Deal had efforts to forge a major piece of social insurance received as much direct encouragement from big employers,” Greer and Swenson note.

Recognizing this movement, Clinton made health care a central issue of his 1992 presidential campaign, and began crafting a plan once elected. But two factors pushed reforms into the hands of private businessmen instead of legislators: Big employers lowered health cost inflation on their own, and economic recovery from the recession of the early 1990s made further cost control unnecessary. Managed care won.

“Managed care, among other efforts, delivered cost containment for employers and their workers more quickly than the political process,” according to the authors. In the government’s plan, “the Clinton administration and congressional reformers were proposing remedies for a problem that was already solved, at least for the time being.”

Today, after more than five years of managed care, the honeymoon is over. The system brought a one-time drop in health care costs, followed by a period of price stability. Now health cost inflation has outpaced general inflation by a factor of three.

But there’s no going back. The authors’ analysis suggests that the political and economic opportunity for government and business to craft national health care reform has passed and likely will not return.
For Urban Lawyers, Practice Makes Perfect:

Firms Reorganize to Meet New Client Needs

The corporate law firm today bears little resemblance to the firms of the 1970s, and the corporate law firm of tomorrow may not even exist, according to a new analysis of urban law practice.

The most significant change in corporate law firms in the last quarter of the 20th century was the sheer increase in the size of the firms, according to John P. Heinz (IPR-Law), Robert L. Nelson (IPR-Sociology) and Edward O. Laumann at the University of Chicago. In a new working paper, the authors explore the costs and benefits of this trend and others that have transformed urban law. These changes include: increased demand for lawyers, greater competition among firms and from accounting and consulting firms, less-intimate relationships with clients, more women lawyers, and an increase in status of Catholic and Jewish lawyers.

The growth of firms is twofold. First, the number of lawyers has increased, to one lawyer per 303 residents in 1995 from one per 572 in 1971. Law firms also are hiring more lawyers. Today, a large New York law firm may have 1,000 or more lawyers, and most large practices operate offices in several major cities in the United States and abroad.

Second, the amount of legal work has grown. With an economy based on services rather than agriculture and heavy industry, the demand for legal services has risen. The nation's booming economy during the 1990s further boosted demand.

As the number of lawyers has grown, so has the diversity in their ranks. More women now practice law, and many work for corporate firms, but a disproportionate number practice in the legal departments of corporations or government agencies.

In the past, Protestant lawyers dominated such prestigious areas of practice as securities work, patents, banking and tax work, and avoided the less-prestigious areas of divorce and personal injury work. Catholic lawyers were disproportionately likely to handle personal injury cases, and did relatively little banking, securities, and labor union work. Jewish lawyers were overrepresented in divorce and commercial law, while few did antitrust defense, patents, probate, and business litigation. Now, the work is spread proportionately among different religious groups.

In response to the increased demand for services to businesses, law firms reorganized their practices. One way of retaining a larger share of a client's legal needs is to provide "one-stop shopping."

"Many firms appear to believe that their corporate clients will find it advantageous to be able to have all of their problems—taxes, transactions, securities issues, labor and employment matters, or litigation—dealt with by the same law firm," the authors note. Small firms and solo practitioners are out; megafirms are in. Lawyers are encouraged to specialize, even fresh from law school.

The cost of this transformation is a more distant relationship between lawyer and client. "When a law firm expands from 30 lawyers to 50, to 100, and then to 300 or 800, the officer of the corporation can no longer count on access to the personal advice of the firm's senior partner on all legal issues. Tax matters will be sent to the tax department, litigation to the litigation department, and the senior partner may be tied up with staffing decisions for the firm's new office in Prague," the authors write. So despite a firm's ability to provide "one-stop shopping," a client has less loyalty to a particular firm because the days of long-term personal relationships are gone.

After documenting the changes in the field of urban law practice, the authors forecast changes—some of them dramatic—for the bar.

The authors speculate on the possibility of consulting firms, accounting firms, and financial services companies taking over the market for legal services. "Some would argue that accounting firms are already making inroads on corporate law practice," they write. These new competitors have deep pockets to pay for hiring and marketing, and lengthy client lists that make a legal services branch easy to start and sustain.

