

## IPR Welcomes Six New Faculty Fellows

This fall, IPR adds three economists, two sociologists, and a mass media researcher to its interdisciplinary roster.

Five are new to Northwestern: economists **Jonathan Guryan** and **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** arrive from the University of Chicago, economist **Kirabo Jackson** from Cornell, and sociologists **Anthony Chen** from the University of Michigan and **Christine Percheski** from a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard.



P. Reese

Anthony Chen (l.), Diane Schanzenbach, and Jonathan Guryan discuss their research interests.

Mass media researcher **Rachel Davis Mersey** has been at Northwestern since 2008.

"These dynamic young scholars bring with them impressive track records of policy-relevant social science research," said IPR Director **Fay Lomax Cook**. "They have quickly integrated themselves into the Institute's interdisciplinary community and are already tackling exciting new projects."

(See fellows' profiles, pages 3–4)

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## Moving Research into Classrooms

IPR faculty school researchers in best practices

In the United States, too many children can't read and can't do math at grade level—despite considerable efforts by teachers, administrators, researchers, and policymakers to pinpoint, understand, and address our nation's education failings.

Though all these groups come under the banner of education reform, far too often they pursue their objectives separately, with little interaction between them. According to Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Director **John Easton**, it would be more produc-



J. Ziv

Larry Hedges (l.) introduces IES Director John Easton to workshop participants.

tive for researchers to move beyond a simple "thumbs-up, thumbs-down" evaluation and find ways to work with the wider education community to get their research into classrooms.

On August 4, Easton spoke to participants taking part in one of two national methodological workshops on education held at IPR this summer. Both are sponsored by IES, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, through its National Center for Education Research. Each is run by an IPR

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## From Chicago to Paris

Workshop examines common cross-national issues

From the beginning, IPR faculty have tackled issues related to urban poverty, education, and housing, mainly at a domestic level. Yet increased globalization and awareness of research on similar issues in other countries are creating new opportunities for international collaboration and comparative research.

To this end, a group of IPR faculty and graduate students traveled to Paris in July to exchange research and ideas with their colleagues at Sciences Po,



P. Reese

IPR Director Fay Lomax Cook sits on a panel with workshop organizers (from left) OSC Director Alain Chenu, Lincoln Quillian, and Marco Oberti.

one of the most prestigious *grandes écoles* in France.

Organized by IPR and Science Po's Observatoire Sociologique de Changement (OSC), the two-day workshop gathered more than 40 researchers and students around the theme of city

and schools. **Alain Chenu**, OSC's director, welcomed participants to the workshop. He shared his excitement about the opportunity for the French and American researchers to compare

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## Faculty Recognition

### Honors and Presentations of Note

#### IPR Faculty Fellows

Social psychologist **Jennifer Richeson** was named Weinberg College Board of Visitors Research and Teaching Professor at Northwestern.

Law professor **Dorothy Roberts** received the Dorothy Ann and Clarence L. Ver Steeg Distinguished Research Fellowship from Northwestern. She is also chair of the search committee for the new law school dean at Northwestern.



P. Reese

Dorothy Roberts

Northwestern President **Morton Schapiro**, professor of economics and an expert on the economics of higher education, was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

#### IPR Faculty Associates

Communication studies researchers **Pablo Boczkowski** and **Jennifer Light** were each awarded a 2010 Innovations Grant from Northwestern's School of Communication for their books-in-progress. Boczkowski's will depict the demise of print newspapers in the United States between 1950 and 2010; Light's will examine virtual citizenship.

The 2010 Harry J. Kalven Jr. Prize for empirical sociolegal scholarship was awarded to social psychologist and law professor **Shari Seidman Diamond** by the Law and Society Association.

Sociologist and legal scholar **John Hagan** was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for his extensive body of work on human rights and international criminal law.

Communication studies researcher **Eszter Hargittai** received the 2010 Outstanding Young Scholar Award from the International Communication Association.

#### IPR Graduate Research Assistants

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in the U.S. Department of Education named **Vivian Wong** its 2010 Outstanding Predoctoral Fellow at the IES Research Conference in Washington, D.C., in June. Wong was recognized for her extensive methodological research, especially on improving the design and use of quasi-experimentation in education studies, while working as an IPR graduate research assistant and a doctoral student in human development and social policy.

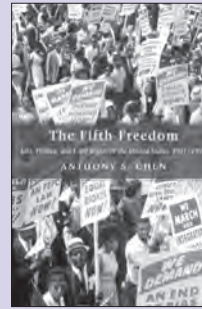


Courtesy of IES

Vivian Wong

## First book, four awards

### Anthony Chen's *The Fifth Freedom*



In *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941–1972*, sociologist **Anthony Chen** takes an interdisciplinary approach to show how and why affirmative action emerged in employment. Drawing on extensive archival research, Chen argues that the mobilization of business-

friendly, small-government conservatives against administrative models of social regulation ironically facilitated the rise of affirmative action.

The book, published by Princeton University Press in 2009, has attracted widespread attention and praise. It received the 2010 Best Book Award from the Race, Ethnicity, and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA). It was also named co-winner of APSA's 2010 Gladys M. Kammerer Award (for the best publication on U.S. national policy) and co-winner of the 2010 J. David Greenstone Award from APSA's Politics and History Section. It was previously the recipient of the 2008 President's Book Award from the Social Science History Association.

### Recent Faculty Grants

Political scientist **James Druckman** will continue his research on U.S. congressional campaigns using data from candidates' websites with support from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

IES is supporting education economist **David Figlio's** work on the Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, a joint project with the Urban Institute.

Economist **Jonathan Guryan** is gathering experimental evidence on how building noncognitive skills can help reduce juvenile delinquency with a grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation.

Biological anthropologist **Christopher Kuzawa** will study how placental structure and function affect birth weight among Filipino infants with a grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

With an NSF grant, economist **Charles F. Manski** will expand his empirical work on identification and decision problems in the social sciences. He is also studying probabilistic thinking and economic behavior with support from the National Institute on Aging.

(Continued on page 4)

## New Faculty Fellows

### Jonathan Guryan

Associate Professor of Human Development and Social Policy  
PhD, Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000



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Economist Jonathan Guryan's work spans various topics related to labor markets, education policy, and social interaction. His research interests include the labor market for teachers, social interactions in the workplace, occupational licensure, youth violence, and lottery gambling. He also studies race and discrimination in the labor

market and in education. In recent projects, he has investigated the extent to which labor market competition can eliminate racial discrimination in hiring and the effects of teacher testing on the type and quality of new teachers.

Guryan is a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). He also serves as a research consultant for the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago and as an associate editor of *Labour Economics*. In 2009, he received the John T. Dunlop Scholar Award from the Labor and Employment Relations Association. Prior to Northwestern and IPR, he was on the faculty of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.

