

## **ILR's Employment and Disability Institute wins \$4M grant**

Cornell University

What kind of manager is most effective at implementing disability policy? Can organizations help people with disabilities feel more engaged and fully utilized at work? How can employers be better equipped to recruit and retain people with disabilities, including returning veterans?

These are some of the questions that the Employment and Disability Institute (EDI), along with other ILR School and external partners, will explore over the next five years, funded by a \$4 million grant from the Department of Education National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

"We'd like to see more people with disabilities being hired and retained, more being able to advance in their careers, and fewer being disparately affected by layoffs," says Susanne Bruyère, ILR School associate dean of outreach and EDI director, as some of the specific employment outcomes the study's findings will inform and facilitate. "Often, people with disabilities can be marginalized when there's an economic crunch."

The study's 13 research projects include focus groups and surveys with human resources executives, as well as in-depth analysis of employer practices with private and public sector organizations.

Several projects will focus on how compensation affects employees with disabilities. Kevin Hallock, director of ILR's Institute for Compensation Studies and who is leading this segment, said he hopes to learn more about the differences in compensation for people with and without disabilities, something that has never been done before.

Lisa Nishii, ILR assistant professor of human resources, will lead work with employers to take a closer look at how culture, policies and practices, leadership and work group dynamics affect the employment experiences of people with disabilities, she said.

"In a previous Department of Labor study, 75 percent of managers said they weren't aware of disability policies, even though their organizations had these in place. We hope to learn more about the discrepancies between espoused and enacted policy and the obstacles that affect awareness and implementation of policy," Nishii said.

Research and outreach activities will also target rehabilitation agency providers, people with disabilities and their families, disability advocates, other researchers, policymakers and the media.

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Bringing together the rehabilitation and employment communities is critical to the study's success, said Judy Young, EDI assistant director of training and development. ILR's connections and established relationships in both communities were a competitive advantage that helped secure the grant.

"Our prior research shows that employment participation rates for Americans with disabilities are approximately half that of their non-disabled peers (40 percent compared to 80 percent)," Young said. "With this study, we're looking at all the stakeholders who can contribute to increasing these workforce participation rates and who have a say in whether a person with a disability will be successful at work."

Bruyère said an online tool that will help employers assess their effectiveness in recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities will be developed, along with a "significant outreach effort" to ensure employers have ready access to information on best practices.

Nishii hopes that besides learning more about the factors that affect people with disabilities after they're hired, greater insight will be gained about broader diversity and diversity policy issues.

Partners in the project are: the EDI; Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies; Institute for Compensation Studies; ILR Executive Education and Human Capital Development group; e-Cornell; Conference Board; Society for Human Resource Management; National Federation of Independent Business and Disability Management Employers' Coalition.

*Joe Zappala is ILR School assistant dean for communications and marketing.*

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