"It may be increasingly difficult for firms composed exclusively of lawyers to remain competitive," the authors note. "... The corporate work done by mid-range and lesser law firms—and perhaps, the more routine work done by large firms—is likely to be squeezed by competition from consulting firms, banks, and other financial services firms."

But the most elite firms will remain intact, the authors predict, at least for now. "The most sophisticated work done in the top W all Street firms and in their counterparts in other major cities requires a level of experience and expertise that is difficult to duplicate."

(Th e working paper, "The scale of justice: Observations on the transformation of urban law practice," may be ordered from IPR's publications department.)
There’s Some Good News, but

Latinos Losing Ground in Chicago’s CAPS Program

While Chicago’s Latino population was exploding during the 1990s, conditions in heavily Latino neighborhoods—including burglaries, auto thefts, abandoned buildings, street crime, public drunkenness, and loitering—worsened. An IPR study also finds Latinos are not participating significantly in Chicago’s citywide community policing program (CAPS), nor are they benefiting much from it.

These findings are among the highlights of “Community Policing in Chicago, Year Seven,” the sixth report issued by an IPR evaluation team that has been following the progress of Chicago’s experimental CAPS program since late 1992.

“It’s partly a language and culture problem for Latinos,” suspects principal investigator Wesley Skogan (IPR-Political Science). Though the city has done much to promote the program among Latinos, especially in Spanish, they have been falling behind.

By contrast, the research team found substantial improvement in neighborhood conditions reported by African-American and white Chicagoans. In African-American areas, reports of serious drug and gang problems dropped from 50% to 30% between 1994 and 1999, and the residents’ ratings of other crime problems dropped by about one-third.

The report reveals trends during the 1990s for crime, city services, and citizen involvement in the CAPS program.

Satisfaction with police services. Though the team’s 1999 report was skeptical about many behind-the-scenes aspects of the program, giving it a “C+” in the public’s eye, according to Skogan, residents in 2000 reported significant improvements in police demeanor, responsiveness, and effectiveness. These improvements were across the board for whites, blacks, and Latinos, with racial minority views improving by about 20 percentage points between 1993 and 1999.

Nevertheless, after five years of citywide community policing, just half of the residents surveyed rated police performance as satisfactory, and less than 60% thought police were doing a good job in responding to community concerns.

Beat meetings. On average, nearly 6,000 residents a month attended some 250 beat meetings throughout the city. Although some feared citizen involvement would flag as the program became routine, that figure has remained constant since 1995. Participation rates were highest in poorer and high-crime areas, but within neighborhoods there was a consistent middle-class bias in those who came. Home owners and long-term residents were more likely to turn out, a familiar pattern in studies of volunteer-based social programs.

Attendees were more positive about police performance than community residents who did not attend. The team found large racial differences in “the optimism gap,” especially between the views of African-Americans and Latinos who attended meetings and their neighbors who did not.

Social disordered problems were most frequently discussed at the beat meetings, particularly gang loitering, public drinking, noise, and bad landlords. Drug problems were brought up at two-thirds of the meetings, and there were complaints about policing, particularly their slow response to 911 calls and lack of police visibility in the neighborhood.

District Advisory Committees (DACs). A major element of the CAPS program has been the creation of committees comprised of residents, business owners, and other community members who meet regularly with police to identify and discuss local crime and disorder issues, set priorities, and develop strategies for addressing them. The report was discouraging about their performance: “After seven years, confusion about the missions of the DACs persists. Low membership, poor or insufficient direction, and irregular contact with their parent body caused many to founder.”

Latinos were noticeably underrepresented on the committees, even in heavily Latino areas. Though their purpose was to identify the “larger issues,” DAC meetings were dominated by beat-level concerns, and often led by police rather than committee members.

Community mobilization. Beginning in 1998, the city deployed a cadre of community organizers—some directly supervised by the city, some members of partnering community groups—to help some of the most troubled communities rebuild their capacity to solve problems and interact more smoothly with police and city agencies. Skogan’s team found “no clear answers” for which type of organizer was more effective. For both, there were positives and negatives.

