KALAMAZOO, Mich. – Rigorous research can and should play a critical role in developing and implementing U.S. employment and training policy. This is the message emphasized in a new book from an author who, as a key player in the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), participated in over two decades of policy development designed to facilitate the return to work of unemployed workers.

In *Solving the Reemployment Puzzle: From Research to Policy* (W.E. Upjohn Institute 2010), Stephen A. Wandner provides an insider’s view on the process by which workforce development laws and policies were developed as a result of experimental and nonexperimental initiatives undertaken by the USDOL and its Employment and Training Administration. Focusing mainly on eight social science experiments— the “UI Experiments,” as they are now known, Wandner provides insightful analysis of the entire processes involved in these demonstration projects, including experiment initiation, implementation, and evaluation; policy development; legislative enactment; program development; and program implementation.

In doing so, he demonstrates that rigorous research can impact employment policy and that such research has had a positive effect on the U.S. labor force in terms of returning dislocated workers to the labor force. Wandner also reveals how the political climate can influence public policy, citing how research results were used (or not) during both the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations.
In addition, Wandner describes programs that work (e.g., comprehensive job search assistance, self-employment assistance, targeted reemployment bonuses), programs that do not work or are unproven (e.g., consolidating and block-granting employment and training programs, personal reemployment accounts, career advancement accounts), and existing programs that could be improved (e.g., Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services, self-employment assistance, work sharing). He also discusses targeting employment services, funding for the federal workforce system, and areas that, he feels, would benefit from more research.

“Stephen Wandner offers a comprehensive and persuasive analysis of the successes and failures of U.S. policies to get the unemployed back to work. He tells two stories. The first is straightforward and first-rate social science analysis. The second is an eye-opening and often discouraging tale of reliable research findings that are sometimes unheeded or willfully distorted.”

–Gary Burtless, Senior Fellow, the Brookings Institution

“Anyone interested in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of contemporary labor market programs—and the politics that surround them—will want to consult this comprehensive and thoughtful volume. I plan to recommend it to my students. What else can I say?”

–Douglas J. Besharov, Professor, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland

“As the political tides ebb and flow, Stephen Wandner remains at the heart of American workforce policy—he serves as not just the institutional memory of the Employment and Training Administration, but its conscience as well. This book traces decades’ worth of research and experimentation on reemployment. It is scrupulously objective, painstakingly thorough, and (if you have the right attitude about the application of intellectual honesty to making America greater) rather thrilling.”

–John D. Donahue, Harvard Kennedy School; former Assistant Secretary of Labor

“Steve Wandner shares his play-by-play analysis of just how and where rigorous research succeeded in driving policy and, importantly, where it did not, and where it was suppressed or badly misused. Solving the Reemployment Puzzle should be read by every current—and would-be—researcher and policymaker. It’s a great read.”

–Christopher T. King, Director, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, University of Texas at Austin

“This is a rich, thoughtful, and highly readable story about real-life social experimentation—what was done, what was learned, and what was and wasn’t used in government. It will be of great value to social scientists and employment policy experts. It should have a permanent place in the literature of applied social science.”


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