### Anthony Chen

Associate Professor of Sociology  
PhD, Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, 2002



J. Ziv

A political and historical sociologist, Anthony Chen is interested in the political development of U.S. public policy since the New Deal, with a special focus on the politics of social policy, civil rights, healthcare, and economic regulation. His first book, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941–*

*1972* (Princeton, 2009) chronicles the forgotten origins of affirmative action, tracing the advent of such policies to the partisan politics of "fair employment practices" in the 1940s. The book has received four awards (see the related mention, p. 2). He is now studying the origins and development of affirmative action in college admissions.

Chen was a visiting scholar at the American Bar Foundation in Chicago in 2008. From 2005 to 2007, he was a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research at the University of California (Berkeley and San Francisco). He was a faculty member in sociology and the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan before joining Northwestern and IPR.

### Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach

Associate Professor of Human Development and Social Policy  
PhD, Economics, Princeton University, 2002



LK Photos

Labor economist Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach studies education policy, child health, and food consumption. Her recent work has focused on public policy impact, especially on children. She has investigated changes in student performance and other outcomes resulting from classroom composition and class size, small-school and

charter-school reform policies, and school accountability policies, such as the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

In an innovative new study, she and her colleagues are examining the life paths of almost 12,000 children who were randomly assigned to kindergarten classrooms in the 1980s as part of the Tennessee Project STAR experiment.

Schanzenbach is a faculty research fellow at NBER and a visiting scholar at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. From 2002 to 2004, she was a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research at the University of California, Berkeley. Before arriving at Northwestern and IPR, she was a faculty member at the University of Chicago's Harris School.

### Kirabo Jackson

Assistant Professor of Human Development and Social Policy  
PhD, Economics, Harvard University, 2007



Courtesy of K. Jackson

A labor economist, Kirabo Jackson studies education and social policy issues. His recent work analyzes the role of peer learning in teacher effectiveness and how student demographics directly affect the distribution of teacher quality across schools. He is also involved in a number of projects to understand when and why certain policies that

reward teachers—or students—for student achievement improve student outcomes. Another research area involves the role of teacher-school "match quality" and its effects on student achievement. Preliminary findings show that how well a teacher fits with a certain school can be as important as teacher quality for some outcomes. Other projects involve looking at the effect of single-sex schooling on student outcomes and investigating how much of the benefits in attending a high-achievement school are directly due to the fact that such schools also provide high-quality peers.

A faculty research fellow at NBER, Jackson comes to Northwestern and IPR from Cornell University, where he was an assistant professor.



## New Faculty Fellows *(Continued from page 3)*

### Christine Percheski

Assistant Professor of Sociology  
PhD, Sociology, Princeton University, 2008



Sociologist Christine Percheski is interested in family demography, social inequality, health policy, and work and occupations. She studies the correlation between family characteristics, income inequality, and employment, with a particular focus on American women and families with children. She has investigated whether becoming

a father affects employment differently for married and unmarried men, as well as how employment patterns of new mothers vary by their partner status. In another project, she examined how the “child penalty” on women’s employment has changed across birth cohorts of professional women. She is currently working on a project to examine how complex family structures, children’s health insurance coverage, and healthcare use are linked, in addition to a project on changing patterns of income inequality among American women.

Before starting at Northwestern and IPR, Percheski was a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research for two years at Harvard University.

### Rachel Davis Mersey

Assistant Professor of Journalism  
PhD, Mass Communication, University of North Carolina, 2007



Rachel Davis Mersey’s work centers on publications’ relationships with their audiences. She employs both quantitative and qualitative methods in analyzing audience identities, as well as journalism’s impact on sense of community, civic participation, and social capital. Her recent book, *Can Journalism Be Saved? Rediscovering*

*America’s Appetite for News* (Praeger, 2010), presents a new theoretical framework—the identity-based model of journalism—for understanding individuals’ connections to media (see p. 8). She is also working with Dan Sullivan of the University of Minnesota to create a valid and reliable measure of the diversity of voices in the public sphere in the wake of the Federal Communications Commission’s decision to allow cross-ownership of newspapers and television stations in some markets.

Mersey joined Medill’s faculty in 2008 and previously was an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. She was also a features writer at *The Arizona Republic*.

## Faculty Recognition *(Continued from page 2)*

The Russell Sage Foundation awarded funding to political scientist and IPR associate **Benjamin Page** to study affluent Americans’ political preferences and beliefs about the common good.

Thanks to an NSF grant, adjunct faculty member **Michelle Reininger** is conducting a longitudinal study of the path to teaching. She is also examining the specific role of teacher preparation programs in this process with a grant from the Joyce Foundation.

The Smith Richardson Foundation is supporting a project by education economist **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** to assess the impact on students when schools that persistently fail are closed.

Developmental psychologist **Lauren Wakschlag** received a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to develop multilevel models of prenatal exposure to cigarettes using translational approaches.

### IPR Media Highlights

*National Geographic* and others reported on a published study led by anthropologist **Christopher Kuzawa** finding that male infants who were better fed in the first six months of life became taller, stronger, and reached puberty more quickly, thus confirming the “strong hand of the environment.”



Christopher Kuzawa

*The Wall Street Journal* picked up a working paper co-authored by economist **Jonathan Guryan** exploring whether a lottery-type savings program with cash incentives could be used to encourage low-income U.S. workers to save. *Newsweek* reported on a recent working paper co-authored by economist **David Figlio** examining a change in Florida’s accountability system for public

schools. It found that up to a third of teachers, usually the best ones, left schools that were now deemed as failing, reinforcing the gap between educational haves and have-nots. *BusinessWeek* reported on research using longitudinal data from the Three-City Study, led by developmental psychologist **Lindsay Chase-Lansdale**, showing that high-quality preschool programs are linked to a reduction in problem behavior for young children, particularly for boys and African Americans. *The New York Times* reported on new research, co-authored by education economist **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach**, showing that 20 years later, young adults who had better kindergarten teachers are more likely to have graduated from college and found better jobs with better pay.

For more press clips, visit [www.northwestern.edu/ipr/media/media.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/media/media.html).

## POLICY PERSPECTIVE

# Do Vouchers for Poor Children Hurt Public Schools?

By David Figlio

**T**he arguments for and against school vouchers are sometimes simple, sometimes complex, and always divisive.

Supporters of school vouchers suggest that increasing school choice benefits students and taxpayers. When public schools aren't forced to compete, they argue, they become inefficient. School choice, they continue, helps public schools to improve because they want to hold onto their students. Voucher advocates make another efficiency argument as well: Allowing students to choose their schools leads to better matches between students and schools, creating an environment in which students are more engaged and ready to learn.

Opponents counter that vouchers increase inequities. Private schools decide who is admitted, leading to an exodus of the best students from public to private schools and thereby worsening public school classes. Since local taxes fund public schools, they argue, school vouchers decrease public support for public schools when more students head to private schools. Many also worry that publicly funded private schools could dilute a basic rationale for public funding of schooling in the first place—ensuring that all citizens have basic citizenship skills and values. And, they add, school vouchers violate the separation of church and state because they can finance religious schools.