The best of the partnering organizations were staffed by experienced professionals. They represented dedicated constituencies and often offered expertise in areas such as community redevelopment, schools, youth, and the elderly. Others, however, focused on their organizations’ interests rather than CAPS, ignored non-members of their traditional constituency, and lacked experience with crime prevention.

The city-hired organizers spent more time attending beat and district meetings to facilitate CAPS projects and to work on improving resident/police relations. They helped promote neighborhood safety in schools and were successful in bringing city services to communities long deprived by neglect.

By many measures, the researchers found conditions in the beats they evaluated had improved after the first year of the community organizers program: “Fear went down, informal social control strengthened, and many serious neighborhood problems were in decline.” However, since parallel changes occurred in many other areas of the city, it was not always clear how much could be attributed to the program.

Management initiatives. A series of management changes were implemented in the past year to establish a clear line of accountability at the district level for making CAPS work. A new Office of Management Accountability is monitoring re-resource allocation, district and area planning and effectiveness, and analyzing crime trends and issues of public concern. The department has restructured its planning process to improve problem-solving in each district. These management initiatives are a major focus of the evaluation group’s ongoing research.
Lack of Data Mars U.S. Policy on Illegal Drugs, Study Finds

Policymakers lack enough information to create useful, realistic policies on illegal drug use, according to a report from the National Research Council (NRC) released in March. As a result, the nation’s ability to evaluate whether its drug policies work is no better now than it was 20 years ago, when drug-control efforts began to accelerate, according to the report.

Charles Manski (IPR-Economics) chaired the NRC Committee on Data and Research for Policy on Illegal Drugs that wrote the report after a 2 1/2-year study. The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy commissioned the work.

One major finding is the need to evaluate drug-enforcement efforts. Although the federal government spends about $12 billion annually on drug enforcement programs, reliable data on drug consumption and actual prices for illegal drugs are not available. Such data are critical because a major goal of enforcement is to reduce drug supply and drive up costs, which then cuts consumption.

“It is unconscionable for this country to continue to carry out a public policy of this magnitude and cost without any way of knowing whether, and to what extent, it is having the desired result,” Manski said. “Our committee strongly recommends that a substantial, new, and robust research effort be undertaken to examine the various aspects of drug control, so that decision-making on these issues can be better supported by more factual and realistic evidence.”

New research should focus on obtaining accurate data on drug prices and the frequency and quantity of consumption, and improving evaluation of prevention, interdiction, enforcement, and treatment, according to the report.

Drug-enforcement spending increased tenfold between 1981 and 1999, making it the major focus of drug-control policies. By 1998, drug arrests had tripled in just eight years, according to Department of Justice statistics. That year, 289,000 drug offenders were newly placed in state prisons, 12 times the number in 1980.

What difference has increased spending and arrests made? Current research does not collect enough information on how drug markets operate, how users begin to consume drugs, how they decide to step up their use, and what factors influence their decision to quit, the committee said.

Accurate information on how much drugs cost would show how drug users respond to price changes. Research has shown that enforcement policy has increased drug prices, but no one knows the magnitude of the increase, which policy components brought about this result, or which drug users have been most affected.

The White House commissioned the committee to do a broad assessment of data and research as a basis for developing a sound national drug policy on illegal drugs. The committee released its Phase I report in April 1999, which detailed flaws uncovered in two prominent cocaine control studies that had influenced previous U.S. drug policies.

(The report may be viewed or ordered online at books.nap.edu/catalog/10021.html.)

September Poverty Conference Targets Hard-to-Employ Families

The Joint Center for Poverty Research (JCPR) is organizing a September Research Institute that will examine how welfare reform has affected people who have serious difficulty finding jobs. In addition, it will present research on services and safety-net policies that may improve their prospects. Included in this hard-to-employ group are families who may be dealing with personal, family, or community problems—lack of child care, poor public transportation, life in high crime areas, or workplace discrimination. These problems may significantly lower their chances of gaining or sustaining paid work or advancing beyond low-wage careers.

