

# Teaching Immigration: Informing and Elevating the Debate

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## ABSTRACT

Based on the insights gained through my own teaching and that of others who participated in a roundtable discussion on the topic at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Immigration to the Southeast: Policy Analysis, Conflict Management (Kennesaw State University, October 2012), this essay uses current research about pedagogical best practices to argue that we should teach courses about immigration that are problem-based and interdisciplinary and include some combination of civic engagement, service learning, and faculty-student research. These practices are demonstrated to improve students' skills, knowledge, and understanding, as well as their desire to be civically engaged.

**Key words:** immigration, pedagogy, interdisciplinary experiential learning.

## RESUMEN

Con base en mi propia experiencia docente y en la de otros que participaron en la discusión en una mesa redonda sobre el tema en la "IV Conferencia Anual sobre Inmigración en el Sureste: Análisis de las Políticas, Manejo de Conflictos" (Kennesaw State University, octubre de 2012), este artículo utiliza la investigación actual sobre las mejores prácticas pedagógicas para argumentar que debemos impartir cursos interdisciplinarios sobre inmigración que estén orientados a la solución de problemas reales y que incluyan una combinación de compromiso cívico, aprendizaje a través del servicio social, e investigación conjunta entre los alumnos y el profesorado. Se ha comprobado que este tipo de prácticas mejora las habilidades, los conocimientos y la comprensión de los estudiantes, además de que incrementa su deseo por un compromiso cívico.

**Palabras clave:** inmigración, pedagogía, aprendizaje interdisciplinario basado en la experiencia.

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Institutions of higher learning are missing a vital opportunity. While researchers at these institutions produce substantial (and growing) research about immigration, colleges and universities in the southeastern United States lack substantial undergraduate course offerings in this area. In West Virginia, the southeastern state with the fewest immigration course offerings, one of the colleges surveyed did not offer a single course about immigration. The average in North Carolina, the state with the most offerings, is just under five courses per institution. These are very low numbers. Immigration is a topic spanning many disciplines: history, economics, political science, sociology, and others. It is surprising that our universities offer so few courses either structured around or including the study of immigration.

This missed opportunity is problematic in many ways, but for those of us employed in the academy, two stand out. For one, learning about immigration is essential if we are to encourage the conditions for reasonable and effective deliberation about immigration policy, a necessary condition for good policy outcomes. And, just as importantly, courses that seek to help students understand the complexity of immigration can support higher education's mission to promote strong intellectual and practical skills as well as a sense of social responsibility (AAC&U, 2012). The study of immigration demands a creative and interdisciplinary approach, the type demonstrated to produce strong learning outcomes in key areas, including graduating individuals better prepared for and more interested in being engaged in the world around them (Finley, 2012).

Deliberation –reasoned consideration and discussion– is noticeably lacking in United States discourse about many issues (Shea and Fiorina, 2013). And issues of immigration reform are no different. If anything, they are worse. The public discourse about immigrants and immigration reform is laden with negative terms and stereotypes, and, in my experience, this is true on college campuses as well. I am constantly surprised by how little my students know about the United States immigration system, the most important factors in decisions about migration, and immigrants themselves. Though students know little, they are often not reticent about offering their opinions. And these are usually reflective of themes in the dominant political discourse which Chavez (2008) argues is characterized by a “Latino Threat Narrative,” portraying Latino immigrants as fundamentally different from previous immigrant groups. Highly emotional, the narrative is built on the concept of an “invasion” by “illegal aliens . . . bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs (the U.S. Southwest) and destroying the American way of life” (Chavez, 2008: 2).

Our students are immersed –consciously and unconsciously– in this discourse. And it is not one that helps them to engage responsibly and intelligently in the essential work of addressing what everyone agrees are very real problems with the United States immigration system. In fact, according to a recent study, undergraduate

students are not developing the tools necessary to contribute meaningfully and intelligently to this or any other policy conversation. In a very disturbing quantitative study of undergraduate education in the United States, Arum and Roksa (2011) find that the majority of college graduates demonstrate no significant increase in learning after four years of undergraduate education.

