

“Migration across the Americas”
Faculty Learning Cluster Proposal

While most Latin American countries have been tied into global migration processes since at least the time of the Spanish conquest – there is no doubt that the past decades has witnessed an explosion in the number of people who abandon their countries of origin to search for work beyond the borders of their countries of birth. Since the 1960s, the U.S. has been the main destination for migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, who now constitute more than half (52%) of the foreign-born population in this country (Census 2000).

This proposed two-year Faculty Cluster titled “Migration Across the Americas” brings together faculty and graduate students from various Rutgers departments and schools, who work on different aspect of migration in the Americas. Our main goal is to develop interconnections between faculty and grad students who work on migration within different departments and schools across the Rutgers community and foster an interdisciplinary “permanent forum” on Latin American and Caribbean migration that can enhance our comparative knowledge of migration literatures and debates while also developing concrete implications for our research and teaching. Our co-signers on this application are members of the faculty and students in the following departments and programs: Anthropology, History, Spanish/Portuguese, Sociology, Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, Political Science, Latin American Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies and the School of Management and Labor Relations. We are also including advanced undergraduate students, who are thesis writers in the participating departments and whose work could benefit from the scholarly exchanges within the framework here proposed.

Current migration flows within the Americas - as well as elsewhere - are intricately tied to the process of restructuring of the global economy starting in the 1970s and the place of Latin America as a labor-exporting region within the new global economic system.

The thematic focus of this proposed faculty cluster is on the central role of global labor migration within global economic and political processes that affect not only the lives of millions of migrants and their families, but also the sovereignty of nation-states and international relations between them. In source countries in Latin America, for example, governments are increasingly concerned with emigration, not only because of the central role of migrant remittances in the national economies of many Latin American countries, but also because of the long-term consequences of emigration including the “brain drain” - effect and the existence of strong diasporic political constituencies which may exert significant influence over national political life. In destination countries like the US, in turn, the rise of globalization, combined with growing concerns over security and terrorism, has transformed immigration into an issue with significant foreign and domestic policy implications. In this proposed research cluster, we will emphasize the connections between global migration flows and other topics central to debates in both source and destination countries including security, citizenship, post-war politics, urban growth, national/regional/racial identities, illegality and deportability, and the rights of mobile populations.

Our aim is to take a hemispheric approach to migration across the Americas, but we might very likely be able to relate our discussions to other colonial, neocolonial, imperial experiences in other parts of the world including parts of Asia and the Middle East thus eventually expanding the geographical scope of the proposal.

The interest in international migration in the social sciences has tended to “ebb and flow” according to the various waves of emigration and immigration within particular historical moments and contexts. The new millennium has seen a rise not only in global migration flows, but also in scholarly works about them. However, research on migration tends to be carried out within narrow disciplinary traditions with often inefficient or insufficient communication, which fragments knowledge production about migration across disciplines, regions, and ideologies. In the preparation for this proposal, we have identified faculty and students at various Rutgers departments, whose work perhaps shows some divergence in the ways in which migration research is

approached, including the theoretical framework and the kinds of questions asked, but who could bring distinct insights drawn from their theoretical, methodological, and epistemological frameworks to the table. While we propose a two-year project duration, our long term goal is to create a sustained dialogue on migration across the Rutgers community, which can lead to cross-national and interdisciplinary joint research projects. We also envision this project as a possibility to lay the groundwork for a larger externally funded proposal for the study of Latino migration to NJ.

Our specific programmatic goals would be to facilitate intellectual exchange on the topic of “Migration Across the Americas” among faculty and student research through organizing a faculty symposium, hosting various local and international guest speakers, supporting faculty and student research, and creating a resource page for Rutgers faculty who research and teach on migration (For an example of this kind of effort, see <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/immigration/>). Such programming is possible because we can draw on cluster members’ large networks of migration scholars and immigration activists both in the US and in Latin America. We also envision this group to foster new international collaborations with migration scholars in Latin America and the Caribbean through institutional networks such as Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO) and Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO). Furthermore, the cluster and its hemispheric approach to the study of migration across the Americas is part of our current efforts of connecting the Department of Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies with the Latin American Studies Program thus fostering a stronger institutional connection and development, which will benefit many of our students who take courses in both programs.