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A Comparison of Theory and Lived Experience:
Immigration to Bloomington-Normal

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An Honors Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This project compares theories of international migration and theories of integration into the U.S. to the lived experience of actual immigrants in Bloomington-Normal, as ascertained by McLean County census data, supplementary reports by community agencies, and personal interviews of immigrants. While interview participants were recruited on a referral basis and are not representative of the entire immigrant population, their personal stories help to humanize the data. Following national urban-to-rural settlement patterns, immigrants who participated in this study chose Bloomington-Normal over urban migration hubs like Chicago. However, Bloomington-Normal stands out from other downstate Illinois communities because of the profile of employment opportunities, most notably the State Farm Corporate Headquarters in town. Participants cited economic opportunities, family reunification, and political persecution as primary motivations for leaving their countries of origin. They were drawn to Bloomington-Normal because of pre-existing networks and chose to remain because of employment opportunities, the presence of universities, a friendly community, and convenience factors. In general, the immigrant family experience—as assessed by economic well-being, educational opportunities, and level of comfort in the community—can be split into two immigrant experiences as divided on a continuum of education and skill level. The experiences of Bloomington-Normal immigrants are premised on education/skill level, facility with language, legal status, and pre-existing immigrant networks and associations, though none of these is an absolute predictor of successful integration.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the U.S. population of immigrants and their U.S. born children (who by virtue of birth are citizens) grows, issues surrounding social justice, assimilation and economic incorporation become increasingly important on the national agenda.

In Illinois, the sixth largest immigrant-receiving state in the country, nearly one in seven people is an immigrant. In the past two decades, the total number of immigrants in Illinois has increased by 83%. Over a quarter of children born in Illinois have at least one immigrant parent (“US and Illinois Immigrants by the Numbers”). Illinois’ immigrants are concentrated in Chicago, but they are increasingly settling outside the city and downstate—including the central Illinoisan twin cities of Bloomington-Normal. In 1990, almost half of Illinois’ immigrants lived within the city limits; however, by 2009 that number had decreased to one-third (“US and Illinois Immigrants by the Numbers”). Immigrants are increasingly moving outward to Chicago suburbs and south to non-traditional communities in central and southern Illinois. Although the extensive literature on immigrants in the U.S. has recognized this urban-to-rural movement, research on urban metropolises is not matched in smaller cities and rural areas.

This project attempts to fill this gap through examining the immigrant family experience in Bloomington-Normal. Bloomington-Normal has a long history of immigration, including the Chinese and Mexican labor immigrants who helped to build the railroads and the German immigrants who founded this university. This project focuses on the most recent wave of immigrants, specifically the last 20 years.

This project draws on principal migration theories to help answer central questions surrounding why immigrants leave their country of origin and how they choose their place of destination. It then assesses assimilation by exploring how immigrant families are

accommodated and integrated into Bloomington-Normal. This project compares the predictions of migration and assimilation theories to actual experiences, as assessed by census data supplemented by interviews with immigrants in the community. Through evaluating the economic, sociological and cultural effects of migration and integration on immigrant families, this project aims to construct an idea of the immigrant experience in Bloomington-Normal.

This project will evaluate three components of the immigrant family experience: economic well-being, educational opportunity, and level of comfort in the community. The evidence gathered reflects locally a national phenomenon of a dual immigrant experience, whereby immigrants tend to be concentrated in highly skilled or unskilled extremes. The immigrant experience in Bloomington-Normal is premised on education/skill level, facility with language, legal status, and pre-existing immigrant networks and associations, though none of these is an absolute predictor of successful integration.

II. DEFINITIONS

The word “immigrant” refers to a foreign-born person who does not have U.S. citizenship at birth, including “naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, persons on temporary visas, and the unauthorized” (Batalova & Terranza 2010). The U.S. Census favors the term “foreign born” over “immigrant”. For the purpose of this paper, “foreign-born” and “immigrant” will be used interchangeably. “Immigrant” can refer to a new arrival or to someone who has lived in the U.S. for almost their entire life, and it is used regardless of current citizenship status.

When referring to a person’s immigration status, this paper will use “documented” or “undocumented”. This is more commonly used than similar terms, like “authorized” versus

“unauthorized” and “in status” or “out of status”. More importantly, it avoids the dehumanizing ramifications of labeling a person as “illegal”. It also recognizes that a person’s immigration status can change over time. Some immigrants are currently undocumented but had legal status at one point or are in the process of getting legal status; conversely, some documented immigrants have been out of status as some point in their lives.

This project makes reference to immigrants’ racial and ethnic backgrounds. When dealing with people from Latin America, there is often a discussion on whether to use the term “Hispanic” or “Latino”. The term Hispanic was developed in the 1970s by the government to refer to all Spanish-speaking peoples; the term Latino came from grassroots organizations and includes non-Spanish speaking people in Latin America (Millard 108). Today, the U.S. Census combines both into “Latino/Hispanic”. When possible, this project tries to specify country of origin, for example Colombian or Mexican-American, but when referring to people across all of Latin America, the terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably.

III. METHODS

In order to garner the actual immigrant experience in Bloomington-Normal, this project draws upon McLean County Census data, supplementary reports by community sources, and personal interviews. Unless otherwise stated, all census data comes from the recently released 2010 American Community Surveys, which produce “demographic, social, housing and economic statistics in the form of 1-year, 3-year and 5-year estimates based on population thresholds” (American Fact Finder). Data is cited parenthetically by the report number.

Over the course of this project, two shortcomings of the census data came to light. First, census data is split by county and therefore the statistics are not confined to the city limits of

Bloomington-Normal. While this is not ideal, a large majority of McLean County's residents live in Bloomington-Normal. More problematic is the fact that undocumented immigrants are hesitant to participate in the census because of fear of being found out by the U.S. government as illegal. A key community informant active with undocumented populations explained, "People who are worried about their status, they don't feel comfortable or safe filling out the Census". Because this project seeks to incorporate all immigrants regardless of legal status, this is a significant weakness.

To provide a more comprehensive survey, this project refers to estimates from community organizations and leaders as supplementary measures of immigrant populations. Because these community sources hold positions of trust and work closely with said immigrants, it can be argued that their measures are more inclusive and thus more accurate. This project includes key informant interviews with current and former leaders of the McLean County Indian Association, One Heart for Congo, the Organization of Chinese Americans, and Western Avenue Community Center.

In order to add more content and humanize the data, this project also includes eleven personal interviews of immigrants who live in Bloomington-Normal and the transcripts of ten interviews of Indian immigrants conducted by the McLean County Museum of History. The McLean County Museum of History's "New Communities Initiative: Asian Indian Community Project" is an ongoing project which began in 2007. It is currently unpublished. Jeff Woodard, the Director of Community Relations, kindly gave permission for this project to access the interview transcripts of ten Indian immigrants who were recruited through its collaborative partner, the McLean County Indian Association. While the interview transcripts were not

designed for this project, the overlap in areas explored was enough to be a relevant contribution to this project.

For the eleven interviews conducted specifically for this project, participation was conditional on the person signing the IRB-approved consent form that indicated s/he was over 18 years of age, could refuse to answer any question, and could withdraw from the study at any time. All participants signed the consent form, and none declined to answer any survey questions. All interviews were given confidentially and will be quoted throughout this project anonymously. Seven of the interviews were conducted in English, two were conducted bilingually in Spanish/English, and two were conducted in Vietnamese through an interpreter. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. Participants were recruited on a referral basis through contacts from Illinois Wesleyan University, The Immigration Project, and Western Avenue Community Center.

The following chart (A) illustrates relevant demographic characteristics of the sample pool of eleven interviews and ten transcripts. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 65 years old. “Education Level” refers to the level of education the participant held upon arrival and does not include schooling in the U.S. Two participants entered the U.S. as children; their parents’ education levels upon arrival to the U.S. are used as proxy measures. A “high” level of education is defined as some level of post-secondary education or equivalent; a “low” level of education is defined as not completing secondary education or its equivalent. “Documentation Status” refers to the participant’s status at the time of the interview. Although one additional participant first entered the U.S. illegally, he later gained legal status and is recorded here as “Documented”.

A. Community Interviews and McLean County History Museum Asian Indian Project Transcripts		
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	NUMBER	PERCENT
Gender		
Male	12	43%
Female	9	57%
Country of Origin		
China	2	10%
DR of Congo	3	14%
India	10	47%
Mexico	3	14%
Philippines	1	5%
Vietnam	2	10%
Education Level		
Post-secondary	16	76%
Less than secondary	5	24%
Documentation Status		
Documented	20	95%
Undocumented	1	5%

Because participants were recruited on a referral basis, this project has a snowball bias. These personal interviews and interview transcripts are not representative of the full immigrant community. Generalizations to populations should be made with extreme caution; however, the personal interviews conducted for this project are valuable in constructing a fuller understanding of the immigrant experience by filling gaps in census and community resource data.

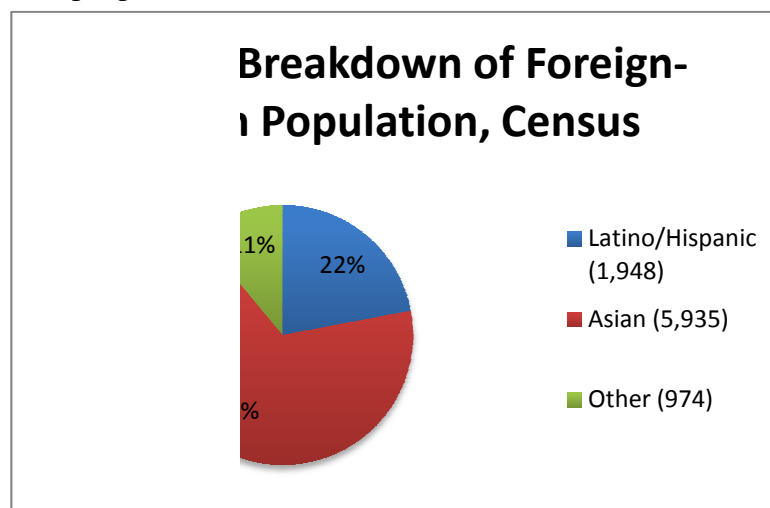
Immigrant quality of life was assessed by a questionnaire developed for use in this study composed of 24 open-ended questions and an invitation at the end for additional comments. The questions gathered basic biographic data before exploring economic opportunities, civic participation, educational opportunities, and identity. The questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

IV. IMMIGRATION TO BLOOMINGTON/NORMAL

Bloomington-Normal lies two and a half hours southwest of Chicago on Interstate 55. It is home to 169,832 people. Of its residents, 68.5% are white and 26.2% are black or African-American; other races/ethnicities comprise the remaining 5.3% (QT-P3US). Bloomington-Normal's largest employment centers are State Farm Insurance, Country Financial, Illinois State University, and BroMenn Hospital.

