International Resource Center Works with Immigration Issues in Indiana

In response to recent sharp increases in the numbers of immigrants to Indiana and the consequent problems of integration, the Indiana University International Resource Center (IUIRC) has undertaken two projects in partnership with the Indiana Economic Development Council (IEDC). A long-term goal of their collaboration, says Shawn Reynolds, director of IUIRC, is to examine the impact that immigration is having statewide; to review local, regional, and national best practices that communities grappling with immigration issues might be able to share; and to facilitate the development of a statewide community immigration network.

For the past few years, Indiana's low unemployment, strong economy, and solid industrial base have been attracting large numbers of immigrants. Employers see them as key to maintaining or expanding productivity levels while immigrants are attracted by the ability to find good jobs and desirable lifestyles. Primary growth has been in Hispanic populations, especially Mexican, but there are significant numbers from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, including non-Hispanic areas such as Haiti. Indiana communities are also receiving groups of workers from Southeast Asia, Central Europe, Russia, and South Asia (India).

Yet the integration of these very diverse immigrant populations into Indiana communities, particularly small- to medium-sized towns, is having profound effects, both in terms of local and state capacity to provide needed services to new as well as long-time community members, and in terms of the workplace. Major issues are affordable/available housing, public transportation, access to community and social service resources, and language and cultural adjustment. For example, according to the Indiana Department of Education, the Indianapolis public school system is reported to have a student population that speaks more than 150 different languages; a much smaller city like Fort Wayne has 71 different languages.

The Allen County Project

With funding from the Foellinger Foundation, IUIRC and IEDC are now actively engaged in a pilot study to determine the economic, social, and cultural impact of immigration in northeast Indiana's Allen County, whose hub is Fort Wayne. The focus is on the scope and level of social services that immigrants and migrants in that area need to be served adequately. IUIRC is focusing on issues of service provision in the community, while IEDC is focusing on employment issues related to the integration of new immigrants into the workforce.

The study seeks to clarify the experiences, needs, best practices, resources, and insights from three separate perspectives: organizational perspective (of different community agencies, social-service organizations, etc.); economic development/employer perspective (of local employers that already have immigrants/newcomers in their workforce); and immigrant/newcomer perspective (of immigrants, refugees, migrant workers, settlers, sojourners, or people coming from neighboring states/counties). The study is being conducted through numerous interviews with local stakeholders (nonprofits, public offices, and the private sector); and with immigrants themselves. Upon completion of the

In a meeting at IU Bloomington with the dean for International Programs are (clockwise) Tom Morton, Indiana Association for Cities and Towns; Charles Bankart, IUIRC; Shawn Reynolds, IUIRC; Robert Hutchings, manager for economic development at Cinergy; Kirk Hobbs, Indiana West area manager of Cinergy; and Gary Shelly, community and economic development representative of Cinergy.

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research, an action agenda will be developed that will match specific issues with potential solutions. The project is expected to be completed in 2001.

The Indiana Immigration Network

Cinergy/PSI has awarded IUIRC a Cinergy Workforce Partnership Grant to create the Indiana Immigration Network, an online resource for community service providers working with new Americans who have chosen to make Indiana their home. Working in collaboration with the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns, IEDC, and the South Central Indiana Human Resources Association, IUIRC will develop a Web site to profile key resources, programs, and organizations throughout Indiana that are addressing the needs of Indiana’s growing immigrant population.

“Community efforts to aid this new population are cropping up in isolation throughout the state,” said Charles Bankart, IUIRC program manager. “This Web site provides an opportunity to centralize information about these efforts and make them more widely available.”

Specifically, the Web site will serve as a searchable database of key community stakeholders (businesses, social service providers, government offices, schools, hospitals, cultural organizations, churches, citizen groups, etc.) that are actively involved with immigrant issues in their communities. Brief descriptions as well as contact information for these organizations will be listed in an easily searchable format.

Bankart is being assisted in this project by Maria del Pilar Muriel, an undergraduate in folklore, who is gathering information on approximately 35 small- and medium-sized towns and communities throughout Indiana that are addressing the needs of Indiana’s growing immigrant population.

“Our hope for this project is to create an online resource that will encourage dialogue among service providers throughout the state who are actively working to make their communities more responsive to the needs of Indiana’s ‘New Hoosiers,’” says Bankart. IUIRC will be responsible for maintaining and updating the Web site.

Prior to the award ceremony, Ambassador Bujon de l’Estang took the opportunity to present a formal lecture on “The State of the European Union and the Priorities of the French Presidency” (see sidebar). The presidency of the European Union rotates every six months, and France held the position until the end of 2000.

The day’s activities, which concluded with a banquet in honor of the ambassador and Valdman that was hosted by Patrick O’Meara, were co-sponsored by the Department of West European Studies, the Department of French and Italian, the Office of the Bloomington Chancellor, the Office of International Programs, and the International Law Society.

Priorities of the French Presidency of the European Union

His Excellency François Bujon de l’Estang, who has been France’s ambassador to the United States since 1995, spoke movingly of France’s responsibilities and priorities in holding the presidency of the European Union (EU) from June through December 2000. This was a crucial time in Europe, in which negotiations were under way to transform the institutions and functions of the EU prior to the enlargement of its membership, including important implications of adopting a common currency for trade and business worldwide. He reviewed the history of the EU, outlined France’s four major priorities of the EU presidency in preparing for the future, and spoke of the relationship between an integrated EU and the United States. His entire address can be heard via full audio stream at IU’s Web site, broadcast.iu.edu/lectures/frambassador/index.html.