Though these problems are deep and difficult to address, this essay argues that colleges and universities can help improve the situation a very simple way: offer more undergraduate courses about immigration. Learning outcomes from my immigration courses demonstrate significant progress in my students' skills and understanding, and colleagues in other colleges and universities report similar results. To develop this argument, the first section offers an overview of the current state of affairs: how colleges and universities in the southeastern United States approach teaching about immigration. How many courses are offered? Which departments offer them? A survey of a sample of undergraduate institutions in the southeastern United States yields the conclusion that undergraduate courses about immigration are relatively rare, and, when taught, almost always done so from a particular disciplinary perspective. The rest of the article argues that well-designed courses structured around immigration issues offer the potential to promote the kinds of learning outcomes stressed by organizations like the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the United States Department of Education, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: a sense of social responsibility, strong intellectual and practical skills, and the ability to apply them in real-world settings (Klein, 2005; Gale, 2007). In addition, courses exploring immigration broadly are well-suited to employing best practices like an interdisciplinary approach, a focus on problem solving, and the integration of experiential and service learning. The last section of the essay includes a discussion of some experiential learning techniques that colleagues shared in a roundtable discussion on the topic at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Immigration to the Southeast: Policy Analysis, Conflict Management (Kennesaw State University, October, 2012). Offering immigration courses that employ these best practices will improve student learning, and equip undergraduates to navigate the immigration debate in reasoned and effective ways; and, one hopes, convince them of the importance of doing so.

## TEACHING IMMIGRATION IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES: STUDY RESULTS

How is immigration taught in colleges and universities in the southeastern United States? What do we know about the courses offered and the departments that teach

them? To answer these questions, we searched the undergraduate course catalogues of 50 colleges and universities in the region, looking for the words “immigration” or “migration” in either the course title or course description. The states included were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. Averaging five institutions per state, the search included a mixture of large and small, public and private colleges and universities. The major findings are the following:

- At the undergraduate level, immigration courses are not common (Table 1). The state with the highest average number of courses per school is North Carolina: just under five. Half of the states averaged two or fewer courses per school. Given that immigration is a subject relevant to any number of disciplines and pre-professional programs (history, political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, education, social work, etc.), and that the survey included all undergraduate courses listed in the catalogue, these numbers are very low.
- In addition, about half of these courses cover immigration as part of the syllabus. But, they are not entirely devoted to the subject; thus further diluting undergraduate coverage of the topic (Table 2).
- The vast majority of the courses including at least some aspect of immigration are taught in just four disciplines: history, political science, anthropology, and U.S. American or interdisciplinary studies (Table 2). A wide variety of other disciplines or subject areas include immigration in their courses: social work, Spanish, Latin American studies, geography, religion, education, English, and law, among others. In terms of total numbers of courses in each discipline, however, none included more than eight total courses across all the institutions surveyed, and most had fewer than five.

The picture emerging from the survey is surprising. Given the prominence of migration as a social, economic, and political issue, as well as its importance to the history of the United States and countries around the world, the subject area does not appear to be taught extensively. The survey methodology employed has some weaknesses, to be sure. It could not capture special topics, honors, or seminar courses that may include a focus on immigration, but are listed in catalogues generically (“Topics in Modern U.S. History,” for example), and thus would not show up in the search. And, of course, the sample could be larger. Even allowing for some undercounting, however, these numbers indicate very little attention to the subject of immigration at the undergraduate level. Given the explosion of academic research about immigration across a variety of disciplines, the relative infrequency of atten-

**Table 1**  
UNDERGRADUATE IMMIGRATION COURSES OFFERED BY COLLEGES  
AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

	Average Number of Immigration Courses per School	Hispanics as a Percentage of State Population	Hispanics as a Percentage of K-12 Students
Alabama	1.6	4	5
Arkansas	1.8	6	9
Florida	4.0	23	27
Georgia	3.2	9	11
Louisiana	2.3	4	4
Mississippi	1.0	2	NA
North Carolina	4.9	8	12
South Carolina	1.2	5	7
Virginia	4.6	8	10
West Virginia	0.7	1	NA

**Source:** Authors' own research using university and college catalogues and data on Hispanic population from the Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends Project (2011).