Other non-urban communities in Illinois are witnessing increasing numbers and similar developments in the immigrant population. This is especially true for cities that share certain characteristics, for example large universities that also exist in Peoria and Moline. Where Bloomington-Normal differs from comparable downstate Illinois cities is that it houses a major employer: the corporate headquarters of State Farm Insurance.

5.22% of McLean County's population, or 8,859 people, are immigrants (B05002). This is a dramatic increase of 56% percent from 2000, when the Census recorded 4,978 immigrants. Of McLean County's foreign-born population, 22% are Latino/Hispanic and 67% are Asian (BO60041). 2010 data was unavailable for white and black immigrants because they compose too small a proportion for the annual measures; however, Census data from 2000 recorded 131 foreign-born people who describe themselves as black or of African descent (PCT063B) and 1,914 foreign-born people who describe themselves as white (PCT063A).

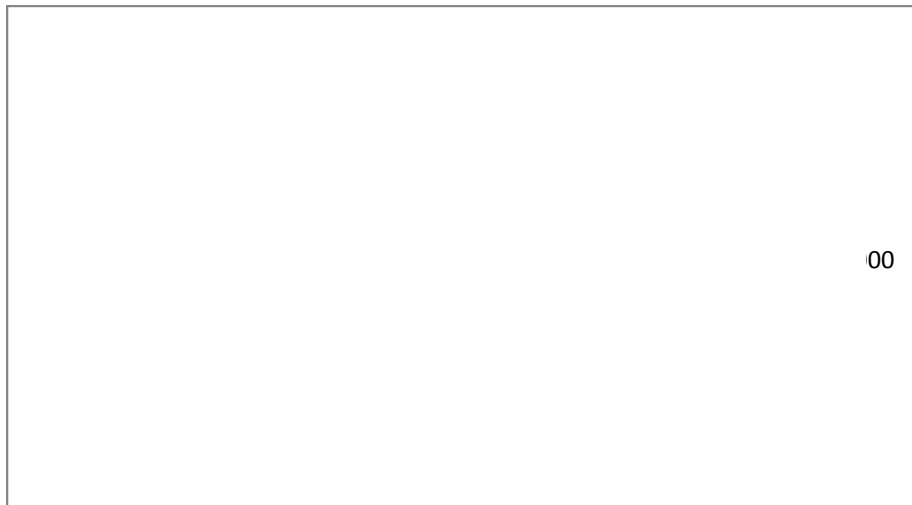


The Census information shown above provides an overly simplistic account of McLean County's foreign-born population. Fortunately, community organizations and key informants who work directly with immigrant populations are able to supplement Census data. Please note that the following community estimate figures are not representative of the entire immigrant population; they are a compilation of human estimates of specific ethnic communities' foreign-born immigrants and their children, both foreign-born and native-born.

Dr. Jacques Bisimwa, a founding leader of One Heart for Congo, Bloomington-Normal's Congolese association, estimated that the Congolese population in Bloomington-Normal was approaching 1,000 people at its peak in the late 2000s. In recent years, many moved out to Galesburg, Beardstown and Rushville. Today, Dr. Bisimwa estimates around 250 Congolese immigrants live in Bloomington-Normal, including children (Bisimwa).

Dr. Narendra Jaggi, twice former president of the McLean County Indian Association, estimated that there are currently between 5,000 and 6,000 Indian people (both immigrants and their descendants) in Bloomington-Normal. The first immigrant families came slowly in the 1960s, peaking in the 1990s with "a very big spike, in 1999, of IT [Information Technology] professionals from India, helping State Farm deal with the Y2K issue", and then plateauing in the 2000s (Jaggi). The Vietnamese couple interviewed in this project noted the lack of Vietnamese in Bloomington-Normal, surmising that there are less than 200 Vietnamese in McLean County. A former president of the Organization of Chinese Americans, known in the Filipino community as "the Mayor", estimated around 150 Filipino immigrant families (around 400 people including adults and children). Of the heads of households, this same key community informant estimated that a full 100% of Filipino immigrants have a college education.

A 2009 report commissioned by the Hispanic Families Work Group estimated between 8,000 and 10,000 undocumented Latino immigrants in McLean County (Bliss 8). Certain Latino businesses have higher estimates of the Latino population, based on the fact that they serve around 15,000 Latinos from Bloomington-Normal and the surrounding area (Bliss 8). Socorro Alvarez, the Hispanic Outreach Coordinator at Western Avenue Community Center, was hesitant to give a number but noted that the most common countries of origin for Bloomington-Normal's Latino residents are Mexico and Guatemala.



A. Migration theory in Bloomington-Normal

It is widely accepted among international migration theorists that immigrants leave their home countries for three primary reasons: economic opportunity, political persecution, and family reunification (Stalker 20). Motivations are also split into “push” and “pull” decisions, where a push implies a force out of the country of origin and a pull implies a draw to the destination country. For example, an economic push would be a lack of jobs in the country of origin (i.e., economic refugees) while an economic pull would be the existence of better job

opportunities in the destination country. To understand the emigration decision, the participant survey developed for this project included an open-ended question of each individual's motivation for leaving their country of origin. If economic opportunity and political persecution include academic opportunity and academic persecution, respectively, then all of the interviews conducted in this project fit this model.

International migration theorist Niklaus Steiner divides immigrants into voluntary migrants and involuntary refugees. Very few immigrants in Bloomington-Normal are categorized as the latter because it is increasingly difficult to obtain asylum or refugee status in the U.S. However, this does not mean that they were not forced to leave their home country. Although only two participants in this survey had refugee status (both from South Vietnam), four others cited political persecution as a factor in their decision to emigrate.

When asked whether he left voluntarily or involuntarily, one self-classified refugee from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo explained that, "When you're occupied, you are considered less than human by the occupant. There is no law. So you can get killed. So you better leave if you can. That's why I left." Another Congolese immigrant, who classified himself as a voluntary migrant with secondary political considerations in leaving the Congo, commented that "every infrastructure—I mean by education, health care, everything—are down, so even if you are educated and you have a degree, it will be hard for you to find a job". Both Chinese participants reported being targeted as intellectuals in the wake of the Cultural Revolution as a key reason to leave China.

Within the category of voluntary migrants, Steiner subdivides into high-skilled immigrants, low-skilled immigrants, admission for chance, and family connections. Anecdotally, community immigration lawyer Dhenu Savla explained that Indian immigrants are often high-

skilled workers who come on H1-B work visas sponsored by specific companies, like State Farm (Savla). Leaders of One Heart for Congo explained that most African immigrants and their families are recipients of the Diversity Visa Lottery, a program established in 1990 which provides fifty thousand green cards each year to randomly selected applicants from all around the world (Bubke 7). Applicants are required to have “the equivalent of a high school education”, as well as computer literacy and access to complete the application (Bubke 1). Applying Steiner’s framework, Diversity Visa Lottery immigrants are well-educated immigrants admitted by chance.

In contrast to H1-B visa and Diversity Visa recipients, immigrants who enter on H1-A temporary work visas or undocumented are more likely to be low-skill immigrants. In this project, one participant entered the U.S. without papers, one was brought without papers by his parents, and one entered on a temporary seasonal work permit. They all emigrated from Mexico for economic opportunity. While it is likely that there is to some extent a correlation between temporary or no documentation and low-skill levels, that was not the case in this project. Two of the three Mexican participants are highly skilled.

The chart (B) on the following page classifies the 11 community participants interviewed for this project. Please note that it does not include the 10 Indian immigrants who were interviewed through the McLean County History Museum Asian Indian Project.

B. COMMUNITY SURVEYS			
<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Self-reported motivation for emigration/immigration</i>	<i>Stalker's classification</i>	<i>Steiner's classification</i>
China	Economic opportunity (pull) Academic persecution (push)	Economic/political	Voluntary migrant (High-skilled immigrant)
	Economic opportunity (pull) Academic persecution (push)	Economic/political	Voluntary migrant (High-skilled immigrant)
DR of Congo	Academic opportunity (pull)	Economic	Voluntary migrant (High-skilled immigrant)
	Economic instability (push) Political instability (push)	Economic/political	Voluntary migrant (Admission for chance)
	Political instability (push)	Political	Voluntary migrant (Admission for chance)
Mexico	Economic opportunity (push)	Economic	Voluntary migrant (Low-skilled immigrant)
	Economic opportunity (push)	Economic	Voluntary migrant (Low-skilled immigrant)
	Economic opportunity (pull)	Economic	Voluntary migrant (Low-skilled immigrant)
Philippines	Economic opportunity (pull)	Economic	Voluntary migrant (High-skilled immigrant)
Vietnam	Refugee (push)	Political	Involuntary refugee
	Refugee (push)	Political	Involuntary refugee

B. Why Bloomington-Normal?

While the *emigration* decision is necessary to give context to the immigrant experience, this project's focus is more on the *immigration* decision: why do immigrants choose to settle in Bloomington-Normal? As mentioned above, the Chicago-to-downstate movement in the past two decades reflects a nationwide trend in immigrant settlement patterns from key urban centers to non-traditional rural areas. All participants cited networks as their dominant motivation. Each interviewee answered that s/he knew someone—a friend or family member—who would help the newcomer and his/her family in their initial adjustment. Secondary reasons were availability of jobs, presence of universities, the “small town” feel, and a lower cost of living. One participant explained, “It is a small town but it is very handy, you can find anything” and there are low

crime levels and “everyone cares about their family”. The Economic Research Institute publishes the average cost of living in specific cities as compared to the national earnings level of \$70,000. In Chicago, the cost of living to meet the national \$70,000 lifestyle is \$89,935; in Bloomington-Normal the cost of living is \$64,544 (“Cost of Living”).