The arguments on both sides are particularly pointed when the students involved are low-income. Low-income families have fewer opportunities to change neighborhoods than middle-class families and are, therefore, often “trapped” in low-performing public schools, say voucher advocates. Voucher opponents argue that schools serving mainly low-income families are more fragile than middle-class ones. If a few key families use vouchers to leave a low-income public school, the school could reach a tipping point after which those “left behind” are worse off than before.

So which of these arguments best squares with reality? Let's look at the empirical evidence.

To start, the evidence on vouchers is sparse and relatively recent. But answers are beginning to emerge from a study of Florida's school voucher program that I am conducting with IPR graduate research assistant Cassandra Hart.

In 2002, Florida began offering vouchers worth nearly 90 percent of tuition and fees for a typical religious elementary school, or two-thirds of a religious high school, to children



David Figlio

in families below 185 percent of the federal poverty line (currently about \$41,000 for a family of four). Through this program, now called the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, income-eligible students can use these vouchers to attend any private school to which they are admitted, as long as they were enrolled in a Florida public school the year before they entered the program or are entering kindergarten or first grade. While the program is the country's largest, it is still small: Only around 30,000 students (representing 3 percent of eligible students in the state) are able to participate in the program.

Right now, the evidence from Florida should help allay some fears of voucher opponents. For one, we find that the students who use vouchers to leave public schools tend to be the lowest performing students in a school, rather than the other way around. This provides strong evidence that students using these means-tested vouchers are probably not good matches with their public schools, rather than the “key students and families” that voucher opponents worry will defect to the private sector. We also find that offering vouchers to low-income families helps improve, albeit modestly, the public schools that serve those students. A public school that faces high levels of voucher competition improves by about four percent of a standard deviation—about one-fifth of the difference between low-income and high-income students—more than a similar public school facing low levels of voucher competition. What about the students who leave for the private schools? We find their test scores go up by the same amount as they would have, had the students stayed in the public schools.

Despite these positive findings, our results suggest that school vouchers for low-income students are not a silver bullet. The public school test-score improvements are modest, not revolutionary. And many unknowns remain, like how the broader effects of school vouchers would change with a large-scale voucher program. For now, the available evidence suggests that the worst fears of voucher opponents have not been realized, and vouchers for low-income students appear to be more likely to help than to hurt—at least when the program is a relatively small one.

*David Figlio is Orrington Lunt Professor of Education and Social Policy and chair of IPR's Program on Education Policy.*

## IPR RESEARCH BRIEFS

### The Party Brand: Perk or Poison?

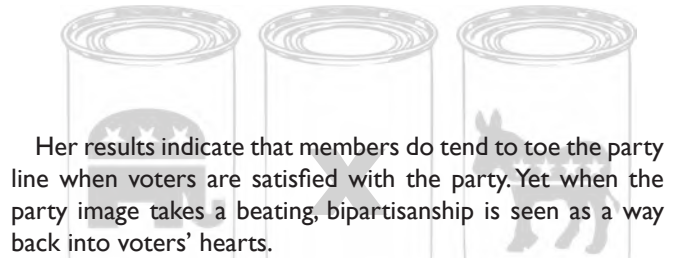


Laurel Harbridge

For members of Congress, being “in” with the party certainly has its perks, from garnering lucrative campaign funds to committee assignments. Using the party brand can also be a big help around election time—that is, if voters are happy with it. But what happens when they are not?

In a recent study, IPR political scientist **Laurel Harbridge** examines how party popularity affects legislative behavior. She finds that members of Congress add up the costs of party loyalty, and for some, the tally can lead to short-term, bipartisan behavior.

Most research on congressional behavior has focused on three fairly stable, long-term factors: party affiliation, constituent influence, and personal preferences. But parties’ approval ratings—often linked to satisfaction with the current president and his party—can shift overnight. To test responsiveness to rapid changes in party popularity, Harbridge examined the 98th to 109th Congresses, tracking quarterly bill co-sponsorship records for each member across the two-year terms. Bill co-sponsorship, she explained, is one way to observe bipartisan cooperation that is not always evident in floor votes.



Her results indicate that members do tend to toe the party line when voters are satisfied with the party. Yet when the party image takes a beating, bipartisanship is seen as a way back into voters’ hearts.

“Looking at the current campaign season, we haven’t seen an uptick in bipartisan votes, but many Democratic members running for re-election are downplaying their party identification and playing up their roles as independent thinkers,” Harbridge said. The struggle for these incumbent Democrats is to come up with policy alternatives to their Republican rivals while simultaneously distancing themselves from the party and President Obama.

“Looking back at the unpopular party brand that GOP candidates faced in 2006 and 2008, now the shoe is on the other foot for Democrats in 2010,” she continued, noting that members in more competitive races are particularly inclined to minimize party ties.

While many predict an increase in congressional gridlock after the midterm elections, Harbridge pointed out that bipartisan bill co-sponsorship rose during periods of divided government in the 1980s and 1990s. This is evidence, she said, that “sharply divided government can actually encourage bipartisan efforts.”

### Breastfeeding in the Fight Against Obesity



Molly Metzger and Thomas McDade

A new study has confirmed the use of a highly effective tool to help curb the nation’s childhood obesity epidemic: breastfeeding.

The study, by IPR anthropologist

**Thomas McDade** and graduate student **Molly Metzger**, shows that breastfed babies are on average 14 pounds lighter in adolescence when compared with their formula-fed siblings.

This within-family difference is a major step forward for obesity research, McDade explained, and holds important policy implications for programs, such as the federally funded Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), that involve obesity prevention, childhood nutrition, and lactation support for new mothers.

Although previous research had indicated that breastfeeding might be linked to adult body mass index, or BMI, an indicator of obesity, researchers had difficulty isolating breastfeeding from other family and environmental factors. It was too easily confounded with mother’s health, employment, and socioeconomic status, among others.

Using data from the nationally representative Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) on more than 1,000 adolescents, McDade and Metzger got around this issue by focusing on 488 sibling pairs, who were likely to share daily routines and eating habits as well as family background.

The findings, published in the *American Journal of Human Biology*, show that in addition to the significant weight difference between children who were breastfed and those who were not, breastfeeding significantly reduced the likelihood of reaching obesity in adolescence for all children in the PSID sample.

“We were surprised by the magnitude of these findings,” said Metzger, the study’s lead author. “We had actually expected the causal link between breastfeeding and obesity to weaken, not strengthen, under this more rigorous research design.”

Given that a full third of U.S. teens are overweight, with 15 percent qualifying as “obese,” the researchers conclude that encouraging breastfeeding is another important tool in the fight against childhood fat—one that should be included alongside the typical emphasis on better eating and exercise habits.

“I think it is important to support mothers who wish to breastfeed and not stigmatize those who don’t or can’t,” Metzger said. “There are a number of programs and policies, from workplace supports to the WIC nutrition program, that could be improved to better support the choice to breastfeed.”



## IPR RESEARCH BRIEFS

### Can Quotas Raise the Number of Women Legislators?



Lori Beaman

In most countries, women are free to vote and run for office, yet they make up only 19 percent of national legislators on average around the world—slightly more than in the United States, which ranks 73<sup>rd</sup> worldwide. Today, more than 100 countries have enacted affirmative action policies to boost female representation in government, but there is little evidence of how well they work and, in particular, how they affect voter attitudes.