**Table 2**  
DISCIPLINE IN WHICH THE IMMIGRATION COURSES WERE TAUGHT

Discipline	Main Focus of Course	Immigration Mentioned in Course Description	Total
History	11	18	29
Sociology	14	15	29
Political Science	9	9	18
[U.S.] American or IDS Studies	8	5	13
Anthropology	1	7	8
English	3	4	7
Social Work	2	5	7
Spanish	0	7	7

**Source:** Authors' own research using university and college catalogues.

tion to the subject in undergraduate courses stands out. Clearly, the work we are doing as scholars in the field is not being carried into our work in the classroom.

## **AN ARGUMENT FOR TEACHING PROBLEM-BASED, INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES ABOUT IMMIGRATION**

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, undergraduate education is best when characterized by the following:

An approach to college learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It emphasizes broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth achievement in a specific field of interest. It helps students develop a sense of social responsibility as well as strong intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and includes a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. (AAC&U, 2012)

Well-designed courses about immigration promote these goals. Such courses can integrate pedagogical best-practices such as an interdisciplinary approach, problem-based inquiry, experiential and service learning, and faculty-student research. These best practices are demonstrated to promote the kinds of practical and intellectual skills emphasized by the AAC&U (2012) and others (Newell, 1992; Rhoten et al., 2006; Kantor and Schneider, 2013; Elder and Paul, 2008; Gale, 2007). Well-designed courses can help students develop a sense of civic and social responsibility as well (Finley, 2012). The causes and consequences of immigration are unfolding outside our classrooms, and sending students into the field to learn and to try to make sense of these phenomena will increase understanding and encourage civic engagement.

The study of immigration is fundamentally interdisciplinary. But, while many education policy researchers argue for a greater use of interdisciplinary courses in undergraduate education, the survey of immigration course offerings in the southeastern United States indicates that most of them are taught within disciplines, employing discipline-specific approaches to learning. But, one cannot understand why people migrate, how migration affects communities (sending and receiving), the economic effects of migration, and the politics surrounding immigration without reference to history, politics, foreign policy, sociology, economics, law, and a range of other disciplines. When I teach my course on the politics of immigration reform, I do so in the university's honors program, rather than within my discipline of political

science. Teaching the course with an honors designation enables me to go outside disciplinary boundaries to explore the multiple influences on immigration politics and policy, as well as the ways in which both are experienced in our community.

What does it mean to take an interdisciplinary approach? Well-crafted and consciously interdisciplinary courses approach a topic using theories, skills, data, and ideas from multiple disciplines (Rhoten, 2004). Such an approach emphasizes *integration* across disciplines, with the goal of greater synthesis and thus greater understanding of complex issues, events, and ideas (Rhoten et al., 2006). As Boix Mansilla (2005: 15) explains, interdisciplinary courses promote understanding that reflects “the capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking in two or more disciplines to produce a cognitive advancement –e.g., explaining a phenomenon, solving a problem, creating a product, raising a new question– in ways that would have been unlikely through single disciplinary means.” Although most discipline-specific courses integrate some insights from other academic disciplines, an intentionally interdisciplinary course will integrate these more systematically, including both knowledge emphasized and methods employed to obtain that knowledge.

Such courses provide excellent opportunities for improving student learning. Newell (1994) finds that interdisciplinary courses promote a range of measurable benefits for undergraduate students. Such courses improve precision and clarity in writing, reading, speaking, and thinking; help students confront challenges to their assumptions about themselves and the world; lead to more creative, original, or unconventional thinking; and develop students’ ability to synthesize and integrate. Interdisciplinary approaches are increasingly promoted for research (NAS, 2004) as well as for teaching (Newell, 1994; Latucca, Voigt, and Fath, 2004; Gale, 2007).