Bloomington-Normal is not a “gateway” city. Of the 21 total immigrants whose experiences were referenced in this project (11 interviewees and 10 transcripts referenced from the McLean County History Museum’s Asian Indian project), seven came directly to Bloomington-Normal from their country of origin and 14 went somewhere else first. Cristina Deutsch, a community activist who has been working with immigrants in central Illinois for over 30 years, gave her perspective on certain towns throughout southern and central Illinois. Certain cities have bad reputations for immigrants, like Peru and Lincoln; others are more neutral, like Pontiac and Chenoa. Peoria and Bloomington-Normal have more resources for immigrants, like Western Avenue and Catholic Charities. Cristina concluded, “I think Bloomington-Normal is the most friendly... around here, definitely the most friendly. There are a few exceptions: a guy at the DMV, a lady who didn’t want to give marriage certificates...” but within central Illinois, Bloomington-Normal is relatively attractive to immigrants.

C. Why now?

The recent surge in immigrant numbers in the past two decades is due to two factors: first, the inherently expansive nature of networks, and second, as a response to immigration policy. Immigration policy is determined by the federal government and the state. Interviews with Dhenu Savla, a community-based immigration lawyer, and Cristina Deutsch, cited above, highlighted two particularly influential pieces of legislation for McLean County. First, the 1990

Immigration Act, which was implemented after aggressive lobbying by businesses and advocates of immigrant and ethnic minority rights groups (Underwood 2011), established the Diversity Visa Lottery mentioned above and the H1-B Visa Program, which provides 195,000 visas each year to foreign workers in specialty occupations (Underwood 2011). In effect, it “trebled the ceilings for the relatively high-skilled employment visas” (Mattoo 57). In practice this was seen in the increased hiring rate by State Farm of computer specialists around Y2K. Cristina Deutsch also emphasized the importance of the 1986 Amnesty for seasonal agricultural workers. Many immigrants who worked in central Illinois in detasselling, the apple groves, and walking beans submitted their paperwork with Western Avenue Community Center here in town.

62% of McLean County’s immigrants entered after 1990 (BO5005), and of its foreign-born population who are now citizens, 80% were naturalized after 1990 (CO5011). These statistics coincide with the 1986 amnesty and 1990 Immigration Act. However, key informant interviews suggested that natural networking effects have a stronger correlation with a larger number of more recent immigrants.

V. THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Despite the fact that many people immigrate for economic opportunity, entry into the United States does not guarantee economic well-being. For the purpose of this project, economic well-being will be assessed through examination of employment and poverty rates.

A. Immigrant employment rate

Statistics show that immigrant labor does not drop appreciably during a recession, and employer demand is largely insensitive to changes in immigration laws and law enforcement

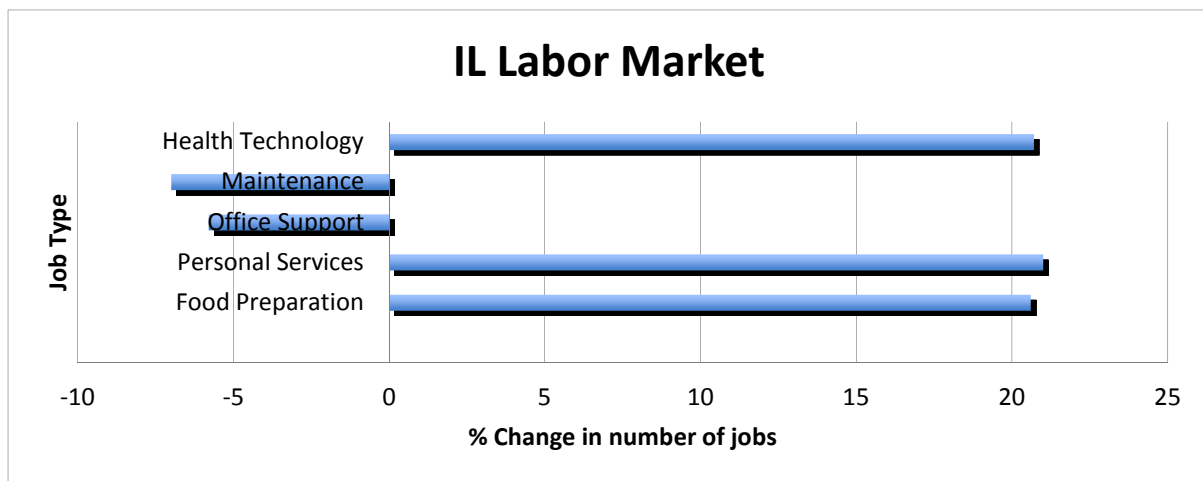
levels (Cornelius 167), suggesting that immigrants fill jobs. In Illinois, immigrants are 13.5% of the population but form 17.5% of the workforce (“US and Illinois Immigration by the Numbers”). Immigrants are overrepresented for a number of reasons. Many immigrants are “pulled” to specific locations in the US by demand for workers (Stalker 22). Potential employees are recruited through extensive family and business networks. Additionally, immigrant women and immigrant youth are more likely to be part of the workforce than their native-born counterparts. Anecdotally, one interviewee active in the Latino immigrant community accounted for higher labor force participation by explaining that immigrants are less likely to leave the workforce due to underemployment or undesirable employment because they are responsible for supporting their immediate families in the U.S. in addition to their extended families in their country of origin. In order to send remittances home whilst sustaining themselves, Latino immigrants have to stay employed.

All of the eleven immigrants interviewed in this project were currently employed at the time of the interview. Out of the ten transcripts from the History Museum’s Asian Indian Project, eight interviewees were employed and the remaining two had elected to be homemakers.

B. Illinois Labor Market and Immigrant Employment Type

Between 2000 and 2005, the Illinois native-born labor force decreased by almost 34,000 people. It was an influx of immigrants that allowed the state to maintain workforce growth (Paral 2). Immigrant employment reflects the general labor market because immigrant labor accommodates structural changes in the job market. In Illinois, jobs at both extremes of the skill spectrum increased between 2000 and 2005. At the high end, health technologist jobs increased by 20.7%; at the low end, food preparation jobs increased by 20.6% and personal services by

21.0% (Paral 5). At the same time, medium-skill job sectors stagnated or decreased: office support jobs decreased by 5.8% and maintenance/repair jobs decreased by 7.0% (Paral 5). The Bureau of Labor Statistics found similar results in a 2000 national analysis and predicted that between 2000-2010, the single most expansive job sector would be food preparation and serving workers (“Foreign Born Workers”). The graph below charts the changes observed by Paral, demonstrating the increasingly pronounced hourglass shape of the labor market.



These structural changes are well-suited to an influx in immigration. International migration scholar Peter Stalker highlights the importance of dual labor markets as a pull factor from receiving states. Jobs are either secure, permanent, high-skilled and well-paid, or temporary, hard, unpleasant, and badly-paid (Stalker 23). Similarly, Alba and Nee distinguish between low-skill “traditional labor immigrants” and high-skill “human-capital immigrants” (230). Previously, women and youth filled undesirable jobs; today, these jobs are filled by immigrants.

Illinois studies show that immigrants are concentrated on the extremes of the skill spectrum. These studies measure skill level by looking at education levels. Although skill and education are two different variables, for the purpose of this topic they can be used

interchangeably: an engineer's degree in electrical engineering is both her education level and skill level, and a professor's teaching degree in philosophy functions as both his education level and skill level.

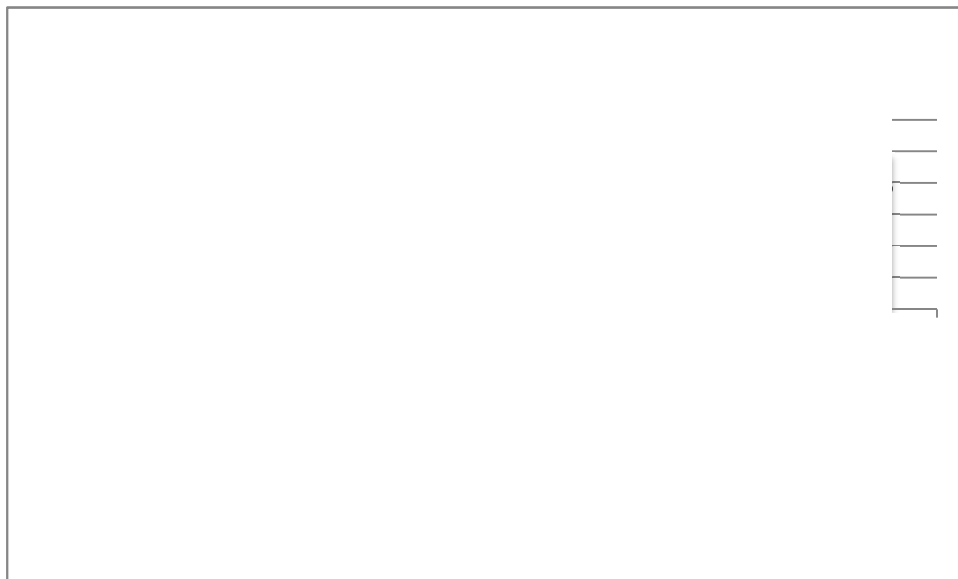
In 2005, 26.3% of immigrant workers in Illinois had equal or less than a high school education and 27.4% had at least a doctorate (Paral 6). A nationwide analysis shows that within specific sectors, Africans, West Indians, and Asians are overrepresented in business and health services, Mexicans in agriculture, and Southeast Asians in manufacturing (Zhou 141). Of the 11 participants in this project, 8 were highly educated (3 from Democratic Republic of Congo, 2 from Mexico, 2 from China, 1 from the Philippines) and 3 were not well-educated (2 from Vietnam and 1 from Mexico). Of the 10 transcripts from the McLean County History Museum's Asian Indian project, 8 were highly educated; the 2 who were not highly-educated were spouses of highly educated Indian immigrants. While community interviews noted trends of highly skilled immigrants from India, China, and the Philippines, and unskilled labor immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and China, country or region of origin does not necessarily preclude skill or education level in Bloomington-Normal.

