Biennial Report: Connecting Data to Public Interests

2014 - 2015 Report
A letter from the IIR Executive Director

This is an exciting time at the IIR. As we begin another chapter in our efforts to tell the story of immigrants and their contributions to the United States, this report highlights our accomplishments and impact from our work during 2014 and 2015. More than that— it shares our vision.

I took up the mantle of the Executive Director in November 2015, working alongside our Director, Dr. James C. Witte. My own story reflects the importance of the work we do. I was born in Bogotá, Colombia and came to the U.S. with my parents, later earning degrees in international business and organizational leadership. I joined the federal workforce, gaining seven years of experience as a political and economic analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense. Later, I lived as an expatriate in Germany, learning German and continuing my education. Over this period I encountered many immigrants, like me, striving to develop skills and cultivate meaningful lives and contribute in their new home. Because of their efforts and their contributions, it is my goal to ensure that the IIR thrives and expands its unique research programs. But that’s not all.

In light of the U.S. Presidential elections, the conversation about immigrants and immigration has not subsided, but instead intensified with highly negative stereotypes and remarks founded in deep fear and ignorance. Our mission at the IIR is to refocus the immigration conversation and conduct unbiased, objective academic research emphasizing the economic benefits immigrants provide to the U.S. More than ever, our role in providing academically-rigorous research redirects the rhetoric away from hate and fear, through impartial data that demonstrates the realities of immigrant contributions.

For this reason, we are launching a new campaign, Friends of the IIR (page 14), to reach out to others who also care about these same issues. At the end of the day, we cannot achieve our goals without you. To effectively fulfill our mission, we seek to expand programs, resources and our organization as a whole. With your support and advice, we will engage additional faculty members, fund graduate research assistants, present at nationally recognized conferences on immigration, and foster discussions on immigration with the greater public through our IIR Colloquium Series and news media outlets.

We hope you will join us as we start this next stage. I look forward to working with each of you to increase the awareness of the IIR, increase our collaborative partnerships with other individuals and organizations dedicated to addressing the issues surrounding immigrants and immigration, and to garner the resources necessary to expand and share our research.

Sincerely,

Monica Gomez Isaac
The Institute for Immigration Research’s location in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area provides rich opportunities to work with governmental and nonprofit community partners to better understand the contributions and needs of immigrant populations.

AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Understanding the needs of a growing population

The Washington D.C. metropolitan area ranks as the second most popular destination for the more than 1.6 million African immigrants in the U.S. About 17,000 African immigrants call the District of Columbia their home, with most settled in the north and east of the Capitol. Over 30 African languages are spoken among D.C. Public School students and over 50 African countries are represented.

In May 2015, the IIR agreed to work with the D.C. Mayor’s Office on African Affairs to collaborate on compiling survey research data focused on the African immigrant population in the District of Columbia. This project marked a significant step forward in documenting demographic details as well as linguistic and cultural diversity among African-born constituents in the District. The survey research tracked the experiences of under-employed African immigrants and examined ways to better leverage their skills and create economic stability. The research will contribute to a jointly-issued annual report designed to address the critical gap in information and give fact-based policy recommendations that serve the African community and its various stakeholders.
CENTREVILLE LABOR STUDY

A qualitative exploration of the lives of day laborers

A partnership with the Centreville Labor Resource Center in Northern Virginia provided the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) with the opportunity to learn more about day laborers, a relatively understudied group. The IIR conducted twelve life-histories and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with day laborers from Guatemala and El Salvador. The men came to the U.S. out of financial necessity to support their families and have spent an average of 7.5 years in the country. Several key themes emerged from the study:

1) **For day laborers**, the ‘American Dream’ involves opportunities in the U.S. to support their families. Many of them plan to return when they have met their financial goals. Some say they would stay if they could, but in general this pattern contradicts our initial expectations that obstacles in the U.S. were the only thing preventing this group of migrants from long term integration.

2) **Another surprising finding** is how adeptly the day laborers rely on the employment skills they bring to the U.S., both formal and informal. They make use of these skills in a variety of professions.