As Rhoten, et al. (2006) argue in a study for the Teagle Foundation, interdisciplinary approaches are ideal for problem-based learning, and, indeed, are required by many of today’s complex problems. These approaches challenge students to integrate multiple ways of thinking in order to understand the complexity of interactions among the forces at the center of academic disciplines (economics and politics, sociology and the law, history and public policy). Students are forced to think about how to approach learning, rather than just to learn answers (Sill, 1996; Bain, 2004). This approach is particularly helpful when asking politically-charged questions (Elder and Paul, 2008) –which immigration questions are, to be sure. Since the emphasis is on the *process* of learning rather than a particular conclusion, students feel less manipulated, and more open to exploring multiple perspectives. For those who teach about immigration, consciously focusing on asking good questions and providing the skills and concepts necessary to seek answers to them helps to avoid some of the pitfalls of teaching a subject about which our students typically have very strong

emotions. Though it is difficult to teach outside our disciplines, it is essential if we are to encourage students to think beyond the simplistic contemporary discourse about immigrants and immigration and to produce students with the intellectual and practical skills to contribute meaningfully to efforts to address complex immigration—and other—issues.

Though I am a political scientist, when I teach about contemporary issues in U.S. immigration policy, I begin with history. It is impossible to understand current issues without understanding policies and patterns of the past. For example, unless students learn about the historic pattern of circular migration between Mexico and the United States, a pattern that characterized the bilateral migration relationship since before current international boundaries were drawn, they cannot understand the recent surge in the Mexican-born population living in the United States. This surge can be explained with reference to many variables (economic recession in Mexico, the boom in construction in the United States, drug violence along the border, etc.). But one must also understand how historic patterns collided with a shift in United States policy toward stricter border enforcement in the late 1980s. The border, historically quite permeable, became very difficult and expensive to cross as a result. This shift disrupted established circular migration patterns, essentially closing the option of seasonal migration to most low-skilled migrants from Mexico. The choice to put down roots in the United States, bringing families and building communities, is a rational response to the closing of other options. I find the best way to get my students to think critically about popular immigration discourses that focus on “anchor babies” and unscrupulous migrants seeking to live off the welfare state is to examine more comprehensive explanations grounded in history, economics, and policy. These explanations are based on individuals responding rationally to the opportunities and constraints they face. When these change, individual responses change. Developing an understanding of historical patterns and policies encourages students to challenge simplistic explanations about the current situation, understanding it more deeply and comprehensively.

Indeed, studies show that problem-based learning is one of the best ways to engage students and to improve their intellectual skills (Newell, 1992; Bain, 2004; Elder and Paul, 2008). Students prefer puzzling through an issue to being lectured to about a variety of solutions. They learn better that way. Bain (2004) calls the first pedagogical approach the “transmission model” (through lectures, professors try to transmit information to students). He finds that the best educators avoid this model. Rather, the best educators “think of teaching as anything they might do to help and encourage students to learn. Teaching is engaging students, engineering an environment in which they learn” (49).



Immigration questions are excellent problems around which to focus undergraduate coursework. Lattuca, Voigt, and Fath (2004) argue that immigration is an “ill-structured problem,” one with considerable ambiguity because the data necessary to understand it are incomplete, the “right” solutions are uncertain, more than one solution is possible, and the problem requires analysis from multiple frames of reference. Teachers should exploit this ambiguity to promote better inquiry and learning. For example, a strong interdisciplinary immigration course could be organized around a central question like “what should the United States do about the millions of immigrants living in the country without legal status?” Students could then be challenged to

