Latinos in North Central Indiana: Educational Challenges and Opportunities

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Third in a series of three research reports produced by the Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning examining the origin and present situation of Latinos in North Central Indiana

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Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning

Since 1968 Goshen College has been a leader in international and experiential learning through our Study Service Term. Building on this experience and responding to the cultural and demographic changes that have taken place in north central Indiana in recent years, Goshen College launched the Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning (CITL). The focus of CITL is to examine the intersection of cultural beliefs and practices to advancements in teaching and learning. As part of this process, CITL is examining the curricular and co-curricular experience of Latino students on campus as well as the social, economic and educational factors that influence their transition to College.

With the publication of this work, CITL is leading the way not only in identifying the educational needs of Latino students in our region, but also in identifying where further research may be needed and its implications for future policy and program interventions.

To this end, we are very thankful to have had the opportunity to begin this important work with the support and collaboration of a remarkable team of scholars from the Institute for Latino Studies (ILS) at the University of Notre Dame. Their level of expertise and passion in studying the Latino experience in the Midwest was instrumental in making this project a success. Therefore, we look to the future with excitement, knowing that this study lays an important foundation in the understanding of the social and educational experiences of Latino immigrant youth in Indiana.

James Brennenman  
President  
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Institute for Latino Studies

Notre Dame’s Institute for Latino Studies (ILS) has a long history of working with other institutes and centers to better understand national socio-economic trends affecting Latinos. Our collaboration with Goshen College’s Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning (CITL) has grown out of our mutual desire to make an impact on the local level. Over the last two decades, Latinos have increasingly been settling in smaller urban centers across the Midwest, and by partnering with CITL, we have been able to study in depth local communities that have been a part of this trend. Latinos are making a vital contribution to the local culture and economy, but Latinos here still face many challenges, including an economy in transition, and a school system that too often fails to see its students graduate. These challenges are not unique to the area, and they can only be met with meaningful responses by more fully understanding both the communities at hand, and the greater context in which they exist.

ILS is proud of our collaboration with CITL. We feel our relationship gives both our organizations the opportunity to learn more about our communities and to explore ways we can improve their wellbeing. We are hopeful that by continuing our relationship, we can help to deliver real improvements to the local area and provide a blueprint for others seeking to better integrate and strengthen their own communities.

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About the Project

The goal of this study is to help Goshen College grow in its capacity to address the educational needs of all students of color in our region. One of the initial research projects of Goshen College's Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning (CITL) was to conduct a community study that explores the presence and experience of Latinos living in North Central Indiana. The study was conducted in collaboration with the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame (ILS).

The study examined three critical areas of the experience of Latinos in North Central Indiana. The first component of the study examines the demographic and economic context by delineating the recent surge of the Latino population since the early 1990s in three counties of North Central Indiana: St. Joseph, Noble, and Elkhart.

The second component of the study provides a historical account of the settlement and adjustment experience of Latinos of four representative cities within these counties: South Bend, Elkhart, Goshen, and Ligonier. Through the use of interviews of key informants and archival material this component aims to tell a more personal story of the settlement experiences of Latinos to this area.

The third component of the study provides an assessment of the educational experiences of Latino high school students and their families in South Bend, Elkhart, Goshen, and Ligonier. Through the use of focus groups and interviews, this component aims to study how the educational systems in North Central Indiana are experienced by Latino immigrant students, Latino parents, and school administrators.

Through this project CITL and ILS strive to provide community leaders, students, educators, and policymakers a more comprehensive understanding of the social, economic, historical, and educational factors affecting Latinos in North Central Indiana and the implications for access to higher education in the years to come.

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