3) **The day laborers’ opinions** on finding work through the Centreville Labor Resource Center (CLRC), highlight the CLRC’s efforts to prevent wage theft and the benefit to day laborers. Additionally, finding work through the CLRC compared to finding employment at a street hiring site has been a clear benefit of the CLRC’s services.
SIX-CITY SURVEY:
Collaboration with WES/IMPRINT
Analyzing economic and demographic characteristics of immigrant populations across the United States

In partnership with North America’s largest non-profit credential evaluation service, World Education Services (WES), IMPRINT (a consortium established to facilitate the integration of immigrant professionals in the U.S.), and AudioNow (an innovative cell-phone based radio service provider), the IIR conducted a six-city survey that explored the experiences of college educated immigrants. The study was conducted with generous funding provided by The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

This first-of-its-kind study documents multiple factors that correlate with the successful integration of immigrant professionals into the U.S. workforce and our communities. Unlike many previously existing studies, the Six City Survey queries where individuals received their higher education: in the U.S. or outside the U.S.

The report, drawn from the survey responses of more than 4,000 college-educated immigrants living in Philadelphia, Boston, Detroit, Miami, San Jose and Seattle, identifies factors that correlate with economic success and immigrants successful integration into American life. Additionally, it offers recommendations for communities to better integrate these skilled workers, and take advantage of their many talents.

Key findings in the report show that:

- **Social capital is powerful**: The survey showed that there is a remarkably strong correlation between the size of an immigrant’s social network and his or her likelihood of success.

- **English really matters**: Across the board, stronger English language skills were associated with virtually every possible measure of immigrant success.

- **Immigrants take enterprising approaches**: Numerous self-improvement strategies were reported, including academic credential evaluation, English language classes, and additional education in the United States.

- **At least some U.S. based higher education provides an advantage**: Immigrants who only received higher education outside the U.S. were disadvantaged relative to those whose higher education credentials also had a "made in America" stamp.

Results from the study have already been presented at forums in Philadelphia and Boston with the aim of presentations in the remaining four of the six cities. This effort is intended to benefit each of the local communities and their immigrant residents. Just as importantly, the study has been cited by the White House Task Force on New Americans as part of the national immigration policy discussion.
NOTABLE INITIATIVES

Advancing the IIR Mission

DISCOVERING IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDUSTRIES

The Immigrants Working for U.S. initiative looks at specific industries where immigrants play a key role in the production of goods and services for all of us in the U.S. We examined topics from media and entertainment, STEM careers, public administration, research and development, trucking, and the pharmaceutical industries. This project provided a firm basis for a factual understanding of how immigrants participate in U.S. industries.

SHARING RESEARCH WITH THE ACADEMY & THE PUBLIC

In 2014 - 2015 the IIR gave 10 presentations at 8 separate conferences, including the National Immigrant Integration Conference, the Ethiopian Community Development Council Conference and Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting. Research from the IIR was published in The Journal of Risk Research with other work under peer review. We published contributions on The Huffington Post, as well as two blog series.

HIGHLIGHTING IMMIGRANT NOBEL PRIZE LAUREATES

The ongoing Immigrant Nobel Prize Laureates initiative, featured in The Huffington Post, discusses the accomplishments of highly-skilled, foreign-born scientists in the U.S. from 1901-2013. Of all the countries in the world, the U.S., at 42.4%, receives the highest proportion of Nobel Prizes. Of these Nobel Prizes, 30.7% are earned by immigrants to the U.S. This ongoing project was updated and includes an additional analysis from the 2015 Nobel Prize.
Developing Current and Future Scholars

The strategic location of the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) within George Mason University allows us to draw on unparalleled resources to advance our mission in research, education, and professional opportunities for current and future scholars of immigration studies. We pride ourselves on our graduate fellows, whose experience at the IIR allows them to build valuable skills while contributing to our collective understanding of immigrants in the United States. Meet some of our fellows below.

Jessica Hewkin is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at George Mason University. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and her Master of Arts in Mass Communication from the University of Central Florida. Jessica’s topic of interest is immigration policy, especially as it relates to youth populations.

Joshua D. Tuttle is a Ph.D. student in the department of Sociology and Anthropology and an integral part of the IIR team. His contributions include developing the U.S. Census-based database used in the majority of the IIR’s research, as well as authoring fact sheets and research briefs. He joined the IIR at the beginning of his doctoral studies, and his work has been instrumental in advancing his existing statistical research skills and providing him with new skills in using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for research.

Alysia Blake is a graduate student of Sociology at George Mason University. She received her Bachelor of Science in Health Promotion from Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Alysia’s topics of interest include immigrant integration, as well as stigma, race, and gender. Her current research focuses on stigma and mental illness, as well as the stigma that immigrants face in the United States. She will be the lead graduate researcher for the upcoming Corporation for National Community Service funded project (see page 13).