- 1) analyze the data we have about the numbers and characteristics of the unauthorized population in the United States: how is data about unauthorized migration collected? What can we “know,” and what is essentially a guess? What about other data used to assess the current situation? How do we assess the impact of a large unauthorized population on wages, educational systems, other public services?
- 2) think about, and, in some cases, engage in collecting their own data. What data would help them to understand the problem better? Can they design a research project to collect such data?
- 3) learn how different disciplines approach the question: How do demographers understand the forces that affect migration? What about economists? When political scientists study immigration, they focus on legal responses to immigration. What tools do students need to understand these?
- 4) assess the various proposals or solutions offered by law-makers, public policy institutes and others. What about existing laws like Arizona’s SB1070? What are their strengths? Weaknesses? Actual and potential consequences?
- 5) propose a solution themselves. How would they answer the central question? How do they support their position?

Not only does problem-based learning enhance students’ intellectual and practical skills, it also encourages intellectual curiosity and the desire to learn. Elder and Paul (2008: 32) argue that “it is only when students apply what they are learning to actual situations or problems that they come to see the value in what they are learning.” And, of course, it is only when they see the value in what they are learning that they will be intrinsically motivated to learn. I found that of all the requirements for my honors immigration course, the one that captured the students’ interest the most was the requirement that they do something to try to improve people’s understand-

ing of immigrants and proposals for immigration reform. After learning about immigration from a number of different perspectives, the students decided that they would host a public forum in which they would emphasize reasoned public discourse. They invited both the university and local communities and organized the event around an invited panel. The panel represented a diversity of experiences, including an immigration attorney, a police officer, a representative from Catholic Social Services' Refugee Resettlement Program, and the consul general of the Mexican consulate in Raleigh, North Carolina. With no input from me, the students planned and organized a very effective event that attracted well over 100 participants. The structure of the event encouraged thoughtful and reasoned discourse between the panelists and the audience. Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. Many remarked that they had learned far more than expected and that the format encouraged them to think about immigration in a more complex and nuanced way. Interestingly, the students' decisions about how to complete the requirement reflected the way we approached learning in the course: seeking to understand the complexity of immigration from a range of positions and points of view, each grounded in both ideas and experience.

When designing an interdisciplinary and problem-based course—or any course—one difficulty to keep in mind is most students' lack of information literacy. Though our students are technology-savvy, this is often mistaken for the ability to capitalize on that skill in an academic setting. To succeed in college—and after—, students need to be able to find, retrieve, understand, and use information (Davis, 1995). But, this is difficult to do, particularly in an area like immigration where the quality of sources varies dramatically, from the high-level academic study to the polemic blog. Well-designed interdisciplinary courses can help students navigate this landscape. Such courses encourage students to see, evaluate, and select from differing perspectives that bear on an issue (Lattuca, Voigt, and Fath, 2004). Thus, immigration courses should include an emphasis on teaching students how to discern quality sources. To help students learn about good sources, I work with a university librarian to put together a "LibGuide" for all my courses. This guide includes links to a range of different types of sources: high quality journalism, peer-reviewed articles, reports from public policy institutes, government documents, etc. And, the guide includes background information on the different types of sources so students understand better the perspectives and potential biases of those who work and write for various purposes. I design the syllabus and readings to use a variety of sources, from multiple perspectives, disciplines, and organizations. And, I spend significant class time discussing not just the work, but the source of that work. For required coursework, students must either use sources listed in the LibGuide or provide their own an-

notation for an outside source. Though I still receive papers and other classwork with questionable sources, the overall quality of my students' efforts has improved markedly. If we want to promote student learning and provide students with the skills necessary to be civically involved, we need to be intentional about integrating training in how to approach information-gathering in our information-saturated world.

## INTEGRATING SERVICE LEARNING AND UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Interdisciplinary learning is most effective when it is combined with "integrative learning," a broader concept (Klein, 2005). Integrative learning seeks to foster students' ability to integrate learning over time and across disciplinary boundaries (interdisciplinary), but also between academic, personal, and community life (integrative). As explained in a statement by the Integrative Learning Project, a three-year collaboration between the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2004),

the undergraduate experience is often a fragmented landscape of general education, concentration, electives, co-curricular activities, and for many students "the real world" beyond campus. An emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates find ways to put the pieces together and develop habits of mind that will prepare them to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life.

