Advancing Construction Industry Diversity: A Pilot Study of the East Central Area Building Trades Council

Robert Bruno, PhD, Director, Labor Education Program
Brandon Grant, Doctoral Candidate, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

BACKGROUND

Recognizing the importance of the construction trades and apprenticeship programs as a unique and unparalleled pathway into middle class job opportunities for non-college graduates, the Project for Middle Class Renewal in the Labor Education Program (LEP) at the University of Illinois' School of Labor and Employment Relations invited building trades' apprenticeship programs to participate in a pilot diversity study.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

In response to the request for participation in the study ten unionized building trades affiliated with the East Central Illinois Building Trades Council agreed to participate. No non-union apprenticeship program operated by the non-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) chose to participate. The ABC's non-participation however had no discernable impact on the study's findings. Studies and state and federal records indicate that non-union apprentice programs make up a miniscule number of the apprentice trades in Illinois (Bruno and Manzo 2016). Studies also reveal that in Illinois and in other states people of color and female participation in non-union programs is substantially lower than in joint apprenticeship training (JAT) programs. A national study found that 80 percent of female apprentices participated in union-sponsored programs, while nearly three-quarters of people of color apprentices enrolled in joint programs (Mulligan-Hamal et al. 2013).

Consequently, this study’s findings represent not only the exclusive records of the JAT programs, but almost certainly the conditions of the state’s only genuine and viable apprentice training programs. The importance of equal access to employment in the construction industry is underscored by both the estimated growth in employment opportunities and the challenge to recruiting enough skilled workers. Over the next decade, construction industry job growth is projected to expand by 12.4 percent in Illinois - twice the pace of the overall state economy (Bruno and Manzo 2016). But in a 2015 survey by the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC 2015), 64 percent of contractors in Illinois report difficulty in finding workers to fill these construction occupations and 36 percent expect it to become more difficult.

The need for equal access to employment in the construction industry is underscored by both the estimated growth in employment opportunities and the challenge to recruiting enough skilled workers. Over the next decade, construction industry job growth is projected to expand by 12.4 percent in Illinois - twice the pace of the overall state economy.

The importance of the construction trades and apprenticeship programs as a unique and unparalleled pathway into middle class job opportunities for non-college graduates inspired the Project for Middle Class Renewal in the Labor Education Program (LEP) at the University of Illinois' School of Labor and Employment Relations to invite building trades' apprenticeship programs to participate in a pilot diversity study.

The study, Advancing Construction Industry Diversity: A Pilot Study of the East Central Area Building Trades Council was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers.

In response to the request for participation in the study ten unionized building trades affiliated with the East Central Illinois Building Trade Council agreed to participate. No non-union apprenticeship program operated by the non-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) chose to participate.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

In response to the request for participation in the study ten unionized building trades affiliated with the East Central Illinois Building Trades Council agreed to participate. No non-union apprenticeship program operated by the non-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) chose to participate.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

In response to the request for participation in the study ten unionized building trades affiliated with the East Central Illinois Building Trades Council agreed to participate. No non-union apprenticeship program operated by the non-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) chose to participate.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

In response to the request for participation in the study ten unionized building trades affiliated with the East Central Illinois Building Trades Council agreed to participate. No non-union apprenticeship program operated by the non-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) chose to participate.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

In response to the request for participation in the study ten unionized building trades affiliated with the East Central Illinois Building Trades Council agreed to participate. No non-union apprenticeship program operated by the non-union Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) chose to participate.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.

The study was designed to determine not only levels of access and involvement in the apprentice building trades by minority and female workers, but also to recommend practices that would enhance inclusivity in the industry. The goal was to address the question of how to make the “apprentice-able” construction trades the preferred labor force for both white and non-white workers. While our study focused on the apprenticeship learning experience, we recognize that the employer bears heavy responsibility for employing a workforce that genuinely represents the diversity of the population. As the authors of a study on women in the trades bluntly state, the “construction work site is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. Construction contractors - the employers of record on construction sites - have the legal responsibility for increasing the numbers of women (and minorities) on the job and providing workplaces free of discrimination, harassment, and coercion” (Mittay, Thompson and Kelleher 2011). This study however does not examine employer hiring or recruitment practices.