OUR MISSION

The Labor Education Service is the only educational program in the state specifically focused on the needs of Minnesota workers and their organizations. Our mission is to equip workers, union officials and labor organizations with the knowledge-based tools to protect and advance their rights and responsibilities in a changing global socio-economic environment. Through these efforts, we foster economic vitality, ethical relations and social justice in the workplace, at home and in the community.

Highlights

- LES served thousands of Minnesotans through our customized training, skills classes, media services and community programming.

- The Minnesota Union Leadership Program marked a milestone when we graduated our sixth cohort of participants.

- Workday Minnesota produced an in-depth report on the problem of wage theft for workers in the state.

- The curriculum developed for our award-winning project, Who Built Our Capitol?, inspired a group of middle school students to successfully lobby the Legislature for a plaque in the Capitol to commemorate the workers who constructed it.
Media Services

The media services of the Labor Education Service are unique among labor education programs. In 2016, LES continued its collaboration with labor and community groups to produce the labor news website, Workday Minnesota, and award-winning video in both long and short formats.

Videographers Randy Croce and Howard Kling shot and edited dozens of news videos for Workday Minnesota. In addition, they, along with staff member John See, produced specialized video programs for unions and other organizations.

Throughout the year, LES also convened Minnesota Labor Communicators, an informal network of people doing communications for unions and allied organizations.

In early 2016, Howard Kling traveled to Vietnam as part of a labor delegation to increase cooperation between U.S. and Vietnamese labor, resulting in a 14-minute video documenting the trip that was premiered at the annual United Association for Labor Education (UALE) conference.

Over the summer, LES staff did an extensive video project for the national convention of the American Postal Workers Union held in Orlando, Florida. They produced the opening video of the convention, and while in Orlando created 30 videos for Facebook and YouTube about convention issues. These videos included a series highlighting APWU’s successful campaign to halt outsourcing of postal services to Staples stores and a look at some of the emerging young worker leaders of the union.

LES media staff also provided audio-visual services for the annual convention of the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council at Fortune Bay and for the biennial convention of the Minnesota AFL-CIO in Duluth.

LES won six awards for video production and Workday Minnesota from the International Labor Communications Association. In May, Workday editor Barb Kucera was honored with the 2015 Media Award from the Labor and Employment Relations Association at its national convention in Minneapolis.

Who Built Our Capitol?

The Who Built Our Capitol? project and its impact continue to grow. Project director Randy Croce regularly adds historical discoveries to the website from ongoing project research and contributions from descendants of the statehouse builders. The site also features original articles and links related to the contemporary restoration and other news related to the Capitol.

In 2016, the Legislature passed a bill to honor the workers who built the Capitol with a plaque to be installed in the building. Owatonna middle school students initiated this commemoration through a petition campaign. The students were inspired by the Capitol project curriculum developed by their teacher, Jennifer Hansen, together with Cannon Falls teacher Melissa Klapperich, Eagan teacher Kimberly Hill and Randy Croce. Bill sponsors, Representative John Petersburg (R-Waseca) and Senator Vicki Jensen (DFL-Owatonna), invited the students to testify at legislative hearings, where they read from the WBOC documentary narration. The plaque will be dedicated in August 2017 in conjunction with the grand opening of the restored State Capitol building.

LES educates workers every day through Workday Minnesota, our website of labor news and resources.

While the Internet is flooded with information, Workday is one of the few places that offers on-the-ground reporting and thoughtful analysis of significant workplace issues, including jobs, trade, workforce training, worker rights, and health and safety.

In 2016, through articles and videos, Workday covered organizing efforts by retail janitors and airport workers, as well as campaigns around the state for earned sick and safe time and a $15 minimum wage. Workday chronicled walkouts by Twin Cities nurses, unionizing among faculty in higher education and mobilization by retirees concerned about their pensions.

Workday also provided perspective on legislative and legal debates around workplace rights. Our groundbreaking series on wage theft revealed a problem facing workers in a variety of industries, from construction to health care to the “gig economy.” (See “Wage Theft” on next page for more information).

Workday Minnesota is a special project sponsored by organizations that see the need to serve working men and women across the state in ways beyond the traditional classroom. The Workday project uses a website and social media to reach a variety of audiences.

Students testify at a legislative hearing in support of a plaque recognizing workers who built the Capitol. With them is their teacher Jennifer Hansen and Rep. John Petersburg, co-sponsor of the bill.
Wage Theft

In February, LES media staff published their months-long investigation of wage theft in Minnesota. The nine articles and eight videos posted to Workday Minnesota showed that wage theft “is larger and more widespread than most people realize,” spanning many economic sectors.