Immigrant participants in this study worked at State Farm, Illinois State University, Illinois Wesleyan University, a family-owned business, Country Financial, the Normal Public Library, and as a cashier in a shop. In general, immigrants on H-1B visas—or “Specialty Occupation” visas which require a bachelor's or higher degree as well as demonstration that there are no equally skilled native workers—worked in the high-skill section of the job spectrum (“H1-B Specialty Occupations” 2011). As ascertained by key informant interviews, undocumented workers tended to take less desirable jobs in low-skill sectors along the opposite extreme of the job spectrum. This is because they tend to have lower skill and education levels.

These immigrants often take temporary, low wage jobs with little job security and high turnover rates. This can lead to higher poverty rates. Furthermore, (and although Illinois state law SB 1133 passed in 2009 prohibits requiring employers to use an employment eligibility verification system like that used in Alabama) they are at a legal disadvantage in comparison to native workers (Andrade 348).

C. Over-qualification

Many immigrants work in jobs for which they are overqualified. One study using 1990 national Census data reported that 25.4% of African immigrants, 28% of non-Southeast Asian immigrants and 26.9% of European immigrants are overqualified for their jobs (Zhou 144). For comparison, 24.4% of native-born whites are also overqualified (Zhou 144). This is commonly called “brain waste”. A 2005-2006 study from the Migration Policy Institute reported that 1 in 5 college-educated immigrants was unemployed or working in a low-skilled job, with a total of 1.3 million underutilized skilled immigrants (Batalova & Fix 2008).



Often, over-qualification is due to the imperfect transferability of immigrants' skills and education from their country of origin. Skilled immigrants' foreign qualifications and licenses are not recognized (Mattoo 267). Empirically, degrees from other countries are "significantly less valued than human capital obtained domestically" (Friedberg 221). One survey of 1990s Census data of migrants from select countries found that at the low end, only 49.5% of Latin American professionals enter a skilled, science or professional job. More optimistically, 77.6% of African professionals and 77.5% of Asian professionals do so (Mattoo 260). Please note that the African and Asian countries selected in the study are predominantly English-speaking. This evidence suggests that "nominally identical educational levels" translate to different job placements depending on the country of origin (Mattoo 257). This is due in part to varying degrees of compatibility between human capital provided by the source country and skills required by the receiving country (Friedberg 225). Use of English as the language of instruction is an especially significant indicator of the portability of human capital from the source country. Coming from an English-speaking country increases the likelihood of obtaining a skilled job in the US by 11% for a hypothetical college graduate (Mattoo 266). One interviewee concurred, explaining that "If you don't speak the language [you can't advance], that's in any country." Furthermore, military conflict weakens institutions and decreases the quality of degrees granted by that state (Mattoo 256). During this project, some of the immigrants who reported over-qualification came from countries in military conflict, and all immigrants who reported over-qualification spoke limited English.

Over-qualification is not an uncommon experience of Bloomington-Normal immigrants (see Chart C). At least 4 participants in this study were overqualified for their jobs. Despite qualifications as a surgeon, a teacher, a professor, and an electrician, four community

interviewees have had to start over in their professional careers. Upon arrival, they worked in menial jobs at restaurants and in seasonal agricultural work. One former teacher told me, “when I came here I did the most difficult jobs. I experimented... labor jobs, manual jobs, hard jobs... I did the basic agriculture jobs. Then I moved to the maid jobs, and then... I worked as a room attendant in different hotels for a period of maybe 7, 8 years”. All of the participants who reported overqualification for their jobs were at the point of the interview in the long process of attaining the level they were at in their home country.

A. Community Surveys	
Country of Origin	Response to 8a “Do you consider yourself under-qualified, over-qualified, or adequately qualified for your job?”
China	Adequately qualified
	Overqualified
DR of Congo	Overqualified
	Overqualified
	Adequately qualified
Mexico	Overqualified
	Adequately qualified
	Adequately qualified
Philippines	Adequately qualified
Vietnam	Adequately qualified
	Adequately qualified

Over-qualification has important implications. It can provide more flexibility and an advantage in labor market entry if the immigrant is willing to take a cut in status. However, at the same time it also demonstrates the difficulty faced by immigrant group members in fully realizing their human capital and achieving socioeconomic success (Zhou 150). When a community member was asked if his over-qualification caused him frustration, he answered:

“I believe life is a fight. You have to fight to become what you want. For me, it is to fight. For me, I’m still fighting to be on the same level as in my country. So that’s why I’m working because I need money to survive. And I’m going to class to get a new degree from here and be able to find a job. I will sleep after I graduate. That is my target.”

Many participants focused on their children. Despite their sacrifices, they took comfort in the fact that their children would have better and more stable opportunities. One mother explained:

“I don’t regret it much because I was thinking of my son. Because of the economic situation you don’t know your future what will happen tomorrow. Moving here you have more guarantees. So I don’t regret much. I still think it was a wise decision.”

B. Recertification

Fortunately, rates of overqualification and under-utilization tend to decrease over time. This is because immigrants invest in new degrees and recertification programs to reach the qualification level that they were at in their home country. Although it is expensive and frustrating to start over in pursuit of the same degree, some people argue that attending school in the destination country is one of the most efficient ways to gain language and other country-specific knowledge in order to adapt their skills to the destination country (Friedberg 227).

Chinese, Congolese, Indian and Mexican immigrants in Bloomington-Normal report enrollment at Heartland Community College and Illinois State University for recertification programs. Multiple participants reported that Bloomington-Normal's three universities are a strong draw for the immigrant community, for both their employment opportunities and recertification opportunities. According to a key community informant, some Congolese spend a few years here to recertify and learn English before leaving for a larger city with more opportunities.

C. Advancement and economic mobility

Immigrants are attracted to the U.S. by the promise of the American dream: economic mobility. However, in addition to the initial challenges in getting their skills recognized, some immigrants reported obstacles in advancement. One participant said that in her own and her friends' experiences there is equal opportunity at the entry level but unequal opportunity for higher positions. She described her joy at finally receiving a promotion: "I closed the door when I got to my office and cried. And all my Chinese friends are so happy for me because they were so successful in China but not here." She explained that before her promotion, often she would

think, “I was a respected professor in China and why do I come here?”. Multiple participants reported that as foreigners, they have to work harder to prove they can do the same job. This may be because employers are not aware of their immigrant employees’ achievements in their home country; however, two participants suspect that it is due in part to prejudice. One participant concluded that:

“capitalism in the United States allows technically orientated people... to rise pretty high within hierarchies... [and] if they are the best, they will keep rising... but in all hierarchies of this kind... you always rise up to a point beyond which your technical skills don’t matter as much... the issue is your ability to lead people, to inspire people, to manage people”. At this point, when “it’s not just your skill, it’s the willingness of other people to follow or choose not to follow your suggestions or advice”, immigrants reach a glass ceiling because of others’ “inability to be led by a person of color and sometimes a woman.”

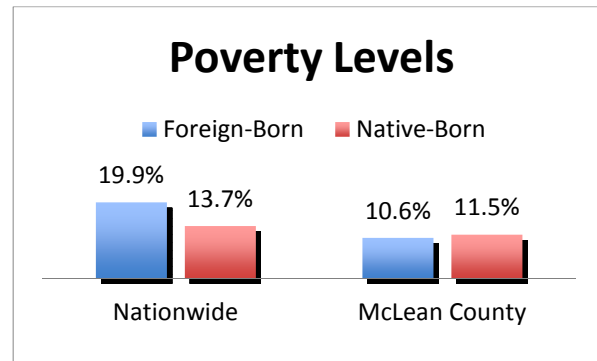
The difficulty of advancement sharpens the need for immigrant-to-immigrant mentorship. Seven are active in formal mentoring relationships with other immigrants from their same country of origin. These mentoring relationships exist within companies or through community organizations. This helps to counteract the challenges to vertical mobility and the glass ceiling described above.

Speaking for undocumented immigrants in Bloomington-Normal, one interviewee explained that there are many possibilities to work in different jobs; however, all of the jobs are of the same type. He explained that a dishwasher can leave one restaurant and get the same job two blocks down at another restaurant the next morning. Although there are many opportunities, there are not necessarily better opportunities. In other words, Bloomington-Normal affords horizontal mobility but not vertical mobility.

D. Poverty

The extra challenges faced by immigrants, such as employment challenges discussed above, in Bloomington-Normal imply higher vulnerability and propensity to poverty.

However, national and local poverty statistics tell a complex story. In 2009, the nationwide poverty rate of the foreign born population was 19.9%, compared to 13.7% of the native born



population (DeNavas Walt 17). In McLean County, the 2010 Census measured 19,012 people below the poverty line: 10.6% (571/8859) of the immigrant population and 11.45% (18441/160,973) of the native-born population (B06012). Therefore, the poverty rate is slightly lower for foreign-born than native-born residents.

