

New Institute Focuses on Immigration Research

By Tara Laskowski, MFA '06

What is the impact of immigrants on the U.S. economy, education system, and business community? A new institute at George Mason University, launched in April 2012, seeks to answer that question and more.

A joint venture between Mason and the Immigrant Learning Center Inc. (ILC) of Massachusetts, the Institute for Immigration Research conducts unbiased research to educate policy makers, media, teachers, students, and the business community about the contributions of immigrants as entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers.

The institute is located within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and works closely with Mason's Center for Social Science Research, a multi-disciplinary research center that examines some of the most pressing social, behavioral, and political problems facing contemporary society.

"With all of the heated rhetoric about immigration these days, academically rigorous research results are needed to cool the discussion with objective information. The Institute for Immigration Research will fill that void," says research director James Witte, who is also a professor of sociology and director of the Center for Social Science Research at Mason.

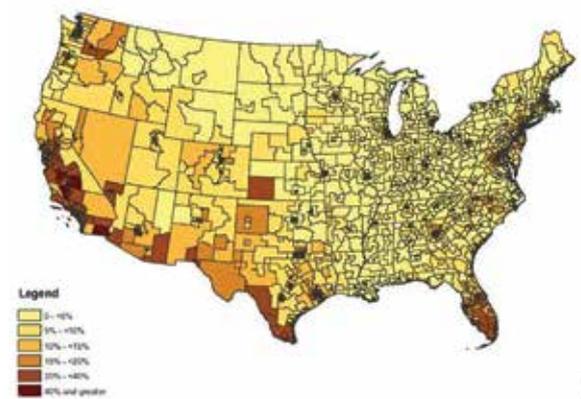
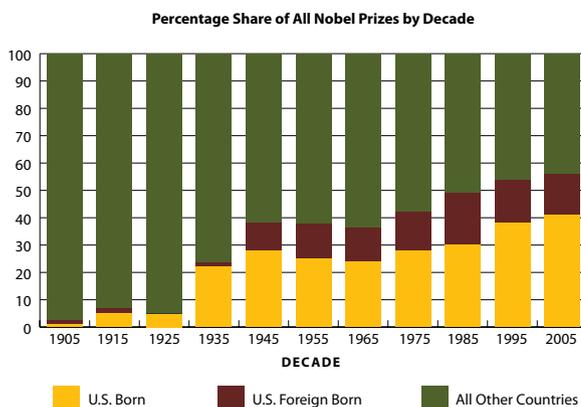
Early research projects include mapping immigrants' economic activity, as well as examining the impact of immigrants in higher education on the economy.

The ILC was founded in 1992 by Diane Portnoy, president and CEO. The nonprofit organization helps immigrants and refugees become successful workers, parents, and community members through direct service programs and public education. The ILC further supports immigrants through the Public Education Institute, which informs Americans about the economic and social contributions of immigrants.

Portnoy says of the joint venture, "This institute will expand on the work that's been done by the Public Education Institute. It is time to expand the focus nationwide, and I'm thrilled to have such a competent and well-respected partner as George Mason University."

Mason has a strong history of conducting scholarly research on immigration. The Center for Social Science

Research has been home to the Mason Project on Immigration, which centers on the immigrant experience in the United States. Members of the project have been committed to furthering a reasoned, empirically informed discussion and debate about the role of immigrant groups within the contemporary United States. The project has focused on the immigrant experience in Northern Virginia, completing original research on Virginia's Latino community, sponsorship of intellectual events and speaking engagements, and introduction of new academic programs in the field of immigration studies.



The Institute for Immigration Research has launched detailed research projects on foreign-born Nobel Prize winners (top) and immigrant entrepreneurship (bottom). Pictures courtesy of IIR.