Taking the case of West Bengal, India's fourth most populous state, IPR economist **Lori Beaman** and her colleagues studied the effects of a 1993 constitutional amendment requiring that women occupy a third of the leadership positions across all village councils in the state. West Bengal has a three-tiered electoral system in which citizens elect the members of a village council, who in turn elect a "pradhan," or village leader. Under the new law, one in three randomly selected pradhan positions would be "reserved" each election cycle, meaning that only women could run for pradhan in that village.

Because of this randomization, Beaman and her colleagues could compare how female candidates fared in villages that

had never had reserved seats to those with reserved seats in one or both of the 1998 and 2003 elections. The researchers measured men's and women's attitudes on the effectiveness of male and female leaders using an Implicit Association Test.

The study, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, confirms that the quotas do put women in office, at least in the medium term. It also found that female leaders elected under the quotas were just as effective, if not more so, than their male counterparts. Though Indian villagers still show a deep-rooted cultural preference for male leaders, their attitudes toward women leaders, and their effectiveness, became more positive after their village had a female pradhan elected to a mandated seat in both elections.

The results are the first to show that a public policy intervention of political affirmative action can work to lessen voter discrimination in a country with high levels of gender discrimination, Beaman said.

"Perhaps most striking was what took place in 2008," Beaman said. "In villages that had quotas in the 10 previous years, the number of elected women who ran in free elections doubled—from less than 5 percent to more than 10. So repeat exposure leads to higher voter opinions of women who hold office, thus paving the way for future generations."

### Live Fast, Die Young: Violent Death Among High-Risk Youth



Linda Teplin

Behavioral scientist and IPR associate **Linda Teplin** and her colleagues began following 1,829 high-risk youth locked in juvenile detention between 1995 and 1998 as part of the Northwestern Juvenile Project. As of this October, 102 were dead, with 62 of them losing their lives to a bullet—four times higher than the normal death rate among 15- to 19-year-olds.

In more than a dozen articles, the project has documented the youths' higher-than-average rates of alcohol and drug abuse, mental health disorders, unprotected sex, HIV/AIDS risk behaviors, and exposure to violent crime. Even so, Teplin was startled by their extremely high rate of gun-related death relative to the rest of the population.

"In most articles, mortality merits a one-line mention in the methods section," said Teplin, who is Owen L. Coon Professor of Psychiatry and the project's principal investigator. "Unfortunately, these death rates have led us to a new area of inquiry."

The project's first article on the topic appeared in *Pediatrics* in 2005. At that time, 65 youth in the sample had died, revealing large racial and sex disparities: 84 percent were African American or Hispanic. Though only 22 percent of those who died

were female, their mortality rate was eight times higher than that of young women in the general population.

So many more youth have died since that first published paper that the researchers are now expanding their analyses to examine how substance use and involvement in gangs and the drug economy affect the likelihood of early violent death. They are addressing a significant omission in the empirical literature because death certificates do not contain this information.

Preliminary analyses show that those youth who sell drugs are nearly five times more likely to die prematurely and violently. Gang involvement and alcohol abuse are also significant predictors.

"In general populations, we presume that these variables are important predictors, but we were surprised to see these effects in our participants, who have so many additional risk factors," Teplin said. "In terms of public health policy, we need to address issues like gun control, reduce income disparities, and provide community-based substance abuse and violence prevention programs."

The Northwestern Juvenile Project, housed in Feinberg School of Medicine's health disparities and public policy program, is the nation's largest epidemiological study of mental health needs and outcomes of delinquent youth. For more information, visit [www.psych-legal.northwestern.edu/about](http://www.psych-legal.northwestern.edu/about).

## Recently Published Faculty Books

### News at Work: Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance

by Pablo Boczkowski  
University of Chicago Press, 2010, 280 pages



Before news organizations posted their content online, people got the news in print or on TV and almost always outside of the workplace. But nowadays, instant access to a growing supply of stories on the Web leads many to keep a watchful eye on the headlines from their desks at work. This change in the amount of news available, as well as how it is consumed, has been coupled with an unexpected development in editorial

labor: rival news organizations can now keep tabs on—and imitate—the competition, resulting in a decrease in the diversity of the news. Peeking inside the newsrooms where journalists create stories and work settings where the public reads them, media, technology, and society researcher **Pablo Boczkowski**, an IPR associate, reveals how journalists contribute to the growing similarity of news—even though they dislike it—and why consumers acquiesce to a media system they find increasingly dissatisfying.

### Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the Rise of China

by Benjamin Page and Tao Xie  
Columbia University Press, 2010, 232 pages



It is widely believed that most Americans not only distrust but also despise China—a country whose unprecedented economic rise and growing military capabilities make it arguably the most challenging global threat to the United States. Yet IPR associate **Benjamin Page** and fellow political scientist Tao Xie take a fresh look at American attitudes toward China in their new book, *Living with the Dragon*, and find

that contrary to conventional wisdom, most Americans favor peaceful engagement with China. Carefully analyzing all available U.S. polls and surveys on a range of topics—including Chinese trade policies, workplace conditions, and human rights—the authors find that the public's views have also been surprisingly coherent and consistent, changing only in response to major events and new information. The book also includes discussion of public attitudes in relation to facts about China and in light of current U.S. debates on diplomacy and policy.

### Can Journalism Be Saved? Rediscovering America's Appetite for News

by Rachel Davis Mersey  
University of Chicago Press, 2010, 167 pages

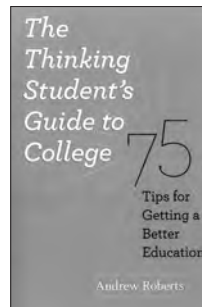


By some measures, it would seem that print journalism is dying. Journalism recently suffered one of its worst circulation declines in years. The *Rocky Mountain News* closed its doors—just after the Denver paper dominated the 2008 Associated Press awards and was lauded for its investigative work. Even the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are experiencing financial trouble. This book reviews the complicated challenge

facing journalism, tracing its 19th-century community-oriented origins and documenting the vast expansion of the news business via blogs and other Internet-enabled outlets, user-generated content, and news-like alternatives. Mass communication scholar **Rachel Davis Mersey** argues that a radical shift in mindset—striving to meet individual demands—will be necessary to save journalism.

### The Thinking Student's Guide to College: 75 Tips for Getting a Better Education

by Andrew Roberts  
University of Chicago Press, 2010, 184 pages



Each fall, thousands of eager freshmen descend on college campuses expecting the best education imaginable: inspiring classes taught by top-ranked professors, academic advisers who will guide them to a prestigious job or graduate school, and an environment where learning flourishes outside the classroom as much as in it. Yet most of these students soon learn that academic life is not quite what they imagined. Based on his

experiences as a student and a professor, political scientist and IPR associate **Andrew Roberts** offers 75 tips for incoming undergraduates “who want to leave college a better person than when they entered it.” Roberts shows how students can successfully navigate their way through college, from choosing a school to selecting classes, deciding on a major, interacting with faculty, and preparing for life after graduation.