Although this may be surprising, the correlation between poverty and nativity is confounded by the diversity of the immigrant population in the high- and low-skill extremes discussed in the section above. It can be partly attributed to underreporting of low-skill undocumented immigrants in census data, which skews poverty rates of the foreign-born population toward higher-income high-skill immigrants. One interviewee explained that low-skill immigrants are less likely to be in poverty because (although they make less money than natives) usually two members of the household work.

E. Access to public benefits

Immigrants in poverty are at a disadvantage due to their limited access to state and federal benefits. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

(PRWORA) of 1996 restricted immigrants' access to federal public benefits through Title IV, which redefined eligibility by immigrant status and whether the applicant arrived before or after the law's enactment date of August 22, 1996 (Levinson 2002). Under PRWORA, legal immigrants are required to wait five years before being eligible for federal benefits and undocumented immigrants are barred from receiving non-emergency benefits.

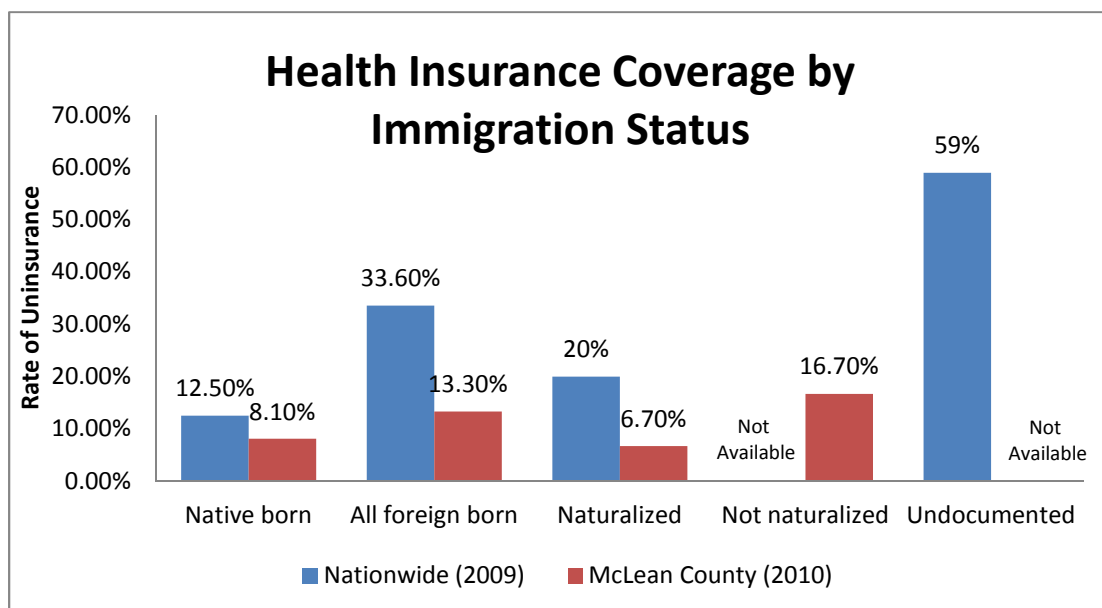
After this law was passed, public benefits were decentralized to the states. Impoverished immigrants and other affected populations became dependent on substitutive state laws. Illinois' main forms of welfare are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security Income (SSI) and LINK (food stamps). All of these programs are provided for refugees and lawful residents (after the five year bar). Supplemental food programs (LINK), health care for children (KidStart) and health care for pregnant women (WIC) are provided for all Illinois residents regardless of status (Hillebrand 10). Outside of LINK, KidStart and WIC, non-refugees and undocumented immigrants are excluded from all non-emergency benefits (Hillebrand 12).

This has a large impact on health access and health trajectories, because affected populations have to look instead to local sources for preventative and non-emergency care. Unfortunately, there are inherent disadvantages to community health-care, including immigrants' lack of familiarity with community resources. Community efficacy in facilitating access to health care and treatment includes overcoming language barriers, creating trust, and helping immigrants become familiar with supportive resources (Edberg 578). A 2009 study by the Hispanic Families Work Group cited high usage of the McLean County Health Department in the Latino community (Bliss 14). This was echoed by Latino and Congolese participants, who also noted the full-time Spanish and French staff members. Annual reports from the McLean County Health Department collate a total 5,380.73 hours of translation and interpretation provided in the past

three years. 95% of these hours are for Spanish language services; the next highest percentage (3.7%) is for French (“Interpretation and Translation Services Provided”).

Even with language access, economic barriers like poverty or lack of insurance negatively impact health outcomes. Across the nation, health insurance is a proxy measure for access to health care and positive health outcomes (Brown 181). Immigrants are significantly less likely to have health insurance. According to 2009 Census Data, 33.6% of immigrants in the U.S. are uninsured, compared to 12.5% of native-born Americans (Bakalava & Terranzas 2010). Within the immigrant population, unauthorized immigrants are about three times more likely (59%) to be uninsured than naturalized immigrants (20%) (Bakalava & Terranzas 2010).

Regardless of immigration status, Latinos in the U.S. have the highest uninsurance rates across all ethnic/racial groups. In 2005, 32.4% of Latinos were uninsured, versus 20.2% of the blacks or African Americans (Bakalava & Terranzas 2010). According to the 2010 McLean County census data, 13.3% of the foreign-born population is uninsured, compared to 8.1% of the native-born population. Similar to national trends, the uninsured rate is higher (16.7%) for non-naturalized immigrants (S2701).



The health insurance inequity noted above is due to a number of factors, including language and cultural differences and diverse health care needs. However, the outstanding reason for the discrepancy can be traced back to employment. Most people in the U.S. receive their healthcare from their employer. In non-metropolitan areas of the U.S., almost two-thirds (65%) of people get their insurance from employers (Brown 184). According to one study, 78.8% of rural Midwestern agriculture workers are uninsured. Due to the impact of low-skilled immigrants, immigrants in general are more likely to work in jobs that do not provide health insurance—like temporary, part-time, or low-benefit jobs—than U.S. citizens. Without health insurance, treatment costs are prohibitively high. Lack of health insurance becomes a large barrier to healthcare access, and helps to explain poorer health outcomes of immigrants.

Although immigrants are more likely than natives to have a job, their quality of employment is very diverse. As posited above, immigrants tend to hold the best and worst jobs. Across employment type, immigrants have fewer options for legal recourse and subsequently lower workers' rights. High-skill immigrants are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs, and low-skill immigrants often lack vertical economic mobility. Slightly lower poverty rates for the foreign-born population in Bloomington-Normal obscure immigrant families' increased vulnerability because of exclusion from public benefits and health insurance. The picture of economic well-being for immigrants is complex and highly dependent on each immigrant's individual situation.

VI. EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Many immigrants take cuts in status and make great sacrifices in immigration to the U.S. to make a better life for their families. Because of this, it follows logically that the second

assessor for the immigrant experience in Bloomington-Normal would be cross-generational educational opportunities. In the United States, a good education and hard work are perceived as the means to improving one's economic situation and achieving the "American dream". It is through education that a person is able to move out of low-wage, difficult jobs at the bottom of the labor market hourglass and secure a permanent, better-paying career. Educational opportunities are a stepping stone for improving adult immigrants' situations. Recertification opportunities were discussed in the previous section and English as a Second Language classes will be discussed in the next section. Here, the focus is educational opportunities for children of immigrants.

A. Children's Education

In focus groups conducted by the Hispanic Families Work Group, many Latino parents emphasized their hopes to provide their children with better educational opportunities as a factor in their migration decision. In the same survey, they "often cited that [Bloomington-Normal] is well-known for its excellent public schools" (Bliss 11). The following section will assess whether Bloomington-Normal does indeed provide an excellent education to children of immigrants by looking at language access and achievement gaps by parents' citizenship status.

a. Limited English Proficiency

A large component of accommodating children of immigrants in the U.S. school system is providing extra language supports. There are over five million limited English proficiency students in the U.S. (Jost 1029). Children of immigrants are the fastest-growing student population in U.S. schools today, and half of them do not speak English fluently (Calderon 103).

Their numbers are determined within each school by an annual ACCESS test. The U.S. government requires every school district with more than 5% of children who have limited English proficiency to institute programs to address this language barrier (Calderon 104). These programs, usually divided into bilingual education and transitional English immersion, have the overarching goal of helping school districts “facilitate their integration into the regular public school curriculum” (Acevedo et. al 2011).