“The Hard-to-Employ and Welfare Reform” conference will be held at Georgetown University on September 20-21, 2001. Organizers are JCPR Director Greg Duncan (IPR-Education and Social Policy) and JCPR Deputy Director Susan Mayer at the University of Chicago’s Harris School.

Potential topics include the demography of hard-to-employ families and the extent to which they have been affected by welfare reform; promising approaches to providing services for these families; and how federal and state government might structure safety-net policies to best address their needs.

Conference proceedings. JCPR has produced several books and journal issues based on research presented at its conferences. Among them:

❖ Proceedings of a December 2000 conference on “Incentive Effects of Tax and Transfer Policies” will be produced as an online volume that will include the conference summary, policy briefs of each paper, and downloadable papers.


❖ Papers from JCPR’s 1999 conference on the Earned Income Tax Credit appeared in a special issue of the National Tax Journal (53:4, Part 2, December 2000), edited by Bruce Meyer (IPR-Economics). He is expanding the issue into a book that Russell Sage will publish. Meyer also edited a volume of papers from a 1999 conference on tax and transfer programs that will appear as a special issue of the Journal of Public Economics.
**Study Links Dropouts to School Safety**

Teacher Responses May Add to Problem

Students who drop out of high school tend to feel unsafe at school, socially isolated, and picked on by their teachers, according to a new study by Stefanie DeLuca, IPR graduate fellow, and James Rosenbaum (IPR-Education and Social Policy).

Peer threats, especially when combined with social isolation and teacher disparagement, cause students to drop out of high school, according to the authors. Their findings, published in an IPR working paper, examine how students’ experiences affect their withdrawal behaviors in school (not doing homework, being tardy, cutting class) and their decisions to leave school. They also consider how teachers respond to students experiencing these threats and teachers’ influence on dropout decisions.

National attention on school safety has increased following several school shootings. Clearly, school violence is a problem. In 1992, the year studied, 14% of students reported being threatened with a weapon, and 24.6% threatened without a weapon, while 5.1% were injured with a weapon, and 12.8% injured without a weapon. The authors measured threats as whether students in their sample had been threatened, got into a physical fight, or generally felt unsafe at school.

Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study, the authors find that dropout decisions are factors of social experiences as well as background influences (factors like test scores, race, gender, socioeconomic status and whether a school is public or private and urban or suburban).

“These results confirm prior research that indicates that dropping out is not a sudden behavior, rather it is strongly predicted by the various indicators of withdrawal that are evident much earlier than dropping out,” according to the authors.

Also striking is how the factors work together. For example, academic failure alone does not always lead a student to drop out. But it may start a chain of events—a being teased by other students and by teachers—that could lead a student to leave school.

In another example, the authors found that by itself, teacher disparagement does not account for dropouts, but when paired with peer threats, it does affect dropping out.

“One possible inference is that teacher disparagement of a student tells other students that this student will get less support from teachers. Perhaps teacher disparagement unintentionally targets some students as potential victims. Alternatively, perhaps some third factor, say student negativity or ‘bullying’ leads both to teacher disparagement and to threats from peers.... It is clear that teachers are not counteracting the effects of threats, as one might hope.”

The authors provide some policy suggestions for teachers, guidance counselors and administrators:

- Form smaller classes for more supportive and personal environments for teachers and students.
- Reduce the danger in highly dangerous schools, and address students’ individual safety concerns in relatively safe schools.
- Address academic concerns swiftly so they do not combine with other problems.
- Consider social interactions, particularly those that lead to violence, when designing dropout prevention programs.

(The working paper, “Are dropout decisions related to safety concerns, social isolation, and teacher disparagement?” is available from IPR’s publications department.)

---

**IPR Undergraduate Summer Training**

This summer, IPR will offer its fourth summer research assistant program for undergraduates. The purpose of the program is to increase the involvement of undergraduates in research at IPR and give undergraduates research experience and the opportunity to work closely with faculty.

Many of the participants continue to work with faculty during the following school year and some write honors theses on policy-relevant topics.

The 12-week paid program includes a weeklong course in statistical computing for social sciences.

