IPA Staff Profile:

David A. Joens

Dave Joens likes to talk about "practitioners" — those people actively engaged in Illinois politics and government. Much of Joens' work as the assistant director of the Illinois Legislative Studies Center is designed to inform and enlighten the practitioners of politics in Illinois. So his work is a mixture of scholarship, public service, and applied research.

He is technically known as an "academic professional" — not a faculty member, but a professional staff member with a particular area of expertise. He is especially proud of his work on the *Almanac of Illinois Politics* that the Institute for Public Affairs publishes every other year. That popular 400-page volume includes information about all state legislators, their voting records, the makeup of their districts, their campaign contributors, as well as historic information about votes for Illinois governors and county-by-county information.

Joens and others painstakingly spend months gathering information for the *Almanac* so it can be published in a timely manner. "We gather everything and check and double check everything," he says. "Very few states have something like this set up. People use it."

Joens, who has almost completed his master's degree in history, is a former newspaper editor and former press secretary for the Illinois Senate Democratic staff. He uses his considerable writing talent in many ways.

He not only plays the leading role with the *Almanac*, but he also writes and produces *The Cook-Witter Report* for a highly regarded Springfield lobbying firm; writes "The Illinois Political Journal," a weekly public radio show about Illinois history and politics; and teaches undergraduate students.

Joens has a passion for history. He is working on a paper on Illinois' first black state legislator, Representative John W.E. Thomas, who was born a slave in Alabama, moved to Chicago in 1869, and elected to the Illinois legislature in 1876. "Nobody seems to know about him," Joens says, adding that he hopes to turn his research into a book. The 100th anniversary of Thomas's death occurs in December 1999.

Joens will receive his master's in history soon and plans to pursue a Ph.D. after that.

Besides having his own personal interests, Joens is widely regarded as a team player in the Institute. He works with radio station WUIS/WIPA on the weekly history piece, with *Illinois Issues* and Institute Publications in publishing books and other materials, and was producer of Professor Jack Van Der Slik's long-running television program produced at UIS's Television Office.

Joens believes having an Institute that blends media units with scholarly work is unique and a major asset for the university.