Integrative learning pedagogies take students outside the classroom, including experiential and service learning, as well as undergraduate research. When required to work and study in the community, students make essential connections between their academic work and life outside their campuses. It is demonstrated that these connections promote students' intellectual and practical skills, and encourage them to be more civically involved (Kantor and Schneider, 2013).

When I teach my course on the politics of immigration reform, I include a requirement to work in a local church's bilingual preschool. The school provides low-cost, bilingual preschool education for the Latino community in Charlotte, a community with few formal options to prepare children for kindergarten. Students for whom English is a second language need help preparing for kindergarten, so preschools such as this one provide an essential service. My students worked with the teachers and students on a project called *Contando mi historia* (Telling My Story). The project starts with the preschoolers working with their parents at home to

answer questions like, what do you want to be when you grow up? and, what brought your family to Charlotte? or, what do you like most/least about living here? Once the answers are submitted, my students work with the preschoolers to decorate poster boards that “tell” each child’s “story.”

The experience is transformative for my students’ understanding of the challenges faced by Latino children and families in Charlotte. One preschooler said what he liked least about Charlotte was driving to school each day because he feared that a police officer would pull over his mother and take her away. Others talked about grandparents they could never visit, parents who worked in other states or back in their home country, and dreams that they feared they could never achieve. My students had read sociological studies about the challenges of being low-income, unauthorized, or both. They learned about “Secure Communities” and the 287(g) program, both of which the city of Charlotte, where my university is located, adopted. But, until they heard these children talk about their stories, my students did not understand the nature or effects of these programs from the perspective of the community most affected by them. My students had not considered the effects on families, many of which have legal status. They did not think about the more subtle effects of programs that involve racial profiling and reinforce stereotypes about our immigrant communities. On end-of-course evaluations, this service project was mentioned consistently as a turning point in the students’ comprehension of the potential and real effects of immigration policy in our society and heightened students’ desire to continue learning about immigration politics and potential immigration policy reform.

Though they should be approached carefully, opportunities for this type of learning are boundless in the southeastern United States. Our communities are living laboratories. The southeastern United States experienced the most explosive growth in the foreign-born population—largely Hispanic—of any region in the country in the past decade. According to data from the Pew Research Center, of the 17 states with the most rapid increases in Hispanic populations between 2000 and 2010, 10 are in the southeastern United States (Motel and Patten, 2011). So, our colleges and universities are located in an area with multiple opportunities for experiential and service learning, as well as for faculty-student research.

To learn more about how colleagues are employing these integrative approaches in their courses, we held a roundtable discussion at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Immigration to the Southeast: Policy Analysis, Conflict Management (Kennesaw State University, October 2012). Participants in the roundtable agreed that getting students into the community to learn first-hand about the immigrant experience is critical to enhancing student learning and spoke at length about the benefits for their students. Some of the ideas presented were the following:

