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NEWS RELEASE

**AUTHOR, SCHOLAR, FATHER: MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ
 ON THE DIFFERENCE DISABILITY LAW MAKES**

DAYTON — When Michael Bérubé talks about the rights of the disabled and how they relate to civil rights and citizenship, he's not just an academic exploring a field of interest. He's a dad, considering American society as it relates to his son Jamie, who has Down syndrome.

Bérubé, professor of English and director of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will address "Disability and the 'Difference' it Makes" at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 31, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom at the University of Dayton.

Sponsored by the 2000-2001 Distinguished Speakers Series, his talk is also a part of Disabilities Awareness Week on campus. Admission is free and open to the public.

"Disability law is quite recent, and there are different understandings about its provisions," Bérubé said. "One of the interesting things about disability law is that potentially it is the most sweeping and universal of the civil rights laws, at least in theory. In practice, the courts have backed down."

In several instances, American courts have interpreted disability employment laws as not applying to those with "easily correctable" conditions, such as a man with hypertension who was refused a position as a trucker and twin sisters who were not allowed to take an airline pilot's test because they had to wear glasses to meet the vision requirements.

"It's a 'Catch 22,'" Bérubé said. "They were too disabled for employment but not so

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disabled as to be covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. It's an extraordinary thing."

Bérubé is still garnering praise for his 1996 book, *Life as We Know It: A Father, a Family and an Exceptional Child* (Pantheon Books), an account of raising a child with disabilities as well as a social critique of disability issues. Issued in paperback in 1998, it is "an astonishingly good book, important, literate and ferociously articulated," according to an Oct. 27, 1996, review in the *New York Times*.

Bérubé is also the author of the books *Higher Education Under Fire: Politics, Economics and the Crisis of the Humanities* and *The Employment of English: Theory Jobs and the Future of Literary Studies*.

From singers and dancers with disabilities to panel discussions and faculty exchanges, the activities for Disabilities Awareness Week at UD are designed to raise public awareness and understanding of people with disabilities and the contributions they make to the communities in which they live and serve.

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For media interviews with **Michael Bérubé**, call him at (217) 244-6258 or reach him by e-mail at m-berube@uiuc.edu.