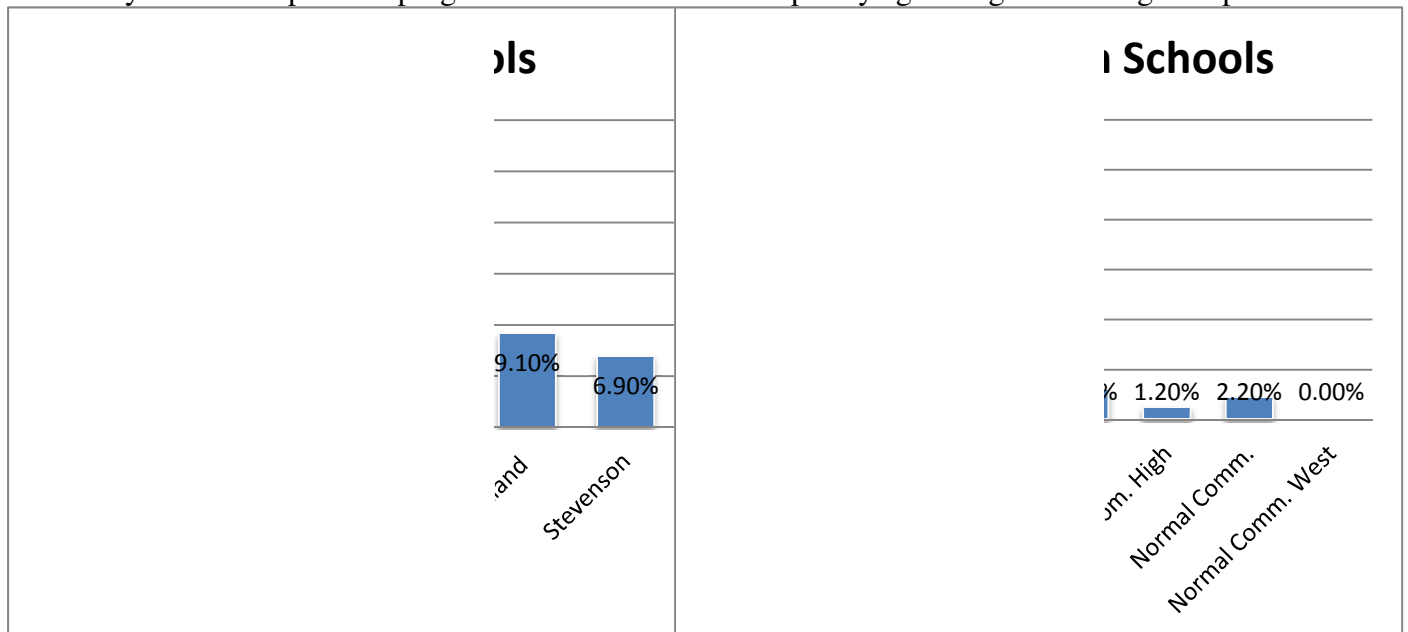
McLean County is split into two school districts: Unit 5, which encompasses Normal and some parts of Bloomington, and District 87, which includes most of Bloomington. In the research conducted for this project, two principals from District 87 elementary schools were interviewed. No one from Unit 5 was interviewed, so that data comes solely from the “2011 Illinois School Report Cards” published online.

Within Unit 5, most LEP students attend Cedar Ridge Elementary School, which provides programs for Spanish-speaking students. 26.0% of Cedar Ridge’s students are LEP. Benjamin Elementary has the next highest percentage of LEP students, at 7.7%. By the time students reach high school, most have progressed out of LEP status. 2.2% of Normal Community’s students are LEP and 0% of Normal Community West’s students are LEP (“McLean USD 5”). According to Socorro Alvarez, the director of Hispanic Outreach at Western Avenue, the Spanish bilingual programs at Cedar Ridge are regarded very highly by Latino parents.

Bent is the only school in District 87 to provide bilingual education. Stevenson and Oakland Elementary schools provide supplementary curriculums for LEP students. As required by Illinois law, District 87 provides bussing for students with language needs to attend Bent, Oakland or Stevenson if they do not live within those schools’ boundaries. Jeff Geringer,

principal at Bent Elementary, explained their programs in depth. Bent Elementary has a kindergarten-fifth grade “developmental bilingual program” for LEP students. At the kindergarten level, 90% of instruction is given in Spanish and 10% in English. Third grade is the pivotal transition to more English-heavy instruction, and by the time they reach fifth grade, 10% is in Spanish and 90% is in English. The purpose is to “build a firm language base before transferring over to the other language”. LEP students learn the same content as their non-LEP peers but in the home language. This is designed to prevent the LEP student from falling behind on the content while learning only the language. One-third of Bent’s students are in the developmental bilingual program. The ratio of LEP students to teachers is 18:1.

Oakland’s principal Dr. Mary Kay Scharf also agreed to be interviewed for this project. The number of LEP students enrolled in Oakland ranges between 30 and 50 students each year who speak up to 17 different languages. Currently, there are 36 students who make up 9.1% of the school body. They speak Arabic, Chinese, Eamil, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Macedonian, Marathi, Pelegu, Russian, Spanish and Tagalog. Oakland has two full-time teachers who run a daily 30-minute pull-out program where LEP students split by age and grade level go to special



attendance classes to focus on academic vocabulary and extra support. At the post-elementary school level, very few students remain classified as LEP. Bloomington Junior High School has a total of 1.9% LEP students and Bloomington High School has only 1.2% LEP students (“Bloomington SD 87”).

b. Achievement

In a 2009 analysis of Latino students, the Hispanic Families Work Group noticed a significant achievement gap well after Latinos are in English-only instruction. Although this report was based on ethnicity not citizenship status, it is safe to infer that at least some of these U.S. citizen students are children of immigrant parents. Of District 87 freshmen high school students, only 32.1% of Hispanic students meet state proficiency standards in English (compared to 69.9% of white students). Similarly, 35.8% of Latino students meet state proficiency standards in math, (compared to 66.5% of white students) (Bliss 12).

c. Post-Secondary Educational Attainment

The “glass ceiling” separating the dual labor market described in the employment section above is often equated to a university education. Post-secondary education is essential to open career opportunities. Numerous studies note the value placed upon education among immigrant families, reflecting the belief that “the best way for their children to succeed in U.S. society is to receive good grades, complete high school, and attend college” (Fuligni & Sidle Fuligni 236). Inter-generational differences in educational attainment are especially dramatic in groups with large numbers of low-wage labor migrants, where “there is an unmistakable tendency for educational attainment to improve—usually substantially—in the second generation” (Alba &

Nee 242). However, while this is positive progress, because of the low level in the first generation, it often means receiving a high school diploma.

Post-secondary educational opportunities in Illinois are largely determined by legal status. U.S. citizen students of immigrant parents and legal permanent resident students qualify for federal financial aid, and participants from Mexico, China and Vietnam all held that the U.S. offers more access to advanced education because of the availability of federal financial aid which is not matched in their countries of origin. However, this is not the case for undocumented students. Although Illinois is a DREAM Act state, meaning that students can attend state universities at in-state tuition rates regardless of immigration status, undocumented students do not qualify for financial aid (Fisseha 2011). Thus, undocumented youth with college aspirations have to compete for small numbers of private-school scholarships. Because many families cannot afford college tuition without federal aid, this excludes many immigrant students from university. Thus, while all immigrant parents recognize the importance of education in improving their children's quality of life, not all immigrant children have access to a university education.

All of the immigrants interviewed in this project have children or siblings in the McLean County K-12 public school system. They reported a general feeling of satisfaction with schools. They specifically expressed gratitude for extracurricular opportunities which provide a more well-rounded education. When asked about their children's future, most immigrants responded that their children would go to college. A Congolese immigrant who made great sacrifices in emigrating answered with a laugh, "Yes, and they have to." A highly-educated Indian immigrant couple explained that their children all received at least a bachelor's degree after attending K-12 in Bloomington-Normal. Another immigrant expressed gratitude that his children are U.S.

citizens who qualify for federal aid, recognizing the huge barriers to entry for undocumented immigrant parents who cannot pay for their children to go to college. One undocumented interviewee reiterated that money determines education. He was unable to afford college, and predicts that his siblings will also be unable to go to college.

VII. LEVEL OF COMFORT IN THE COMMUNITY

The final quality of life indicator chosen for this project is the level of comfort reported by immigrants. There are many theories used to assess immigrants' place in mainstream society, including assimilation, integration, incorporation, and acculturation. The differences between the various terms are subtle. Assimilation refers to a convergence process by which "characteristics of members of immigrant groups and host societies come to resemble one another" (Brown). In practice, the minority group culture often becomes absorbed by the majority group culture over time. This is the classic "melting pot" theory. Acculturation is more often equated to the "salad bowl" analogy and implies a preservation of the minority group's culture (Brown).

Due to measurement difficulties, this section relies heavily on community interviews and the McLean County History Museum transcripts. Immigrants were not asked explicitly to evaluate their level of assimilation or acculturation; rather, they were asked a series of questions regarding their level of social and political engagement.

When immigrants settle in and decide to raise their families here, Bloomington-Normal becomes their new home. However, participants communicated a number of transitional challenges including costs of relocation, English language barriers, learning to navigate public services like transportation and the school systems, and securing employment. Those without legal status face additional obstacles of community relations and integration.

The leader of One Heart for Congo explained that many Congolese enter Bloomington-Normal in debt. The base cost to immigrate to the U.S. with a Diversity Visa is \$780 per person (including children). He estimated that around 80% of Congolese in Bloomington-Normal borrowed money from a financier and entered the U.S. in large amounts of debt (Bisimwa). Because it takes at least a month for a social security card to come through in order to be able to work and earn money, upon arrival these families are totally dependent. Because of the incredibly high costs of relocation, this is a situation experienced by many immigrants, not just Congolese.

A range of participants mentioned difficulties in becoming familiar with the community. They all experienced transitional challenges when, as one participant put it, “learning Bloomington-Normal”. Cristina Deutsch, who has helped non-profit organizations like United Way and the Hispanic Families Work Group in analyses of immigrant communities, notes the persistent challenges of transportation and language access. However, she reiterated, “It ALL starts with immigration. If their immigration issue is solved then their other problems can be solved (housing, employment).”

Because of time constraints, this project did not identify an exhaustive list of the challenges experienced by immigrants. However, the themes highlighted by participants scratch the surface. For this project, comfort in the community is assessed by how frequently immigrants use community resources (and which resources they use), level of integration with the general community, language access, and feelings of identity.

A. Support from Immigrant Community

Especially just after arrival, immigrants have a strong need for support systems. In anticipation of this, many immigrants migrate to where they have pre-existing networks. Every immigrant interviewed in this project had a pre-existing connection with a friend or family member in Bloomington-Normal.