## Workshop Dissects Aspects of 2008 Election

Midwest researchers meet to share work on voting, ideology, public opinion

It has been two years since the watershed 2008 election year, and social scientists are still busy studying its outcomes and implications. Several recent papers using data from the election were presented at the 2010 Chicago Area Political and Social Behavior Workshop at Northwestern University in late spring. The annual workshop is organized by IPR political scientist **James Druckman** and co-sponsored by IPR.

Presentations covered the origins of liberal-conservative ideology, public opinion and election reform, and how both voting laws and incarceration rates affect voter turnout. Three prominent scholars—Doris Graber, Benjamin Page, and John Zaller—also discussed the inspiration for and key contributions of their seminal works (*Processing Politics*, *The Rational Public*, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*) and offered guidance for future research.

### Party and Ideology

UCLA political scientist **John Zaller** started by defining the “problem of ideology” as the odd way in which political issues are structured around liberalism and conservatism. When issues are as disparate as healthcare, Iraq, global warming, and abortion, he questioned whether it was really a mark of sophistication for highly informed citizens to respond in an ideologically consistent fashion. Emphasizing the role of activists and other “intense policy demanders,” Zaller presented a new framework for understanding ideology that mirrors that of political parties. Just as a party platform is made up of myriad issues with little or no direct relation to one another, he said it is helpful to view ideologies as “a coalition of interests and values.” He said he hoped this interpretation of ideology would help researchers to move past an unproductive debate about whether citizens form “coherent” opinions and instead turn their attention to more useful questions, such as which values are behind political organization in America.

### Election Laws, Mobilization, and Turnout

Do all laws making it “easier” to vote increase turnout? Not necessarily, according to political scientist **Barry Burden** of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He and his colleagues compared states’ various voting laws and their effects on turnout for the 2008 presidential election. Their findings show that although early voting and no-excuse absentee voting have been by far the most dramatic and popular election reforms, they only appear to be effective when combined with same-day registration to create a “one-stop shopping” opportunity. Otherwise, early voting laws have the opposite effect, driving down mobilization efforts by parties,

public service organizations, friends, and families. The most effective route to raising voter turnout, Burden said, is through election-day registration, which capitalizes on election-day enthusiasm and eliminates the inconvenience and confusion of early registration cut-off dates.

### Who Supports Election Reform?

**Caroline Tolbert**, a University of Iowa political scientist, presented her study of public support for election reform using Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project survey data from the 2008 presidential election. One aspect of the study demonstrates public awareness of a power imbalance among the states. For example, voters in Iowa and New Hampshire—classified as “structural winners” because their states’ early

primaries are more influential in selecting party candidates—tend to oppose proposals for a national primary or rotating state primaries, while citizens in late-voting states tend to favor these reforms. Similarly, voters from small battleground states favor the electoral college, while “structural losers”



Benjamin Page, John Zaller, and Doris Graber discuss the contributions of their seminal works and set out future research directions.

from high-population states such as California show support for a national popular vote to directly elect the president. This research is some of the first to show that citizens can reason strategically about proposals to change election laws based on whether their own state would be a winner or loser.

### Spillover Effects of Incarceration

Of all eligible U.S. voters, 13 percent of black men and 6 percent of Latinos are unable to vote due to felon disenfranchisement laws. New research by Northwestern political scientist and IPR associate **Traci Burch** is uncovering additional “spillover” effects of incarceration in prisoners’ home neighborhoods. Burch matched neighborhoods in Charlotte, N.C., and Atlanta in the 2008 election and compared them to those where at least one resident was sent to prison before the election versus after. Her preliminary analyses suggest that imprisoning neighborhood residents has at least some impact on voter turnout. In some cases, she said, one incarceration can lead to the loss of as many as 11 votes in that community. One important implication, she explained, is that quality of democracy suffers in such cases because politicians tend to look where the votes are, possibly ignoring neighborhoods where large numbers of residents are moving in and out of prison.

To learn about next year’s workshop on May 6, please see [www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/workshops.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/workshops.html).

## New IPR Working Papers

### EDUCATION POLICY

#### **Competitive Effects of Means-Tested School Vouchers (WP-10-03)**

David Figlio and Cassandra Hart, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Figlio and Hart study the effects of private school competition on public school students' test scores in the wake of Florida's Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program, which offers scholarships to eligible low-income students to attend private schools. They find that students in schools that were exposed to a more competitive private school landscape after the introduction of the scholarship program saw greater improvements in their test scores than did students in schools that faced less competition. The degree of competition is characterized by several geocoded variables that capture students' ease of access to private schools and the variety of nearby private school options open to students. The findings are robust to the different variables used to define competition and are not an artifact of pre-policy trends—the degree of competition from nearby private schools matters only after the new program's announcement, which makes nearby private competitors more affordable for voucher-eligible students. The authors also test for several moderating factors, finding that schools expected to be most sensitive to competitive pressure see larger improvements in their test scores as a result of increased competition.

#### **School Accountability and Teacher Mobility (WP-10-06)**

Li Feng, Texas State University; David Figlio, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University; and Tim Sass, Florida State University

This paper presents the first causal evidence on how school accountability systems affect teacher labor markets. The researchers exploit a 2002 change in Florida's school accountability system, which exogenously shocked some schools to higher accountability grades and others to lower accountability grades. Using microdata from the universe of Florida public school teachers, they measure whether teachers in shocked schools are more or less likely to leave. They find strong evidence that accountability shocks influence the teacher labor market; specifically, teachers are more likely to leave schools that have been downward shocked—especially to the lowest grade—and they are less likely to leave schools that have been upward shocked. They also find that accountability shocks influence the distribution of the measured quality of teachers (in terms of value-added measures) who stay and leave their school, though the average differences are not large.

### POLITICS, INSTITUTIONS, AND PUBLIC POLICY

#### **Lawyers in National Policymaking (WP-10-01)**

Ann Southworth, University of California–Irvine; Anthony Paik, University of Iowa; and John Heinz, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Previous research on lawyers engaged in politics analyzed a sample of those who represented conservative or libertarian organizations in the late 1990s. The data examined here deal with organizations and lawyers drawn from the full range of American politics—right, left, and center—and focus on a set of policy initiatives in 2004 and 2005. The authors find that women were overrepresented among lawyers representing liberal activist organizations and strikingly underrepresented among those serving social conservatives. Lawyers for the latter were also much less likely to have prestigious academic credentials than were those serving liberal activists. Moreover, organizations speaking for social and religious conservatives had few ties to other interest groups in the measures used here: joint participation in litigation or in legislative testimony, overlap in boards of directors or advisers, and use of the same lobbying firm. Overall, the network of organizations was sparsely connected. There are, however, two sectors within the network where connections were dense: first, a cluster of social and religious conservatives, and second, a large set of businesses and trade associations. Unlike the social conservatives, however, the businesses are not only connected to each other but are well-integrated into the overall system, with many links that provide potential for communication to other sectors.