Louise Puck is a research assistant and earned a MSc from London School of Economics in Social Research Methods. She also holds a M.A. in Social Anthropology and a B.A. in Social Work. Louise’s current research interests involve day laborers’ contribution to the U.S. economy, evaluation of immigrant integration and qualitative research methods. She also examines what makes day laborers more employable in the U.S.

Nicole Slivensky is a research assistant and has worked on SPSS quantitative and qualitative analyses, assisted in the development of web-based surveys, and has worked on data integrity issues for multi-mode surveys (given in paper, and two different digital formats). Recently, she has been the lead analyst for our survey of African-born individuals in the Washington, D.C. area.
This map shows the states we have developed detailed geographic profiles of immigrants and their contributions. More are on their way.
In 2014, the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) developed a series of fact sheets for 29 locations including states, counties, and cities across the nation. These fact sheets were shared with congressional representatives, the Immigrant Learning Center, World Education Services and the Cisneros Center, among others, to provide a better understanding of immigrant populations in the U.S. The success of this initiative facilitated the development of the IIR’s Immigration Data on Demand (iDod) service, which creates a direct pathway for organizations to request information about specific immigration populations. See page 12 for more about iDod.
COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Expanding our impact through community connections

MONTHLY COLLOQUIUM

The Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) hosts a monthly colloquium at our location on the Fairfax campus of George Mason University. These presentations have enabled us to increase and strengthen our network of researchers, policymakers, and artists whose work centers on immigration. Presenters have hailed from institutions such as the Brookings Institution, the D.C. Mayor’s Office on African Affairs, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research and George Mason University’s own School of Public Policy.

COMMUNITY & CAMPUS COLLABORATIONS

Our location in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area has enabled us to participate in important conversations regarding America’s immigrant populations. In the fall of 2015, the Institute collaborated with the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Center for International Disaster Information to conduct a panel discussion of the contribution of immigrant and diaspora communities in U.S. disaster response missions in the fall of 2015. The team also participated in a symposia in Philadelphia and Boston entitled, Strengthening the Workforce through Immigrant Professional Integration, which featured the results of the Six City Survey (pages 4-5).

The IIR has also brought immigrant centered arts to GMU. In the fall of 2014, the IIR hosted a showing of the documentaries The Stranger and I Learn America, films exploring the experiences of immigrants in the U.S. from different perspectives. The Institute, along with its partners, hosted the play, This Stained Dawn. The play was performed by Theater Wallay, a theater company based in Islamabad, Pakistan, and focuses on the personal stories of survivors of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The partitioning of Pakistan and India was the largest mass migration in modern history, and one in which over one million lives were lost.
PARTNERING WITH THE ILC

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC), is the founding donor for the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR). Their continuing support has provided a strong partnership that has been instrumental to the IIR’s success and has resulted in important collaborations as well. Below, we highlight examples of our collaborations from 2014-2015.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The IIR conducted research on immigrant communities across the United States to support The ILC’s work with community colleges. The data was used in the Immigrants Beyond Adult Education initiative, which equipped and empowered community college administrators and educators with demographic information about their immigrant students.

IMMIGRANT HISTORY

The IIR and ILC jointly participated in the Immigrant America: New Immigration Histories from 1965-2015 conference at the University of Minnesota in the fall of 2015. The presentation featured the IIR’s statistical and geographic database, which has allowed the IIR to produce comprehensive maps and profiles that locate and describe, in detail, immigrant populations across the U.S.

IMMIGRANTS IN MEDICINE

Our two organizations collaborated to publish the report Immigrants in Health Care: Keeping Americans Healthy through Care and Innovation. This report was featured in a webinar conducted by The ILC Public Education Institute, which provided the latest data, industry perspectives, and policy implications to a national audience representing 35 states and the District of Columbia.
The Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) has unveiled its latest research development: The Immigration Data on Demand (iDod) service. By meeting the needs of academics, policy-makers and the public with unbiased and objective research related to immigrants and immigration in the United States, the IIR will provide data to help individuals and institutions examine the immigrant populations in specific geographic areas, industries, and occupations.

The goal of the Immigration Data on Demand (iDod) project is to create collaborations and connect people with data, from their particular region or sector of interest, on immigrant populations.

