

Building Bilingual Community Partnerships to Promote Social and Economic Wellbeing Narrative

Following nearly two decades of population decline, many remote rural Kansas communities are experiencing renewed immigration from abroad. Recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America seek jobs in growing agricultural industries and settlement in rural communities. This immigration provides opportunities for schools, businesses, and neighborhoods—recently under threat of closing—to grow. However, since recent immigration from abroad occurs on the heels of depopulation, some rural communities lack resources to promote language contact, institutions of upward social mobility for recent immigrants, and social integration of diverse populations, all of which are vital for community development.

In consultation with stakeholders in one remote rural community experiencing substantial immigration following years of depopulation,¹ we request support to implement five programs aimed at promoting language contact and community development: (1) weekly, year-round Spanish and English language classes for adults; (2) a workshop series to connect recent immigrants from abroad with local institutions and expand both service provision and utilization (e.g., banking, internet, recreation, vocational training, higher education); (3) a “young writers academy” for middle school students to aid English language writing proficiency and creative expression and in university recruitment; (4) a book drive to supply the school library with contemporary and culturally relevant bilingual literature, and (5) a parent-child bilingual reading group, which will also assist the school principal in developing a bilingual and intercultural pre-kindergarten program. These efforts will promote local business growth, social cohesion in an increasingly diverse rural community, and education across age groups. Benefits for K-State include increased student recruitment to assist in promoting a diverse student body, academic presentations and publications by faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students on the sociological and linguistic impact of rapid demographic change, and opportunities for service learning for K-State students.

Collaborative Partners and their Role: Dr. Alisa Garni in Sociology and Dr. Mary Kohn in English are the Principle Investigators. Dr. Garni has been working in the community delivering ESL classes for three years, while Dr. Kohn began assisting with ESL courses this spring. Madai Rivera, Academic Services and Diversity Coordinator with the College of Human Ecology, is working with the PIs to build bridges to higher education for first generation college students, including the local immigrant population. With the assistance of, and in consultation with colleagues in English and the College of Education, PIs will lead the language classes each week and oversee the workshop series, book drive, and parent-child bilingual reading group. Two undergraduate research assistants and one graduate research assistant will assist us. We will also seek support from the College of Education for information on curriculum design, particularly for the bilingual pre-K reading group, and from the Department of English on diverse, inclusive literature for young readers. The local school principal has committed to supporting the book drive (with the assistance of the part-time school librarian) and reading group. We have secured space from the City Council for the language classes and workshop series. The town mayor has also pledged assistance, and interest in the Spanish language class. We have relationships with a long-time local banker in Manhattan who assists immigrants from abroad in opening bank accounts, seeking credit and loans, and planning for retirement. We will work with local bankers, the local internet provider, and business owners to assist residents in obtaining services.

In addition to building positive community relations and promoting recruitment through

¹ We use a pseudonym for the town, “Dairy City,” to maintain confidentiality.

these efforts, these connections will provide the groundwork for research on rural communities affected by rapid demographic change. To assess the impact of our program on how communities build or restructure institutions of upward social mobility for diverse populations, research assistants and faculty will conduct ethnographic observation, write fieldnotes for each visit, conduct interviews with stakeholders at the end of the project, and apply for additional external funding to analyze data and continue outreach efforts. Interviews will also provide valuable language data that will be analyzed to study language contact outcomes in rural communities. In collaboration with student researchers, we will submit this work for publication in academic journals thus promoting the reputation of K-State as a research institution and providing undergraduate and graduate community-based participatory research opportunities.