- Dr. Miranda Hallett (Otterbein University, cultural anthropology) emphasizes humanizing students' understanding of the immigrant experience. Her ANTH 291 students work weekly with the Community Refugee and Immigration Services organization in their area. Using insights from this experience, pupils construct an immigration simulation and invite students and members of the community to participate. The simulation gives participants a role, and each must accomplish certain tasks in a "real world" setting. Through organizing and participating in the simulation, students experience the challenges faced by immigrants in daily life. Immigrants and their challenges become humanized.
- Dr. Juan José Bustamante (University of Arkansas, sociology) employs a research-learning approach in his immigration courses. For one of his projects, he assigns students to interview community and social service institutions in the local area about the services they provide to people in the community. Then, they interview members of the community to see if they are being served by the people and programs run by these organizations. By comparing both perspectives—service and client—, students come to understand the challenges faced by those trying to provide community services (police, schools, social services, health clinics, etc.) as well as the challenges of those trying to use those services. These challenges are extensive, including obvious obstacles like a language barrier, but also underlying issues of racism, suspicion, and intolerance.
- Dr. Timothy Steigenga (Florida Atlantic University, political science) agrees that helping students to understand the human context is essential. He helped found two local organizations that provide services to the immigrant community: Corn Maya, Inc., an organization that provides services to the immigrant community in Palm Beach, Florida; and, El Sol, Jupiter's Neighborhood Resource Center, providing work-centered and other services to laborers in the local area. To encourage students to think critically about common myths and stereotypes of immigrants, Dr. Steigenga's co-authored a book with Marie Friedmann Marquardt, Philip J. Williams, and Manuel Vásquez, *Living Illegal: The Human Face of Unauthorized Immigration* (2011). The book, a product of years of integrating teaching about immigration and working in the immigrant community, is accompanied by a website with a reading guide and instructor resources: <http://www.livingillegal.org/>.
- Dr. Larry Nackerud (University of Georgia, School of Social Work) takes his immigration class to both a chicken processing plant and a detention center run by Corrections Corporation of America. Though there are some logistical challenges to this type of experiential learning (for example, students must

have criminal background checks from Immigration and Customs Enforcement to visit the corrections site), students are able to experience first-hand some of the harsh realities of the immigrant experience. The visit to the chicken processing plant is organized around questions of labor economics such as, does the presence of unauthorized immigrants in the workforce displace citizen workers? So students are challenged to channel their experiential learning into greater intellectual understanding.

These approaches share the common pedagogical emphasis on asking difficult questions and approaching potential answers not only through academic and classroom work, but through experience, research, and service. When we get students out of classrooms and into the community, learning can be so much richer. It seems obvious that these types of experiences would yield positive learning results for students. And, the research supports that conclusion. According to Finley's (2012) review of evidence on civic learning in higher education, the evidence shows that the more students participate in civic activities—from experiential to service learning—the higher they score on measures of civic outcomes like tolerance and political participation. And, it is not just civic outcomes that are achieved. The studies reviewed also show higher scores on a variety of learning outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

If you teach undergraduates, you understand both its joys and the frustrations. These students are simultaneously mired in simplistic understandings and unquestioned assumptions and profoundly ready to challenge both. It is our responsibility to foster the latter. Colleges and universities need to teach more courses about immigration, and those of us who conduct research in this and related fields need to design and teach these courses effectively. With more and more research into the scholarship of teaching and learning, we know so much more about how to create courses more likely to improve students' skills, knowledge, and understanding, as well as their desire to be civically engaged. These courses are typically problem-based and interdisciplinary, and include opportunities for some combination of civic engagement, service learning, and faculty-student research.

This essay is the product of a panel discussion I organized for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Immigration to the Southeast: Policy Analysis, Conflict Management (Kennesaw State University, October, 2012). The impetus was to provide a forum where those of us who teach immigration courses could share our ideas and best

practices. We need more forums like this. And, we need common repositories where scholars can share good sources for undergraduate learning, pedagogical ideas, and syllabi. Some professional associations are constructing such sites. Members of the American Political Science Association just organized an academic subsection for Migration and Citizenship Scholars. The organizers have created a List-Serve for the subsection membership, a quarterly newsletter, and a website. This is proving an excellent vehicle for sharing ideas and resources about both teaching and research.

As far as I know, however, nothing similar exists in an interdisciplinary academic association. This is something that we should consider as we build academic partnerships cross-nationally around immigration studies. Most of us whose research focuses on immigration are passionate about resolving issues related to the status and treatment of immigrants in our countries. Helping each other to design and teach high-quality courses is an important part of the potential for progress in this regard. If we can prepare our students for informed and active participation in ongoing debates about immigration reform and convince them of the necessity of doing so, perhaps less emotional –and more productive– public discourse will follow, and better public policy will become a reality.

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