Bloomington-Normal has a number of immigrant support community groups. While most tend to be centered around specific countries of origin, some are cross-country and/or cross-ethnic. The organizations mentioned by participants were:

- Organization of Chinese Americans, a pan-Asian group founded in 1975
- McLean County Indian Association, founded in 1979
- Western Avenue Community Center, founded in 1926, which has served German and Chinese waves of immigrants and currently serves mainly Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants through the Hispanic Outreach Program
- One Heart for Congo, founded in 2009

The degree to which community organizations can provide support in navigating Bloomington-Normal, finding work, and accessing social services depends how long they have existed and how well established they are. Western Avenue has a long history in the community and receives a large portion of its support from a community church, Second Presbyterian. The McLean County Indian Association is over thirty years old, but does not have a physical location to host its activities. One Indian immigrant explained that religious services and cultural events are hosted “in somebody’s house because we do not have our own place. No community hall or no Temple.” One Heart for Congo is only three years old. It was established by two Congolese immigrants, both of whom were interviewed for this project. Neither used any community resources when they arrived five years ago. Noting the need for a group, in 2009 they helped establish One Heart for Congo to “help Congolese immigrants living in the US to integrate into American society” through “translating, tutoring, cultural adjustment and more” (“About Us”).

They believe that the situation of Congolese in Bloomington-Normal is “much better than when [we] came five years ago... because of One Heart”.

One of the purposes of these groups is to foster immigrant-to-immigrant mentoring relationships crucial to successful integration into Bloomington-Normal. At least seven of the participants self-identify as mentors for newcomers from the same country of origin. All of them are well-established in Bloomington-Normal, which “lends you some credibility [because newcomers] perceive that you’ve been successful and therefore you must know something!”. Their mentoring relationships were set up either formally through the organizations, formally through their place of employment, or informally through word-of-mouth. Mentors help newly-arrived immigrants in ways like “giving them an orientation” or helping with “getting a job with the university or resumes or taxes”. A former leader of the Organization of Chinese Americans explained, “We are involved in getting new immigrants resettled, all the time... anytime there is something they need, someone is new in town, I organize social gatherings and stuff like that.”

Of course, providing support for immigrants is limited by the extent of the pre-existing networks of immigrants from that country of origin. Vietnamese participants remarked that there is no association for them, probably because they are so few in number.

B. Support from General Community

One couple who have lived in Bloomington-Normal for many years noted that Bloomington-Normal is “getting better and better. We moved in town 20 years ago and it was very limited. They didn’t even know what services we needed.” The improvement is due in part to increased community surveys and development plans created by local leadership bodies and community agencies. In Cristina Deutsch’s words, “That shows that the community cares and is

willing to help because they do these surveys and want to understand the challenges faced by the community... the social agencies were trying to understand and meet their needs and not just label them that they didn't care."

a. Legal Status Challenges

Despite improvements, there are still many challenges to integration because immigrant communities often remain hidden from mainstream Bloomington-Normal society. Even when the community is able to access and communicate with Bloomington-Normal immigrants, they have legal status and language barriers. The Hispanic Families Work Group observed high levels of fear in both undocumented immigrants and documented immigrants with undocumented family members, resulting in a low demand for social services (Bliss 16). One participant said that many social services in the community have legal identification requirements which unintentionally exclude the undocumented. He anecdotally related how a Christian shelter was unable to house a group of homeless undocumented immigrants because they could not present driver's licenses or state I.D.s. In this particular case, the interviewee brought them to Hispanic Outreach at Western Avenue, whose staff used personal connections to find the individuals places to stay. In sum, the interviewee concluded, "they do have a place where they can go: Western Avenue. So there is a space which is available"—however, this space is an "immigrant" space rather than a "general" community space.

Cristina Deutsch's assertion that "It ALL starts with immigration" was repeated by key informants who work with Latino and undocumented populations. According to the Hispanic Families Work Group, "the issue of driver's licenses (lack of, difficulty in obtaining, difficulty in keeping)" was the primary problem reported by Latinos in Bloomington-Normal (Bliss 10).

Because public transportation does not service certain areas where undocumented immigrants are concentrated, they have to drive without licenses to get to work. This has caused a number of problems in the community since the implementation of Secure Communities, a federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) program passed in 2009 which authorizes state and local police to apprehend and detain undocumented immigrants. Although Secure Communities was passed with the goal that ICE would be able to “stop deporting illegal immigrants who pose no threat to public safety or national security so that it can focus on catching and expelling criminals who do” (Pear), it has sparked a lot of criticism nationally because of its aggressiveness as compared to results from the Department of Homeland Security. It has been accused of fostering racism by the police force: over 93% of undocumented immigrants arrested under Secure Communities are Latinos, although they account for only 77% of the undocumented population (Gavett 2011). In May 2011, Governor Pat Quinn instructed Illinois State Police to suspend Secure Communities; however, since July 2011 there have been 63 individuals apprehended and forwarded to ICE in McLean County by state and county police (Brady-Lunny 2011).

The apprehensions of undocumented immigrants has highlighted and exacerbated tensions within the immigrant community and Bloomington-Normal in general. An article published in the Pantagraph in November 2011 sparked over 100 online comments (Brady-Lunny 2011). In response to all this, one legal immigrant observed how overall attitudes towards immigrants may be shifting: “When we came, we were accepted very nicely. Things are changing now—a little different because of too many migrant workers are coming—some are legally, some are illegally.” At a public panel on local immigration issues, community leaders like Arturo Garcia, a professor at Illinois Wesleyan and active member of Latinos Unidos para

Cambio (Latinos United for Change) and Fr. Gregg Petri of St. Mary's church expressed the negative effects on families and children. If fear remains at this level, it is probable that Bloomington-Normal will no longer be perceived as an immigrant-friendly town.

b. English language access

Outside of legal status issues, immigrants with or without papers face language access barriers if they do not speak English. One interviewee explained that lack of English has limited his parents' independence and mobility. Another stated, "the key to integration is language, if you really want to integrate and get a chance to use the opportunities, you need the language".

The most recent Census data on language comes from the 2006 American Community Survey. 92.7% of McLean County speaks English only, and the remaining 7.3% speaks another language. Of the 7.3% non-native English speakers, 3.2% speak Spanish, 2.4% speak other Indo-European languages, and 1.6% speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages (CP02). Bilingual Spanish/English signage has increased significantly in schools and public service areas, like the Bloomington Public Library and the McLean County Health Department. However, language accommodation is primarily limited to Spanish. One Heart for Congo focuses strongly on English learning specifically because, as an interviewee noted, "There are no signs in French. Nowhere are you going to find a sign in French." Fortunately, English as a Second Language courses are offered at Heartland Community College. Free ESL classes are offered at the Normal Public Library and a number of churches. Until recently, one church offered late-night classes for Chinese restaurant workers who work late shifts.

C. Geographic integration

Due to natural networking effects, immigration policy enforcement for undocumented immigrants and the small foreign-born proportion relative to the native-born population, the general Bloomington-Normal community is often unaware of immigrant communities. This can result in a certain degree of de facto segregation. Bloomington-Normal's neighborhoods are not as distinct as Chicago, but there are certain clusters. A key community informant who works in real estate has observed over his career that "the only [immigrant group] that really converged in a heavy concentration is the Indians. One good example is Gill Street, there is a heavy concentration of Indians in that neighborhood." Chinese and Filipinos tend to be spread out. Latinos are also concentrated. The Hispanic Families Work Group reported that most Latinos live in the near south side (South Hill), far south side (I74), near west side (Downtown Bloomington), far west side (I55), and east side (Veterans Parkway) and in Normal, the far north side (I55) (Bliss 8). Because public transportation does not go to the outskirts of town, undocumented Latinos are in a very vulnerable position to be picked up by local police.

D. Identity

Migration and resettlement can provoke a wide range of emotional challenges. Migration theorists collect some of these feelings under the umbrella term "migration loss": the loss of families, friends, language, culture and homeland (Falicov 275). Migrant families often struggle to retain aspects of their old lives while adjusting to their new lives. Studies show that the physical presence of the extended family, rather than just the immediate family or an individual immigrant, helps to foster a sense of continuity within the family (Falicov 275).

Migration loss and acculturation affect adults and children differently. When asked about how they and their families identify, interviewees noted a generational difference. Each interviewee had a unique answer. One naturalized citizen explained, “Legally, I’m American. But... in my head now, sometimes I forget I am American.” Another responded, “I think I will always be Congolese”. One man who spent his childhood travelling between Mexico and the United States described his identity conflict as “very very very bizarre”. All interviewees expressed a desire to maintain both languages and both cultures, and a tendency to identify more strongly with their country of origin.

When describing their children, interviewees observed that they attend school with mostly Americans. As they grow, they tend to speak English better than their native language. It is much harder for parents to preserve cultural ties to the country of origin in Bloomington-Normal than it would be in a larger city. However, the parents try to teach their children their roots. The McLean County Indian Association organizes children’s dance performances to celebrate holidays like Diwali. For Chinese children, Heartland Community College hosts weekend Chinese school and ISU has an annual Chinese New Year festival at which community children can perform. One father explained, “It’s so hard, but it’s better to know where you came from.” Another parent explained that his son folds up his pizza and eats it like a taco. These families are in the midst of a day-to-day learning experience as they try to create the right atmosphere of binationalism, bilingualism, and biculturalism for their children to thrive (Falicov 277).

This section of the project serves as a broad survey of themes identified by the immigrants themselves. Unfortunately, due to time and space limits, many of these themes were not fully developed here. Overall, the questions examined in final section correspond to theories

of assimilation and successful integration. It is important to note that different immigrant communities define “success” differently; some emphasize economic success, educational attainment, or family relationships. These values directly shape how immigrants judge their own level of successful integration. Further research directions should acknowledge and explore how various immigrant communities’ values affect integration. Participants’ responses also suggest that another valuable research direction would include questions surrounding expectations immigrants have of life in the U.S., how those expectations are shaped by cultural values, and how their actual experiences compare to expectations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

To ensure the social justice values upon which the U.S. is built, new immigrant families must be recognized as a growing constituency across the nation and here in McLean County. Although it is a largely homogenous area in the heart of the Midwest, Bloomington-Normal has a long history as a destination city for diverse immigrant communities. This project examines its most recent wave of immigration.

