



Learning from the World, Serving North Carolina and Beyond

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Abstract: North Carolina's Center for International Understanding offers cross-cultural training and short-term study programs in a unique brand of international education. The Center's Latino Initiative has been recognized as a model for the nation. A collaboration among Southern Region Extension leaders and the North Carolina Center for International Understanding is proposed.

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BACKGROUND

The south has the fastest growing Latino population of any region with North Carolina having experienced the fastest growing Latino population of any state in the region. North Carolina saw a 569 percent increase in its Latino/Hispanic student enrollment from 1995-2005, and Latinos/Hispanics comprise 16 percent of total births in 2005 in that state. Over 50 percent of net population growth in southern states is attributed to the increase of the Latino/Hispanic population. The Southeast reported the most dramatic increases in Hispanic populations in the 2000 US Census, showing that North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia and Arkansas are new Hispanic Magnet states. The Latino Initiative provides leaders with resources and information to create practical solutions for successfully incorporating immigrants into their communities. Since 1979 North Carolina's Center for International Understanding (NCCIU) has taken more than 7,800 North Carolinians to 47 different countries. To assist North Carolina educators, policy leaders, health providers, law enforcement, business leaders and others in facing the explosive growth of the Latino community in North Carolina, the Center developed its Latino Initiative. The Center for International Understanding's Latino Initiative provides state and local leaders with a fresh approach to immigration integration.

ACTION

Between 1998 and 2007 more than 350 North Carolina policy and civic leaders participated in the Center for International Understanding's Latino Initiative. The Center's year-long class-room and experiential training program, including travel to Mexico, provides participants with resources and information to create practical solutions for successfully incorporating immigrants into their communities. In 2006, twenty-five NC Cooperative Extension educators participated in the Center's Latino Initiative, developing and implementing an action plan for increasing Extension's capacity to serve the Latino population upon completion of the training.

RESULTS

As a result of this program, North Carolina Cooperative Extension has made progress toward achieving the goal of expanding the capacity for developing and implementing community-based educational programs for the growing population of Latino families in North Carolina. Milestone accomplishments include grant funding of a model community-based program and assignment of a staff member to serve as Latino Affairs Facilitator.

A collaboration involving the NC CIU Latino Initiative, NC Cooperative Extension and other Southern Region Extension professionals is proposed to extend the NC CIU Latino Initiative model to other southern region states. The goals of the collaboration are:

- To develop a multi-disciplinary network of leaders interested in investigating the challenges of incorporating immigrants into strong communities;

- To gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, political, social and economic issues impacting the decisions of Mexicans to come to the southern region of the United States & the families they leave behind;
- To have a better understanding about what cultural, governmental, and local resources are available in the southern region in order make appropriate community-based decisions for the benefit of all residents.

CONCLUSIONS

Creative leadership will be required to expand Extension's capacity to serve the Latino community. The North Carolina Center for International Understanding's Latino Initiative has promise for developing that creative leadership capacity in the southern region.

REFERENCES

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