Unlike many services currently available, this project will provide these fact sheets at no cost to the user. Each fact sheet will be personalized to each request, based on a form that can be filled out on our website. Through this service we will demonstrate ways in which additional data can aid potential collaborators in fact-based decision making regarding immigration issues. For more information, please contact us at iir@gmu.edu, or scan the QR code to the right.
In 2015, the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) received a three year $300,000 research grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to research national service, volunteering, and civic engagement among immigrant populations. The IIR’s research proposal was selected from among more than 50 applications submitted from a variety of universities across the country. Six proposals were selected and ours was one of only two with a special emphasis on immigrants. Given the importance of volunteering and civic engagement to the social fabric of American communities, understanding immigrant participation in the civic life of communities is vitally important as the immigrant population expands.

Work on this project will be undertaken by four of our faculty affiliates with the support of a new graduate assistantship funded by the award. The project work will include detailed quantitative analyses of the Six City Survey, further survey data collection in the D.C. metro area and a series of follow-up surveys and in-depth interviews with survey participants from the six cities. With the complementary quantitative and qualitative data we hope to gain further insights into the relationships between social capital, volunteering and immigrant economic contributions to the community and their own economic success.

Results from the study will be distributed to policymakers and other constituents via online policy briefs, brochures, and public lectures, as well as through academic conference presentations and publications. Dissemination of the results will be further facilitated through the outreach efforts of CNCS who are committed to demonstrating the significance and value of service, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement.
FRIENDS OF THE INSTITUTE

Growing the Institute for Immigration Research public profile

With all of the heated rhetoric about immigration these days, reliable and unbiased research results are needed to cool the discussion with objective information. Our unique and novel research projects cannot be possible without the generous support of dedicated individuals like yourself. We recognize the importance of people who are an integral part of our local, state, and national economies. Please consider joining our effort as a Friend of the IIR and help us to further expand our research with a tax-deductible donation. With this donation, you will become a member of the Friends of the IIR, help finance research projects and local academic conferences held at Mason to educate the greater public on immigration. Supporting the IIR demonstrates your commitment to immigrant entrepreneurship and innovation in America. By committing to the IIR, you support an institution the helps make up a top research university, as recognized by the influential Carnegie Classification.

Your support is essential to setting the record straight about immigrants and the positive impacts they have on the U.S. economy. We hope you will choose to be a part of this effort and make a donation today.

Budget Allocation for the IIR

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Budget Allocation for the IIR

LOOKING FORWARD INTO 2016-2017

- Release of the Centreville Labor Blog
- An evening celebrating the contributions of immigrant artists as entrepreneurs
- Future Collaborations with DC Mayor’s Offices of Immigrant affairs
- Future Collaborations with CASA and other Immigrant serving organizations
- Launch of Immigration Data on Demand
- Launch Friends of the Institute

2016 - 2017
Faculty Affiliates

Dr. Amy Best, Professor and Department Chair, Sociology & Anthropology
Dr. John Dale, Associate Professor, Sociology & Anthropology
Dr. Shannon Davis, Associate Professor, Sociology & Anthropology
Dr. Gregory A. Guagnano, Associate Professor, Sociology & Anthropology
Dr. Dae Young Kim, Associate Professor, Sociology & Anthropology
Dr. Roberta Spalter-Roth, Senior Research Fellow

The Mission of the Institute for Immigration Research

The mission of the institute is to focus the immigration conversation among academics, policy-makers and the public, including the business community and media, by producing and disseminating unbiased and objective, interdisciplinary academic research related to immigrants and immigration to the United States. Research conducted by the IIR examines the economic and social impact of all immigrant groups, with particular emphasis on the economic contributions of immigrant entrepreneurs with high level of education or skills. The IIR concentrates on economic questions while adding in a sociological perspective. The Institute for Immigration Research is a joint venture between George Mason University and The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC) of Massachusetts.
CONNECT WITH US
Growing our public profile

The IIR is working to build our public profile online and with the news media.

- Grown 50% in 2015 and into 2016 with a goal to double our reach
- Grown 60% in 2015 and into 2016 with a goal to double our reach
- 69% of our web traffic are new visitors
- Expert interviews with local and national print, radio, and television media
Institute for Immigration Research

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In partnership with George Mason University
and the Immigrant Learning Center
INSTITUTE FOR IMMIGRATION RESEARCH

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