Jamie Baim, a senior studying economics through the Mathematical Methods in Social Sciences program, worked with economist Burton Weisbrod last summer. Baim is investigating behavioral differences among for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental hospitals in their use of autopsies as a research instrument and as part of medical education. Baim has continued her research into the school year.

A typical day for Baim included running regressions and performing econometric analysis, which she said she learned through the computer training course. Baim said the training sharpened her critical and strategic thinking skills. She also benefited from the relationship with Weisbrod, an IPR faculty fellow.

“Professor Weisbrod is amazing,” she said. “He wants you to learn throughout the process. He was really a mentor.”

Erica Sitkoff, a senior, worked with Leonard Rubinowitz (IPR-Law) last summer on research related to his work on the families who moved out of Chicago public housing as part of the Gautreaux program. Sitkoff also did research on Cabrini Green.

“The research I did provided important background for the research I'm doing for my senior thesis,” she said.

Students interested in the program should apply directly to IPR faculty fellows and faculty associates. Applications for the program will be accepted until May 20, but IPR began selections on April 15.
Illinois Families Study (continued from page 1)

improve policymaking,” Lewis said.

Working closely with IDHS, researchers interviewed a random sample of 1,362 TANF recipients from nine Illinois counties between November 1999 and September 2000.

One of the clearest findings is that current and former TANF recipients value health insurance more than any other benefit potentially available to them, and it is associated with positive employment outcomes. Most families had health insurance, although significant gaps remain and employer-sponsored coverage is rare. Of those interviewed, 76% had Medicaid coverage, and 7% had employer-sponsored coverage.

If money and medical coverage were the same, nearly all respondents (95%) said they would prefer to work rather than receive welfare. In fact, most respondents approved of reforms like work requirements and improved work supports. More than half (60%) were positive about imposing time limits.

However, training and education programs may not be adequate. Many who requested these services did not receive them, and those who participated in job search and job training programs gave them mixed reviews.

Many respondents found the specifics of welfare rules confusing. More than one-third did not know of time limits on TANF benefits. Some were unclear about their eligibility for Medicaid and Food Stamps. Nearly 30% did not know of time limits of welfare rules, “merely getting a job cannot be equated with self-sufficiency,” the report concluded.

Although Illinois allows some families, depending on income, to get benefits while working, many study respondents felt frustration with low-paying jobs.

“It’s hard to find a job with enough money to take care of your children, rent, light, gas,” one respondent said. “Most of the jobs pay $6 hourly and they may give you 12 hours weekly. What can you do with that?”

Other findings:

Workforce participation. Among the 53% currently employed, 38% had full-time jobs. The average work week for respondents was 33 hours. The median hourly wage was $7 and median monthly earnings were $960. A third of respondents had to commute one hour or more to their job.

Experiences with welfare. More than half (55%) of respondents were still on TANF and 23% were combining work with TANF at the time of the interview. Of those who left the TANF rolls, 42% said they left because they had found jobs or because their earnings were too high. Some lost their benefits because of missed appointments, or failure to file paperwork or meet work requirements.

Health and well-being. Though 25% of respondents reported a period when they were uninsured during the previous 12 months, 83% had health insurance, and 88% of their children had coverage (84% on Medicaid or KidCare).

Housing and neighborhoods. Overall, the study showed the respondents’ housing was relatively stable. Three-quarters had lived in the same residence over the past 12 months. Only 7% reported they had been homeless or living precariously (in a car, abandoned building, or homeless shelter).

Future reports will draw upon state administrative data, follow-up surveys, and in-depth interviews to explore workforce attachment, service use, and child well-being.

Other investigators are Paul Kleppner, executive director of the Office for Social Policy and Research at Northern Illinois University; James H. Lewis, executive director of the Institute for Metropolitan Affairs at Roosevelt University; and Stephanie Riger, professor of psychology and women’s studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The report was funded by the Joyce Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Woods Fund of Chicago, the Polk Bros. Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The summary (free) and technical report ($15) are available at www.jcpr.org or from IPR’s publications department.

Institute for Policy Research
Northwestern University
2040 Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60208-4100

Phone: 847-491-3395
Fax: 847-491-9916
Web: www.northwestern.edu/IPR