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Amanda ReCupido  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## IWU to hold Living Wage Panel

September 19, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - IWU will host a discussion panel, "The Benefits and Costs of a Living Wage in Central Illinois" on Wednesday, Sept. 20, at 7:00 p.m. in Beckman Auditorium of The Ames Library, 1 Ames Plaza, in Bloomington.

The event, which is free and open to the public, will include panelists Todd Kumler, a senior economics and math major; Jean Pretz, assistant professor of psychology; Steven Purcell, alderman for Bloomington's Ward 7; and Steve Stockton, mayor of Bloomington.

Kumler, who first became interested in the idea of poverty reduction while studying at the London School of Economics, explains how the aim of the panel is to educate the public about the living wage, an issue of which three-fourths of Bloomington-Normal is projected to be in favor. If implemented, a living wage would effect "specific businesses...mostly the Coliseum," Kumler said.

The event is related to Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America*, a part of IWU's 2006 Summer Reading Program. Ehrenreich spoke at the University's President's Convocation on Sept. 6 and held both a discussion session and book signing that same day. The book is an account of Ehrenreich's undercover experiences living on minimum wage in various cities throughout the country. In her investigation, she discovered the mentally and physically exhausting efforts of low-wage workers and the extent to which this group of people is overlooked.

The living wage is an hourly wage that is established in order to maintain a basic standard of living in a given community. The CIOP (Central Illinois Organizing Project) calculated a living wage rate for Bloomington-Normal based on the hourly wage necessary to keep a standard one-bedroom apartment and not exceed 30% income. This rate is \$8.58 per hour.

Underemployment is defined as employment that is limited through either minimum wage or scarce hours, or often, a combination of the two. Living wage seeks to remedy the problem of underemployment in Central Illinois, and in effect, diminish the level of poverty. At the current Illinois minimum wage rate (\$6.50), a worker in Bloomington-Normal must still work at least 53 hours to afford the same standard one-bedroom apartment.

For additional information, contact Carolyn Nadeau, coordinator of first-year advising and professor of Hispanic Studies, at (309) 556-3332.

Contact: Amanda ReCupido, (309) 556-3181