### **School Finance Reform and the Progressivity of State Taxes (WP-10-04)**

Nathan Anderson, Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois at Chicago; and Therese McGuire, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

One of the most important exogenous shocks to state government finances over the last 40 years has been court-ordered school finance reform (SFR). Previous studies have found that state expenditures on education became more redistributive in states with SFR. Theory would seem to indicate that this shock to the distribution of state expenditures across income groups should lead to a change in the redistributive nature of state tax systems. The researchers investigate whether states subject to SFR altered their tax systems to be more or less progressive. They find that SFR is associated with an increase in the progressivity of individual income taxes but no change in the progressivity of general sales taxes.

### **Tobin Meets Oates: Solidarity and the Optimal Fiscal Federal Structure (WP-10-05)**

Xavier Calsamiglia and Teresa Garcia-Milà, Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Barcelona Graduate School of Economics; and Therese McGuire, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

The authors explore the implications for the optimal degree of fiscal decentralization when people's preferences for goods and services, which classic treatments of fiscal federalism (Oates, 1972) place in the purview of local governments, exhibit specific egalitarianism (Tobin, 1970), or solidarity. They find that a system in which the central government provides a common minimum level of the publicly provided good, and local governments are allowed to use their own resources to provide an even higher local level, performs better from an efficiency perspective relative to all other systems analyzed for a relevant range of preferences over solidarity.

### **Policy Analysis with Incredible Certitude (WP-10-07)**

Charles F. Manski, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Analyses of public policy regularly express certitude about the consequences of alternative policy choices. Yet policy predictions often are fragile, with conclusions resting on critical unsupported assumptions or leaps of logic. Then the certitude of policy analysis is not credible. Manski develops a typology of incredible analytical practices and gives illustrative cases. He calls these practices conventional certitude, dueling certitudes, conflating science and advocacy, wishful extrapolation, illogical certitude, and media overreach.

## **QUANTITATIVE METHODS FOR POLICY RESEARCH (Q-CENTER)**

### **Analyzing Regression-Discontinuity Designs with Multiple Assignment Variables: A Comparative Study of Four Estimation Methods (WP-10-02)**

Vivian Wong, Peter Steiner, and Thomas D. Cook, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

In a traditional regression-discontinuity design (RDD), units are assigned to treatment on the basis of a cutoff score and a continuous assignment variable. The treatment effect is measured at a single cutoff location along the assignment variable. A more flexible conceptualization of RDD, however, allows researchers to examine effects along a multi-dimensional frontier using multiple assignment variables and cutoffs. This paper introduces the multivariate regression-discontinuity design (MRDD). For an MRDD with two assignment variables, the authors show that the overall treatment effect at the cutoff frontier can be decomposed into a weighted average of two univariate RDD effects and that the weights depend on the scaling of the assignment variables. The paper discusses four methods for estimating MRDD treatment effects—the frontier, centering, univariate, and instrumental variable approaches—and compares their relative performance in a Monte Carlo simulation study under different scenarios. Given correct model specifications, all four approaches estimate treatment effects without bias, but the instrumental variable approach has severe limitations in terms of more stringent required assumptions and reduced efficiency.



## From Chicago to Paris *(Continued from page 1)*

and discuss their research on a variety of cross-national social issues, including ethnic and racial inequalities, urban schools, and housing and segregation.

IPR Director **Fay Lomax Cook** noted in her introductory remarks that “social problems do not start and stop at nations’ frontiers.”

“We need to think about how to collaborate and conduct comparative research to better understand the causes behind—and solutions for—these pervasive problems that many countries face,” she commented.

The double-sided issue of housing and segregation, for example, appears in both Chicago’s public housing tenements and the high rises of Paris’ *banlieues*, or suburbs. Yet while there are similarities, each country also presents unique challenges. In particular, one of the great hurdles for French researchers is that they are prohibited from collecting data on a person’s race or ethnicity. France prohibits such data collection because it runs counter to the French republican principles of equality and indivisibility.

Northwestern University doctoral student **Elizabeth Onasch** presented her study that cataloged debate in the French media following a proposed immigration control bill amendment that would have allowed researchers to collect data on a person’s ethnic and racial identity. (This amendment was eventually struck down.) Some prominent social scientists in France have declared that issues of inequality, poverty, immigration, and others cannot be properly studied if they do not have adequate data to examine. OSC researcher **Mirna Safi** described some of the difficulties in looking at segregation and residential mobility of ethnic minorities in France. Yet, she noted, research trends are changing, better data are being collected, and there is more of a push to study inequality rather than just assimilation in French immigration studies.

On the other side, IPR sociologist **Lincoln Quillian**’s study was an example of how such data might improve understanding of the issues. He presented a population-level model of residential mobility, which includes census and housing data, to better understand racial and economic changes in cities. Preliminary results from tracking the mobility of white and black families between 1968 and 1993 reveal that “racial considerations strongly drive where people move,” he said. Quillian was one of the workshop’s organizers.

Another panel looked at urban schooling challenges. IPR education economist and workshop co-organizer **David Figlio** talked about Florida’s statewide voucher program, currently the largest in the nation. Results from his recent study indicate that test scores increased competition

for students, particularly in schools with greater financial incentives (from Title I funds) to keep low-income students enrolled. OSC education researcher **Agnès van Zanten** discussed school choice in France, which is more limited than in the United States. From interviews with 167 families in four Parisian suburbs, she painted a sociological portrait of middle-class parents, mindful of socioeconomic status and being in the “right school,” who employ informal “hot knowledge” networks to validate housing and school choices. OSC doctoral student **Mathieu Ichou** examined the perception that low-income immigrant parents in France “care less” about schooling for their children, finding they are as equally engaged in their children’s schooling as their middle-class counterparts.



*James Spillane and Lindsay Chase-Lansdale take part in a roundtable discussion, outlining their work to improve K-12 education practices and family outcomes.*

In the session considering schools and the meritocracy, OSC sociologist **Marie Duru-Bellat** looked at links between education and social cohesion in 27 European countries, finding “diploma inflation,” in which an increase in postsecondary degrees does not necessarily lead to better outcomes and can reflect social rigidity. IPR education researcher **James Rosenbaum** discussed the “college-for-all” movement and showed how well-intentioned high school counselors create “hidden stratification” by recommending college programs with “idealistic goals” and 80-percent failure rates to low-achieving students, while other more promising programs are rarely considered. Education researcher and IPR associate **James Spillane** reviewed his work on how organizational routines in schools are key mechanisms in school leaders’ attempts to re-couple administrative practice with the institutional environment and the core technical work of schools—instruction.

Moving to housing, segregation, and inequalities, OSC professor emeritus **Edmond Préteceille** pointed to his research showing that despite increased rates of immigration to France, there “has been no explosion of racial segregation.” Most French immigrants live in predominantly white areas, he noted, which is contrary to what the media report. OSC postdoctoral researcher **Bruno Cousin** discussed how upper-middle class Parisians are segregating themselves into enclaves on the west side of the city. IPR graduate research assistant **Hisham Petry** demonstrated an innovative spatial modeling software that he developed to explore the persistence of U.S. academic achievement gaps.

