



Hard evidence on soft skills	3	Value-added measures of teachers: Research and policy	21
Year Up: Providing a pathway from poverty to a professional career for urban young adults	9	The long-term effects of teachers	21
How does Year Up measure up?	13	Effects of value-added policies	23
Response from the author	18	Use of value added in teacher policy measures	25

*I am very happy to introduce this issue of Focus, which is centered on the theme of building human capital for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, one of IRP’s major research themes for the next two years (see <http://www.irk.wisc.edu/research/humancapital.htm>). Now almost four years after the end of the Great Recession, hiring and job quality are both far from a full recovery, especially for low-skill younger workers. Because we believe that the answer to poverty for non-disabled adults and their children lies in a good steady job with decent wages and long-term prospects for advancement, we are especially interested in how to improve job market outcomes for poor youth and adults.*

*We lead off with a summary of the Robert J. Lampman Memorial Lecture given by James Heckman last spring. James discusses personality psychology, a new point of contact between the fields of economics and psychology. He argues that individual personality traits, sometimes called “soft skills,” are predictors of success in many areas of economic and social life, including earnings outcomes. Individual variation in these skills is an important source of inequality. James details the ways that economists can both take from and contribute to personality psychology in order to better examine and address the sources of poverty.*

*Next is an article by Gerald Chertavian, which provides a real-life example of the importance of soft skills. The piece is based on the annual IRP New Perspectives in Social Policy Seminar delivered by Gerald last fall, with Carolyn Heinrich serving as the respondent. His is the first in a set of articles about Year Up, a one-year intensive training program that he founded. Year Up provides low-income young adults with a combination of technical and professional (or soft) skill development, college credits, and corporate internships. He describes the success of the program to date, and strategies to improve, expand, and replicate its results across the nation.*

*The Year Up article is followed by a summary of the seminar response by Carolyn Heinrich, co-organizer of IRP’s Building Human Capital and Economic Potential project. Carolyn applauds the program’s success, but also cautions about the difficulties of going to scale and replicating results in different locations. Gerald in return makes a constructive reply to Carolyn’s remarks.*

*We close the issue with a summary of a wonderful panel on the value added of good teaching organized by IRP Affiliate Robert Moffitt as part of the IRP 2012 Summer Research Workshop. In their presentations, Raj Chetty, Eric Hanushek, and Jesse Rothstein reviewed research, policy, and practice in using value-added measures to improve educational outcomes, and perhaps labor market outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children.*

*Another resource for those interested in reducing the effects of poverty on the next generation is IRP Associate Director Katherine Magnuson’s recent webinar on early childhood interventions for low-income children, in which she summarizes the state of research and practice in this crucial policy arena. Rather than*

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including a summary of her webinar in this issue of Focus, we have posted her presentation on our website so that you can access it directly (visit <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/media/webinars.htm> or go to our home page and click on the IRP Webinars link in the left-hand column).

As always, IRP is on the lookout for good opportunities to stimulate research, train young researchers, analyze policy, and improve program performance and practice to better the lot of the poor. We welcome any ideas you may have that will help us to achieve these goals.

—Timothy M. Smeeding, IRP Director

### Digital Media Resources at IRP

#### Webinar Series

IRP has established a new series of interactive online seminars designed to more broadly disseminate current research on poverty and social inequality in the United States. <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/media/webinars.htm>

#### IRP Podcasts

Also new, IRP offers brief discussions of poverty issues for nonspecialist audiences, posted monthly. <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/media/podcasts.htm>

#### Video Archives

Videos of past IRP events are now archived online. <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/newsevents/videos.htm>

#### Social Media

IRP is on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/irpwisc>) and on Twitter ([https://twitter.com/irp\\_uw](https://twitter.com/irp_uw)).

#### Poverty Dispatch

IRP also compiles and emails weekly poverty-related news links. <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/dispatch/>

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The purpose of *Focus* is to provide coverage of poverty-related research, events, and issues, and to acquaint a large audience with the work of the Institute by means of short essays on selected pieces of research. Full texts of Discussion Papers and Special Reports are available on the IRP Web site.

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