April 1-May 15, 2018 (pre-award)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty secure approval to conduct research with human subjects (IRB)
July 2018-July 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty teach Spanish and English classes, one hour each, one day a week • Research assistants assist faculty during regular academic year • Research assistants and faculty regularly record fieldnotes
August 15-September 15, 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty and undergraduate research assistants plan workshop series • Research assistants schedule monthly workshops • Research assistants advertise monthly workshops in English and Spanish • Faculty and research assistants, in collaboration with the school principal, plan guest lectures through the K-State Presidential Lecture Series at the local school. Topics include how to apply for college, the first year academic experience, planning for success in college, and a range of topics related to reading, writing, and academic success • Faculty and research assistants plan the book drive, parent-child reading group, and young writers academy sessions • Faculty teach research assistants research ethics, methods for ethnographic observation, writing fieldnotes, and conducting interviews
September 16, 2018-May 1, 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty and research assistants launch the book drive, parent-child reading group, and young writers academy • Research assistants help faculty host workshops • Research assistants and faculty record fieldnotes for classes, book drive, lecture series, academy, reading group, and workshops
April 1-April 30, 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty and undergraduate research assistants interview stakeholders and community members regarding program impact (language classes, book drive, workshop series, academy, reading group)
June 1-August 1, 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty apply for additional funding to transcribe and analyze April interviews, year's worth of fieldnotes

Potential Impact for all Collaborate Parties: Recent immigrants report that language barriers serve as the single greatest obstacle to their incorporation. Language classes not only provide skills, but also enable learners to develop confidence in speaking and promote community cohesion. Language contact facilitates collaborative institution building that is crucial for the social and economic wellbeing of all community members (Pfeffer & Parra 2009). Long-time

residents who are monolingual English speakers recognize the important opportunity recent immigration has provided them to learn Spanish. Further, learning a second language has positive health effects, including improving resiliency against the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's, improved ability to multi-task, and improved ability to process information quickly and efficiently (Bialystok 2010). Spanish and English language classes foster cross-cultural communication and empathy, skills which aid in immigrant incorporation.

The book drive will assist in new language acquisition and promoting a love of learning among youth by providing culturally-relevant Spanish, English, and bilingual literature. Literacy skills transfer across languages, particularly when the languages are typologically similar and share a writing system (Lyndsey, Manis, & Bailey 2003). If parents have access to Spanish children's literature, they can assist their children in gaining and practicing literacy skills outside of school hours, thus preparing children for the classroom and improving transitions between home and school. These efforts will be supported through a concurrent program of bilingual story-time events. K-State students, in conjunction with PIs, will facilitate story-times aimed at encouraging early literacy practices in the home, while also introducing Pre-K students to English classroom conventions. As parents and children read books together, and as adolescents read bilingual and intercultural literature, they will develop curiosity, insight, and social connections. Culturally relevant connections to literacy promote student confidence and a sense of well-being, thus boosting academic achievement (Paris 2015), supporting public school efforts to promote successful acquisition of literacy skills.

The workshop series will enable families to plan for the future, meet their communications needs, access remote educational resources, seek advanced education and additional job training, and connect with neighbors. We anticipate that the workshop will help participants further build human, social, and cultural capital. Our graduate student coordinator will gain first-hand experience in community organization and outreach.

The students and faculty involved in the project will experience the benefits of service learning and participate in community-based research by analyzing the effectiveness of language and community programs in contributing to integration and local development. The project will also build infrastructure for expanding educational programs, ensuring learning, and helping students and teachers meeting personal and professional goals.

Amount of funding requested and any matching funds: We request \$10,000 in funding:

1. Two undergraduate research assistants funded at a rate of \$1,000 per semester, for two semesters each: \$4,000.
2. One graduate research assistant funded at the rate of \$1,500 per semester, for two semesters: \$3,000.
3. Faculty and student travel from Manhattan to Dairy City: 120 miles/week for 45 weeks (holidays excluded, project collaborators will carpool): 120 miles per week at .57 cents per mile, \$3,078.

Pilot research has been funded by successive Undergraduate Research Awards during the past three years, and Drs. Garni and Kohn will apply for additional funding to transcribe interviews and analyze data. Outside grant applications will include funding to continue supporting language classes and community programming. Potential funders include the National Science Foundation.

Sociology will contribute \$2,000 to fund one research assistant during the summer of 2018 and English will contribute \$1,000 to fund print and digital resources for classes and workshops during the summer and academic year.