Looking at social capital, sociologist and IPR associate **John Hagan** discussed the 10 to 20 percent of U.S. school-aged children with a parent in prison during elementary school. This situation exerts a major intergenerational roadblock

*(Continued on page 13)*

## Preview of the Profession

### Undergraduates get early exposure to a research career

What does it mean to be a researcher? While classes and coursework might peak interest in graduate school or a future career in policy, students are often removed from day-to-day research activities, such as designing and implementing a study. And so the Summer Undergraduate Research Assistants Program at the Institute for Policy Research, now in its 13th year, brings students in to work directly with cutting-edge researchers on their projects.

"This is definitely the most intense [undergraduate] research experience that Northwestern provides," said **Jordan Fein**, a senior majoring in American studies and political science. "You get a real taste of what is going on in your field."

Students in the program work full-time on various research projects run by IPR faculty. Just this summer, 17 professors hosted a total of 21 students.

"Students learn that research is a dynamic process that differs from what is taught in textbooks," said program director **James Rosenbaum**, professor of education and social policy. "For example, they might start working with one model and then find that they either have to refine it or even consider alternate models."



*James Rosenbaum (front center) and IPR Director Fay Lomax Cook (back left) meet with students in IPR's Summer Undergraduate Research Assistants Program.*

P. Reese

Fein worked jointly with two IPR fellows—political scientist **James Druckman** on theories of campaign websites and energy politics and sociologist **Leslie McCall** on how beliefs about opportunity, inequality, and redistribution are reported in the news. Working one-on-one with each professor gave him skills and ideas that will be useful to his senior thesis, which will examine national discourse on healthcare reform, he said.

"Part of my thesis is going to be a media analysis of the healthcare debate," Fein explained, "and

I'm going to be doing some Druckman-style laboratory experiments with framing as well."

**Curie Lee**, a junior in social policy and political science, said working with the raw data was one of her favorite parts of the program. She helped education researcher and IPR associate **James Spillane** code and organize interviews for his Principal Policy and Practice (P3) Study, part of his broad body of work on distributed leadership in schools.

"Nobody has done this kind of research [on school leadership] before Jim, and that was really inspiring," said Lee. She hopes eventually to apply some of these big-picture lessons from the summer to a career in teaching and education policy.

## From Chicago to Paris *(Continued from page 12)*

that prevents these children from obtaining the type of higher education increasingly needed to succeed in America. In coding French teenagers' by the ethnicity of their last name, OSC researcher **Hugues Lagrange** was able to link information to education and criminal records for 4,000 young adolescents, finding that failed social integration was a likely reason behind the higher rates of criminal behavior among those with Sahel, and to a lesser extent North African, origins. Northwestern doctoral student **Robert Vargas** presented his analysis of peer interactions in three Mexican American adolescent groups, showing how status and power dependency helped insulate them from ridicule, teasing, and peer pressure.

In the session on social classes, mobility, and inequality, OSC sociologist **Louis Chauvel** presented a comparative study of U.S.-French awards of master's degrees between 1970 and 2008 in which he links returns on investments in education with generational and social mobility, finding a decline in returns on French "educational assets" as compared with the United States. IPR developmental psychologist

**Lindsay Chase-Lansdale** presented a new framework to simultaneously advance the education of low-income children and their parents, where early childhood education centers serve as the access point for promoting the parents' postsecondary attainment. OSC doctoral student **Jules Naudet** presented his comparative study of French-U.S. social mobility narratives, exploring how a person's ethnic, racial, class, and national identity can have an impact on his or her experience of social success.

"In discussing common issues such as these, we are finding new ways to look at and understand societal ills, which can contribute to a better understanding of how we might approach solving these problems in both our countries," said OSC sociologist **Marco Oberti**, a conference co-organizer. "We look forward to our continued transatlantic collaboration."

Plans are being made for another conference at Northwestern in June 2011 that will look at issues of inequality in the two countries.

For more information about the conference, please go to [www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/workshops/osc-ipr/2010workshop.htm](http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/workshops/osc-ipr/2010workshop.htm).

## Moving Research into Classrooms *(Continued from page 1)*

education researcher—**Thomas D. Cook** on quasi-experimentation and **Larry Hedges** on cluster-randomization, a type of randomized controlled trial (RCT).

Easton talked about his time heading the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which impressed upon him how researchers should strive to be more relevant and useful partners in improving education rather than just engrossed in investigating their “pet projects.” He pointed to the vital role that researchers, working together across a variety of disciplines, can play by conducting methodologically rigorous studies to help those “swimming in all of this data.”

“IES sponsors large-scale, very expensive impact evaluations—which are often RCTs and sometimes not,” Easton said. “I’m really pushing for those studies to grapple more aggressively with the interactions between the treatment and the specific conditions of the schools, the teachers, the students, and the community.”

### Methodological Workshops at IPR

Expanding researchers’ methodological repertoire is one way for IES to ensure that researchers are better able to answer complex questions and translate meaningful data into practical and effective solutions that can be scaled up and implemented, Hedges said.

Hedges, who is Board of Trustees Professor of Statistics and Social Policy, leads the IES Summer Institute on Cluster-Randomized Trials in Education, in which participants learn theoretical and practical skills for the design, implementation, and analysis of education field studies. Cluster-randomization is a key component of many education studies, which must account for the group effects of teachers and classrooms as well as individual gains in student achievement. Participants also practice data analysis with statistical software such as STATA and HLM and present a mock IES research proposal for studying the impact of an education intervention. Hedges and his Vanderbilt University colleagues Mark Lipsey and David Cordray have run these workshops each summer for the past four years, with the location alternating between the two universities. This summer 30 researchers from around the country took part in the two-week program from July 26 to August 6 at Northwestern.

This year, IES also provided support for the Workshop on Quasi-Experimental Design and Analysis in Education, run by Cook, who is Joan and Sarepta Harrison Chair in Ethics and Justice at Northwestern, and William Shadish of the University of California, Merced. Complementing the current interest

in RCTs in education, these workshops seek to improve the quality of quasi-experiments—needed when random assignment is not feasible or breaks down in the classroom setting. Cook and Shadish operated two weeklong sessions between August 2 and 13 at Northwestern, training 120 researchers. In all, more than 450 researchers have received training in the program since it first got underway in 2006 with funding from the Spencer Foundation.

### From Workshops to Postdocs

Both of these workshops train rising and mid-career researchers from universities, school districts, and research think tanks. But IES also sponsors several programs at IPR and Northwestern for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, including two grants for a program to train recent PhDs in education research methods. Northwestern was one of the first universities awarded an IES grant to start a postdoctoral training program, for which Hedges is principal investigator. To date, the multidisciplinary program has trained five fellows.

IES also recognizes outstanding graduate students, and this summer **Vivian Wong**, then an IPR graduate research assistant, was named the 2010 IES Outstanding Predoctoral Fellow for her work on quasi-experimentation (see p. 2).