Wage theft can take many forms, from being denied overtime pay or being misclassified as an independent contractor to simply not being paid for weeks – sometimes months – of work. The series featured workers who had experienced wage theft and people working to address the problem.

The series was likely the most ambitious project LES has done for Workday. Media staff Randy Croce, Howard Kling and Barb Kucera teamed up with freelance writer Joey Getty and intern Justin Rostad to pore over government data and interview workers, industry leaders, union representatives, academics and state officials. John See devised a social media plan for the project.

The series – and a forum that LES sponsored in June – drew attention to the issue. Community media, the Star Tribune and Minnesota Public Radio picked up the story. The articles and videos were shared widely on social media. Unions, labor-management organizations and worker rights groups, energized to do more, formed a coalition that is working to find solutions.

Members include Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), the Greater Minnesota Workers Center, Centro Campesino, the Fair Contractors Foundation, the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, SEIU including Healthcare Minnesota, 284 and the State Council, LIUNA, the Minnesota, St. Paul and Minneapolis branches of the AFL-CIO and other individuals and organizations.

Customized Training

Our core teaching staff – Monica Bielski Boris, Amy Livingston and Russell Raczkowski – taught classes for unions in the areas of steward training, collective bargaining, and labor history. They also offered topical classes on immigration, political economy and diversity issues.

LES developed the Business Agent Skills Enhancement (BASE) program in partnership with the Minneapolis Building and Construction Trades Council to provide union staff with grounding in labor relations. The first cohort began classes in September and will graduate in May 2018. Participants meet monthly for a total of 54 hours of training over two years. Topics covered include labor history, labor law, union organizing, collective bargaining and contract administration.

“Unions 101” trainings offering labor history and an introduction to the labor movement were offered to apprentices for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Roofers, and Sprinkler Fitters as well as journeymen from the Painters. We are working to expand these trainings to other building trades training programs and to all unions seeking to introduce new members to the labor movement or to enhance the knowledge of more seasoned members.

Organizations that were served with customized trainings in 2016 included AFSCME, MAPE, National Association of Letter Carriers, OPEIU, Operating Engineers, Pipefitters, United Steelworkers and United Food & Commercial Workers, among others.

Minnesota Union Leadership Program

The sixth group of Minnesota Union Leadership Program (MULP) students completed the program in May of 2016. Meanwhile, MULP attracted one of its largest group of students (28) for the seventh cohort, which started in the fall of 2016 and will graduate in May of 2017.

Since 2010, MULP has been preparing workplace activists to take leadership in the labor movement. Students connect with members of diverse labor organizations in six sessions over eight months while being exposed to economics, labor history, worker struggles, organizing strategy and principles of leadership. The 2016 graduates of MULP characterized it as “invaluable,” “incredibly powerful,” and “an absolutely wonderful experience.”

Individual unions and other labor related organizations sponsor MULP student participants, who have gone on to a number of labor and civic leadership positions.

They include MULP graduate Mary Kunesh-Podein, elected to the Minnesota House in 2016.
On July 1, Monica Bielski Boris succeeded Barb Kucera as director of the Labor Education Service. Barb, who served for six years as director, returned to working full-time as a staff member and editor of the Workday Minnesota website.

Sharice McCain was elected Vice President of AFSCME Local 3800, a union representing clerical workers at the University of Minnesota. Sharice is leading the local’s internal organizing efforts.

Barb Kucera was elected to the executive board of the United Association for Labor Education (UALE) as the representative for the Midwest. Barb organized the UALE Midwest meeting in October and is coordinating the planning for the UALE national conference in Detroit, Michigan.

Howard Kling began his term as president of the International Labor Communications Association in January. Howard oversaw the hiring of new staff and coordinated ILCA’s annual media contest and awards ceremony. He is spearheading planning for ILCA’s 61st National Convention in St. Louis.

The longest serving member of the LES Advisory Committee, Barry Weiner, a retired business representative for the National Association of Letter Carriers, stepped down from the committee after many years of appreciated service and support.

## Updates

Monica Bielski Boris and Amy Livingston, in partnership with the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s East Central Area Labor Council, developed and implemented a training on creating a welcoming atmosphere for refugees. Students, workers, and St. Cloud community members, including members of local refugee communities, participated in a half-day training at St. Cloud State University in January 2016.

LES was proud to continue our co-sponsorship of Untold Stories, a series of community programs coordinated by The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library during labor history month in May. As part of the 2016 series, Barb Kucera moderated a panel on the U.S. Supreme Court case, Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association.

In collaboration with the Midwest Economic Policy Institute (MWEPI), Monica Bielski Boris co-authored a report on the status of unions in Minnesota and presented findings at the Minnesota State Fair.

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