SPEA Professor Contributes to European Union Research on Workplace Diversity

With political, social, economic, and technological changes reshaping nations in the European Union (EU), growing attention is being paid to the changing demographics in the workforce and the implications that a more diverse workforce might hold for public policy and public sector management issues in these countries. IUB's Lois R. Wise, a professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), has been active this past year in contributing to an understanding of such issues, meeting several times with international researchers concerned with workplace diversity issues. Wise's research and teaching interests are in the broad area of employment policies and practices, especially in the public sector, and on civil service management reforms. Her studies focused on Sweden have earned her several prestigious awards from the Swedish government.

In February, Wise attended a workshop entitled "Transforming New Public Management" as a discussant at SCANCOR's (the Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research) research base at Stanford University. The workshop examined civil service reforms in four countries—Australia, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden—from a transformative perspective within the framework of the New Public Management model that is being implemented in these different national contexts.

On June 13–15 in Brussels, Belgium, Wise co-organized, with Gabrielle Fagerlind and Kenneth Abrahamsson, an international interdisciplinary workshop, “Workplace Diversity: A Research Perspective on Policy and Practice,” sponsored by the Swedish National Institute for Working Life and the Swedish Council for Work Life Research. It was one of 50 workshops held under Swedish sponsorship in preparation for the Work Life Conference in January 22–25, 2001, in Malmö, Sweden. The workshop's focus was subsequently adopted as one of the four major themes of the upcoming conference. It is an EU Presidency conference, forming an official part of Sweden's assumption of the EU presidency in January 2001, and it signifies Sweden's intention to emphasize EU workplace issues. Wise will participate in a policy roundtable with top government officials.

At the Brussels workshop, Wise, in collaboration with SPEA colleague Mary Tschirhart, presented a paper, "What Diversity Research Tells Us about Heterogeneity and Work Performance," stating that an analysis of empirical studies thus far is inconclusive about the consequences of diversity on performance effectiveness versus performance efficiency. The workshop included a paper by another SPEA professor, David Audretsch, entitled "Diversity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship," which stresses diversity as an increasingly important management strategy. SPEA doctoral student Adam Lederer attended the workshop as an observer.

At the World Congress of the International Political Science Association held August 1–5 in Quebec, Canada, Wise organized and chaired the Public Policy and Administration research panel. She co-presented a paper, "An Active Administrative Policy—Presumptions and Practice: The Case of Norway, Sweden, and the U.S.,” with Tom Christensen (University of Oslo) and Per Lægreid (University of Bergen), continued on page 36
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Standing on a bridge in Bruges, Belgium, are SPEA’s Mary Tschirhart (left) with Nadia Rubai-Barrett from the University of New Mexico—Las Cruces and Charmine Härtel of the University of Queensland, Australia.

her SCANCOR colleagues. She also chaired the roundtable session, “Study of Development of the Discipline: Policy Analysis and Administrative Science.”

In conjunction with her ongoing international research on workplace diversity, Wise also teaches an undergraduate course, “Managing Workforce Diversity” in which she introduces basic concepts of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. In addition, she says student teams have to “develop case studies of a real organization that deals with or fails to manage a particular issue related to diversity in the workforce, assess the extent to which that diversity benefits or hampers organizational performance,” and then make recommendations to management. “It is managers themselves who must decide how to accommodate real differences among the members of their organizations,” she states in the course syllabus, and her hope is that her future student-managers will be able to “integrate an understanding of workforce diversity into their management style and professional behavior.”

—RMN