“In general, the overall quality of education research has been rather deplorable,” said Cook, who mentored Wong. “Billions of dollars have been invested in education interventions, all too often based on unreliable or methodologically flawed studies. However, this new crop of talented, young researchers that we see in our workshops and graduate and postgraduate programs is a sign that we can improve the state of the art in

research—not just to run better studies, but to truly make a difference in our schools and our children’s lives.”

To find out more about the workshops held at IPR, see [www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/workshops.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/workshops.html).



*IPR graduate research assistant Elizabeth Tipton (l.) and IES postdoctoral fellow Christopher Rhoads help select the “random order” in which participants will present their mock research proposals at the RCT workshop.*

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## Lecture by Obama Economic Adviser *(Continued from page 16)*

then chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, happened also to be an expert on the Great Depression.) But in the absence of reliable data, they often had to put aside academic instincts and take a flying leap with available data or “best guesses,” some of which might not hold up under normal scholarly standards.

A case in point was the Obama administration’s initial forecast for unemployment under the stimulus. The forecast was taken from a paper by Romer, in which she used a widely accepted government-spending multiplier—her baseline number—to conclude that with the stimulus, unemployment would rise to just 8 percent, as opposed to 8.9 percent without it. But after the stimulus, when the unemployment rate climbed to an unexpected 10 percent, accusing fingers were pointed at the administration.

“Nobody remembers the whole point of the study was ‘What would be the difference in the unemployment rate?’ ” Goolsbee said, emphasizing both the necessity and somewhat arbitrary nature of such baseline predictions.

On the other hand, in dealing with the foreclosure crisis after the election, there was an enormous body of research on housing to draw upon. But most of the research was conducted with homeowners who were “underwater”—owing more on their mortgages than their houses were currently worth—by only 10 percent.

“Here, we were seeing some homeowners who were underwater by 30 to 40 percent,” Goolsbee said. No one had ever done research under such dire conditions.

So Goolsbee and his colleagues began calling real-estate economists around the country to see what evidence they had for why these foreclosures were happening: Were owners strategically defaulting because they were underwater? Or was it a dual-trigger effect, where the homeowner was underwater and struggling with an additional financial hardship, such as job loss or divorce, and couldn’t afford the mortgage payment?

Since the best available research indicated that in the past, homeowners engaged in very little strategic default—even those who were underwater continued to make payments—the policy became to make it affordable. So the Obama administration moved to find those situations where it could lower payments, he said.

Later, however, the same experts started to call back because they were seeing a rise in strategic defaults that kicked in when the homeowner was approximately 25 percent underwater. In response to this new evidence, Goolsbee said, they adjusted their policy and launched a second-wave effort to have banks write down loans.

### Moving Between Academia and Politics

The biggest transition for Goolsbee from academia to the “alternate universe” of the campaign and then the nation’s Capitol was coming to terms with how things actually work.

“I thought when I first joined the campaign, we’ll come up with some policy ideas, we’ll go tell David Axelrod, he’ll turn that into a message, and we’ll go out and sell it,” he quipped. “That’s not how it works, and that’s not how it works in the government, either.”

Goolsbee, who has advised Obama since his 2004 Senate campaign, likened his role to that of a NASCAR pit crew.

“You’re the guy coming over the wall with a gas can—you’re not driving,” he said, imitating the sounds of riveting. “You’re just getting the tire on there and hoping it doesn’t come off.”

He complimented the president for surrounding himself with well-trained PhD economists, including the head of the Congressional Budget Office (Peter Orszag), the head of the President’s National Economic Council (Lawrence Summers), and the Treasury Department’s second in command (Alan Krueger), among others. (Both Orszag and Summers announced recently they were leaving.)

But he also cautioned that while economic “grouphink” creates a common shorthand for discussing issues, it can lead to errors that are easily replicated from person to person. Thus, he said it is crucial to have an interdisciplinary team as well boards like PERAB, which bring in non-government perspectives to advise the president—especially on tangled issues like healthcare reform and financial regulation.

### A Call to Service

Calling Washington, D.C., an “idea desert,” Goolsbee noted that many academics doing amazing, nonpartisan research are not known inside the Beltway. Thus, he encouraged them to get on the “radar screen” of Capitol Hill policymakers and serve their nation if called upon.

“The government and American people have funded and supported [American universities] and contributed to their wide academic prestige,” he said. “And if you ever have the opportunity to explain or help understand what is going on, you should. You owe it to society.”

“And if you don’t,” he continued, “trust me—there a lot of people dumber than you that are willing to go out and push their ideas.”

*Austan Goolsbee is chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, chief economist of the President’s Economic Recovery Advisory Board, and on leave from the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business, where he is Gwinn Professor of Economics.*



*Presidential adviser Austan Goolsbee (l.), IPR Director Fay Lomax Cook, and Jay Walsh, Northwestern’s Vice President for Research*

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## Obama Economic Adviser Talks Recession and Research

Austan Goolsbee delivers as IPR's 2010 Distinguished Public Policy Lecturer

**Austan Goolsbee**, one of President Obama's top economic advisers, regaled a full-capacity crowd of more than 250 guests with accounts from the front lines of U.S. economic policymaking as IPR's Distinguished Public Policy Lecturer on April 26 at Northwestern University.

Speaking from his experience as chief economist of the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board (PERAB), as a long-standing economic adviser to President Obama, and as an academic, Goolsbee provided insights into his position at the crossroads of academia and policymaking, his relationship with the president, and the administration's initial response to the nation's worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

"Austan Goolsbee is one of the few scholars who has successfully bridged the worlds of academia and policymaking and managed to make important contributions in both arenas," said IPR Director **Fay Lomax Cook**, professor of human development and social policy.

### Using Research in Policymaking

While many see the worlds of academia and politics as vastly different, working on a political campaign is somewhat similar to academic life in that both offer at least "a little time to sit down and discuss big ideas," Goolsbee remarked.

But being in the government is a different story, he said. "There is no time to conduct research," he explained, so people have to take what is at hand.

Even so, Goolsbee said, his training as an academic proved invaluable—particularly in responding to the financial crisis.

For example, when the debate over the Troubled Asset Relief Program (or TARP, which ended in October) brought up the question of how much should be paid for the banks' toxic assets, Goolsbee noted, "I just happened to know three or four of the world's leading financial and banking experts."

After Obama won the presidency and began his transition to the White House, the financial crisis deepened, demanding hit-the-ground policymaking.

"During the transition, it was totally clear that the economy was going off a cliff," Goolsbee said, adding that gross domestic product (GDP) fell by more than 5 percent in the fourth quarter of 2008 and again in the first quarter of 2009, marking the country's worst back-to-back economic quarters in 65 years.

The administration was fortunate to have economists like Christina Romer on board, Goolsbee said. (Romer, who was



A. Malkani / North by Northwestern

*Austan Goolsbee discusses his role on Obama's economic recovery team and the transition from academia to politics.*

*(Continued on page 15)*