Following national urban-to-rural settlement patterns, immigrants who participated in this study chose Bloomington-Normal over urban migration hubs like Chicago. Participants cited economic opportunities, family reunification, and political persecution as primary motivations for leaving their countries of origin. According to Census data, the majority of Bloomington-Normal’s immigrants are Asian (including people from Southeast Asia, India and the Pacific Islands) and the second largest group is Hispanics/Latinos. Community interviews highlighted immigrants from China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Mexico, the Philippines and Vietnam. Almost all initially settled in Bloomington-Normal because of pre-existing networks

and chose to remain and raise their families in Bloomington-Normal because of employment opportunities, the presence of universities, a friendly community, and convenience factors. State Farm, Illinois State University, and Heartland Community College were frequently cited.

In addition to identifying patterns of immigration, this project has also attempted to assess how immigrants are accommodated and integrated in Bloomington-Normal. Because participants in the individual interviews were not randomly selected, any conclusions drawn from this project cannot be generalized to wider immigrant groups. However, the insights gathered here can help contribute to a more complete picture of immigrant communities that often go unnoticed by native-born Bloomington-Normal residents. General opinion holds that Bloomington-Normal is relatively “immigrant-friendly” as compared to other towns in central and southern Illinois. In this project, the immigrant family experience was assessed through a rubric of 1) economic well-being as determined by employment rate, mobility and poverty rates, 2) intergenerational educational opportunities for immigrant parents and their children, and 3) level of comfort in the community, i.e., access to community resources, social engagement, and identity.

In general, immigrants in Bloomington-Normal fall into two distinct camps: well-educated people who arrive with high skill levels and less-educated people who are relegated to undesirable employment. This division is loosely correlated with country of origin, but there are notable exceptions: participants specifically mentioned that immigrants from China and Mexico can fall into either camp. A more accurate fault line is legal immigration status; however, both the Census data and the participant surveys conducted in this project underreport undocumented immigrants. Although this project has tried to self-correct with perspectives from key informants

who work with undocumented populations, further research is needed to determine to what extent individual perspectives and experiences align with the conclusions drawn in this project.

A. Highly educated immigrants

Most immigrants who come to Bloomington-Normal with a high level of education are able to integrate successfully in the long run, although they face high transition costs upon arrival. Within employment, the primary predictor of success is a pre-existing employment offer, especially if it is in a science/math/technology-based field (which tends to have less language and country-specific skill requirements). However, all participants noted that it is much harder for them to advance here in Bloomington-Normal as compared to their home country. Often, immigrants will never attain jobs at the same level of prestige which they would have enjoyed in their home countries. This could be due to linguistic and cultural barriers as well as subtle ethnic and racial prejudices.

Facility with English is another strong predictor of success for highly-educated immigrants in Bloomington-Normal. Many participants from Asian countries (China, the Philippines, and India) learned English in their country of origin. In India and the Philippines, English is often the language of instruction in advanced education. For those who do not speak fluent English, the language barrier proves a huge obstacle in attaining the same socioeconomic status that they had in their country of origin. This was reported by highly-educated participants from China, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mexico who work in jobs for which they are overqualified. Fortunately, these transitional cuts in status become less pronounced over time as immigrants improve their English.

Because highly educated immigrants tend to have better jobs and speak more English than less-educated immigrants, they are in a better position to be more involved in their children's schooling. In this project, all of the highly-educated participants placed a lot of value on education and reported high achievement from their children. They predicted that their children will have equal or better educational opportunities than they had as children. Very few of their children participated in ESL or ELL schooling. A common positive theme was the extra-curricular opportunities afforded by U.S. schools which are not matched in other countries.

In terms of social integration and level of comfort in Bloomington-Normal, connecting with other immigrants from the same country of origin is essential in easing the transition process. Immigrants from certain countries of origin have founded formal, close-knit organizations specifically to advocate for other immigrants. Longer-established groups like the Organization of Chinese Americans (founded in 1975) and the McLean County Indian Association (founded in 1979) are better positioned to help new arrivals than newer organizations like One Heart for Congo (founded 2009). It is with the help of other immigrants in informal networks, formally established immigrant groups, and services geared specifically to immigrants (like ESL classes at Heartland or community churches) that newly arrived immigrants settle in the community and learn English.

All in all, despite dramatic cuts in status and high transition costs, highly educated immigrants are able to integrate successfully in the long-run. Although they often never attain the status they expected in their country of origin, they predict that their next generation will be able to reach that level or advance further.

B. Less-educated immigrants

Less well-educated immigrants are more likely to be undocumented. Only three of the interviews conducted for this project were of immigrants who came to Bloomington-Normal with less than a high school degree. Of those three, two entered with refugee status from Vietnam and one was an undocumented immigrant from Mexico. Based on interviews conducted with these three participants and key community informants chosen to give a deeper insight into less-educated immigrants, it seems that in Bloomington-Normal less-educated, low-skill immigrants are “traditional labor immigrants” who fill temporary, hard, unpleasant and badly-paid jobs. They work in labor-intensive jobs like food preparation in Bloomington-Normal’s numerous restaurants and cleaning positions in office buildings or hotels. Although immigrants can usually find work, they are often relegated to low-end jobs with little opportunity for advancement. Because they have lower salaries, they are more vulnerable to poverty.

In terms of education, primary and secondary educational opportunities and achievement levels depend on school district. District 87 and Unit 5 both offer ESL and ELL services through junior high. However, a report done by the Hispanic Families Work Group (which looked at all Latinos and Hispanics regardless of whether they were born in the U.S. or another country) notes a significant achievement gap at the high school level. Post-secondary educational opportunities depend on legal status. In the absence of the DREAM Act, going to college is out of the question for most undocumented youths. Even children of undocumented immigrants who were born in the U.S. (and thus are American citizens who qualify for federal education grants) are more likely to live in households that cannot afford to send their children to college. Overall, less-educated immigrants and their children have less access to educational opportunities.

Less-educated immigrants tend to utilize community services at a lower rate than their better-educated counterparts. For undocumented immigrants and documented immigrants with undocumented family members, this can be accounted for by apprehensions and fear regarding legal status. A notable exception is Western Avenue Community Center, which was reported to be the most frequently utilized social service for Latino immigrants in Bloomington-Normal by the Latino participants and key community informants in this study. Western Avenue's Hispanic Outreach Program serves low-income immigrants, many of whom are undocumented. It provides Spanish translators and referrals to other community resources. Outside of Western Avenue, participants noted teachers in their children's schools as community resources.

Bloomington-Normal offers immigrants varying sets of opportunities and restrictions, depending on their individual situations. The immigrant family experience—as assessed by economic well-being, educational opportunities, and level of comfort in the community—can be generally split into two immigrant experiences as divided on a continuum of education and skill level. The immigrant experience in Bloomington-Normal is premised on education/skill level, facility with language, legal status, and pre-existing immigrant networks and associations, though none of these is an absolute predictor of successful integration. Secondary factors are ethnicity and length of residence in Bloomington-Normal. To move forward and promote social justice, Bloomington-Normal must recognize these often overlooked communities. Immigrants should be protected from poverty, granted access to educational opportunities, and integrated into all aspects of U.S. society.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Part 1: Biographic data

These questions are for background information on you and your immigration story.

- 1) What is your country of origin?
 - 2) Why did you decide to leave your country of origin?
 - a. Did you make this decision on your own, or with your family?
 - 3) Did you leave voluntarily or involuntarily?
 - 4) Did you leave for political, social, economic reasons, a combination of those reasons, or for an altogether different reason?
 - 5) Why did you choose to settle in Bloomington-Normal?
 - 6) How did you enter the U.S. (without authorization, on a limited visa, or as a legal resident)?
 - 7) Did you enter along or with family members?
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Part 2: Economic opportunities

These questions are to help understand the quality of job opportunities and work experiences in Bloomington-Normal for immigrants.

- 8) Do you consider yourself to have economic mobility; that is, to have opportunities to get better jobs?
 - a. Do you consider yourself under-qualified, over-qualified or adequately qualified for your job?
 - 9) Do you feel that you have been given equal treatment and opportunity in the job market? Have you ever experienced discrimination? If so, how?
 - 10) How does your previous job in your country of origin compare to your current job in Bloomington-Normal?
 - a. If you were still in your country of origin, what job do you think you would be working?
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Part 3: Civic participation

These questions are designed to assess the level of comfort and welcome felt by immigrants in Bloomington-Normal.

- 11) Do you feel like your concerns are represented to the local government, like the Mayor or the McLean County Board?

- 12) Do you consider yourself to be an active participant in U.S. civic life? Do you think your civic participation is affected by your immigration status? If so, how?
- 13) In your personal opinion, are community resources in Bloomington-Normal approachable (to you and to other immigrants)?
- Which community resources are approachable and which are not?
 - How could community resources be made more approachable?
- 14) How well integrated do you feel in the immigrant community in Bloomington-Normal?
- 15) How well integrated do you feel in the larger (non-immigrant) community in Bloomington-Normal?
- 16) If English is not your first language, how much access does Bloomington-Normal provide to your native language?
- 17) How have you been affected by language barriers?
- 18) In your personal opinion, how are English as Second Language speakers received in Bloomington-Normal?

Part 4: Educational opportunities

These questions are designed to assess the educational opportunities available to immigrants and their children.

- 19) What is your level of education? Did you receive most of your education in your country of origin or here in the U.S.?
- 20) If you have children, what is your personal opinion of how Bloomington-Normal district schools cater to their needs?
- Do your children attend public schools? Have they ever been in ELL classes?
 - Is English a language barrier for your children? If so how are they accommodated by their schools?
 - How well does the school (teachers, principals) communicate with immigrant parents, who may be accustomed to other schooling systems or may have limited English?
- 21) Do you think your children have more educational opportunities here in Bloomington-Normal that you had as a child?
- 22) Do you think your children will reach a higher level of educational attainment that you have?
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Part 5: Identity

23) Do you identify with your country of origin or as an American?

24) If you have children, how do they identify?

Any other comments?

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