

Apprenticeship and Training Department
Written by: Mike White

Ironworkers and the National Labor College

Recognizing the importance of encouraging Iron Workers to continue their education, General President Hunt recently signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the National Labor College (NLC), George Meany Campus. These MOUs will facilitate the process for Iron Workers to pursue two different bachelor degree programs through the NLC. Continuing education through the NLC is not new to the Iron Workers. Over the past few years a number of Iron Workers have completed their bachelor degrees through the NLC. The NLC is now offering a new degree program, and these MOUs will help to provide our members with more alternatives for using their apprenticeship program to earn a bachelor's degree.

The fundamental mission of the National Labor College is to serve the higher education needs and desires of working men and women and their union representatives. As the NLC grows and develops to accommodate changing circumstances and provide greater opportunities, these two central goals remain consistent – bringing higher education to workers and preparing union representatives for the challenge of leadership in a global economy.

The first degree program is the Bachelor of Arts (BA). This program is a flexible, largely external program that enables students to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree while continuing their trade union work. It recognizes the educational value of the union experience that active officers and staff gain over the years, and credit is awarded for the learning which this experience has generated. Iron Workers pursuing this degree are able to major in areas such as labor studies, labor education, labor history, etc. The BA degree allows the students to receive credit for their apprenticeship program, courses taken during the annual

Ironworker Instructor Training Program, military training, life experiences, etc. The curriculum revolves around six fields of labor study which enable students to relate their day-to-day activities in the trade union movement to general developments in the American economic, social, and political arenas.

The other degree of interest to Iron Workers is the Bachelor of Technical/Professional Studies (BTPS) which is a new degree program. Working with union partners such as the Iron Workers, this new degree program provides union members who have participated in challenging apprenticeships and training programs with online (Internet) access to the courses needed to earn a college degree. Like the NLC Bachelor of Arts degree program, the BTPS program offers a high degree of flexibility. Coursework is done online – with easy-to-navigate instruction. Through their apprenticeship program, online courses and structured internships approved by the local union, Iron Workers can complete their bachelor's degree and never leave their local union or home computer.

The Iron Workers have been working closely with the NLC for many years. Each year during the annual Ironworker Instructor Training Program faculty members from the NLC teach courses for our instructors. This year the annual program will be held at the University of San Diego in July and the NLC will be participating. The NLC will be offering one of their courses and will also conduct a special large-group orientation.

One of the courses required for the BA degree is "Introduction to Labor Studies" and will be offered to instructors attending the program in San Diego. This course surveys various labor studies topics. Subject matter includes the role of labor in the economy, a brief history of American unions, internal union structure and management, labor legislation, collective bargaining, the changing labor force, the union status of minorities and women, theories of the labor movement and current labor issues. This course will be offered July 15-16 just

prior to the beginning of the main program so that participants can then enroll in other courses the next week.

New for the annual Ironworker Instructor Training Program this year will be a special orientation session offered by the NLC. The orientation session is entitled "Earn College Credit: Introduction to the National Labor College." This session will be held on Sunday morning, July 17. The objective of this session is to orient instructors to the two degree programs so that they can carry this information back to their local unions to share with other instructors and their apprentices. Those attending the orientation will receive a set of materials to help Iron Workers continue their education and pursue their bachelor's degree.

For more information on these degree programs and the National Labor College, go their website at www.nationallaborcollege.edu. In the coming months the Apprenticeship and Training Department will be sending more information on these two degree programs to the local unions.