



## AERA Coordinated Committee Meeting

### Committees Meet and Discuss Major Issues for Research

The American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Coordinated Committee Meeting—its opening scheduled to coincide with the Fourth Annual AERA *Brown* Lecture—took place October 19–20 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Bethesda, Maryland. More than 100 committee members, AERA officers, and AERA Council liaisons gathered for the event.

The committees—ranging from the Communications and Publications Committees to the Government Relations Committee and the Affirmative Action Council—met individually and, in many cases, in joint sessions to undertake their



Harry Holzer, Professor of Public Policy, Georgetown University.

respective projects, to consider cross-cutting issues, and to plan for the future. As the name Coordinated Committee suggests, this meeting is an annual opportunity for AERA committee members to meet and to consider the intellectual grounding of the Association, gather ideas, and discuss strategies for future directions.

In the tradition of previous years, committee members were challenged by invited speakers to think beyond individual agendas of work. Following a full

day of committee discussions on October 19, attendees convened for an informal plenary session on the connections between school and community. AERA President William F. Tate introduced guest speaker Clarence Stone, Research Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at George Washington University. Addressing the assembled scholars on “Public Policy and the Challenge of School-Community Alignment,” Stone emphasized that “education effectiveness is dependent on a close tie between home and community. What happens in the community happens in the schools.”

Drawing from his research on civic capacity, Stone described the alignment through which community development contributes to other social and school reforms. He sketched contrasting community images: suburban neighborhoods where Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) moms know how to work the system to get things done, and urban neighborhoods where parents sometimes transmit mixed signals about the value of education or are unsure how to navigate the system. Parental feelings of isolation and low self-esteem potentially lead to misalignment of values between home and school, he said in his initial introductory remarks.

The increased evidence of economic polarization in urban environments means that education reforms, to be successful, must be accompanied by social reforms. Stone cited community development projects in Philadelphia, neighborhood renewal efforts in Baltimore, and the Dudley Street Neighborhood in Boston as examples of local ventures that sow seeds of increased civic capacity. Such enterprises must be rooted in issues that the community cares about, that are

manageable, and on which the community can prevail. He emphasized that even small-scale successes set a community on a path of progress that can be celebrated and pursued.

Also connecting to the 2008 Annual Meeting theme, “Research on Schools, Neighborhoods, and Communities: Toward Civic Responsibility,” discussion



Clarence Stone, Research Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, George Washington University.  
(Photographs by Felice J. Levine)

continued at a breakfast plenary talk on October 20, delivered by Harry Holzer on “Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men.” Holzer, a labor economist and Professor of Public Policy at Georgetown University, focused on the impact of a low-wage labor market and the link between low skill levels and hiring practices.

Holzer provided an accessible overview of his and others’ research on these issues and the policy questions raised by the findings. He noted that, although there are individuals of all backgrounds who are disconnected from the labor market, the numbers are disproportionately high for young African American men. Significant

numbers of these young men are not in school and are not working or even looking for work—meaning in effect that they have dropped out of the labor market.

Despite statistics showing increased opportunities for all sectors of the labor market during a boom economy, recent surveys indicate that employment opportunities for the unskilled remain lower with each successive boom. Holzer discussed factors that drive these trends, based on labor market numbers, including a decline in real wages for the less educated in comparison with all other workers, a breakdown of family and community networks, highly segregated schools, and the negative effects of incarceration and the

fathering of children outside marriage. He noted that, seeing no pathways to success in their surroundings and facing severely negative consequences of early decisions, many young Black men continue to disconnect from school and work.

Holzer emphasized that policies to reverse such trends must begin at an early age, and he offered several suggestions: improve education and early opportunities; improve pathways and incentives to allow young people to return to the workforce; and deal with the disincentives of a criminal record, including strategies whereby fewer young men are imprisoned for nonviolent crimes. “The real threat to public safety is the barriers in place to

work,” Holzer said. “The cost of doing nothing is enormous. From an economic point of view, it makes no sense not to turn the present situation around.”

The Coordinated Committee Meeting concluded with a luncheon, also on October 20, during which representatives of each AERA standing committee reported back on discussions of “significant markers and milestones” in education research. Through these discussions and the reports, each committee contributed to examining the 2007 cross-cutting issue—“Innovation in Education Research”—that AERA President Tate has made a centerpiece of his presidential term.

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