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The Educational Convergence of the U.S. and Mexico: Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract

Globalization and NAFTA led to a greater economic and social integration between the U.S. and Mexico. This integration led to continued Mexican migration to the U.S. contributing to Hispanic growth in the U.S. with resulting shortages in bilingual professionals. Building from public anthropology, we developed exchange projects in education and health between the two countries to meet the needs of the Mexican population and foster greater understanding between the two societies. Notwithstanding current strained political relations between the two countries, we expect NAFTA to survive in a revised form continuing the economic and social interdependency for this region of North America. Thus, it is important to continue developing educational partnerships between the two societies, which may lead to a greater level of educational convergence. Similarly, this study provides an example of how anthropologists and others in academia can collaborate with government officials in the development of projects of benefit to the larger society.

Keywords U.S.-Mexico border, NAFTA, education, bilingualism, globalization

We will be living in a “borderless North America in 20 years, and the governments of the United States and Mexico need to work together so that the integration takes place in an orderly basis.” This was the first statement made by Ambassador Jim Jones (U.S. ambassador to Mexico under President Bill Clinton) in a world’s affair symposium sponsored by Chicago’s Council on Foreign Relations in 2003 (Solberg, 2003). In a way, Ambassador Jones’s comments were a reflection of the increasing economic and social interdependency of the two countries fueled by the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). A number of people including Robert Pastor (2011) in his book, “The North America Idea,” championed the idea that the two countries share a common destiny and a common future. Sharing this view, Seele (2018) argues of continuing economic and social forces pushing the two countries together. Following a similar perspective and with respect to education and the economy, Presidents Obama and Peña Nieto signed in 2013 the Bilateral Forum in Higher Education, Innovation, and Research (FOBESII). A key objective of the agreement is to facilitate educational exchanges and collaborations to provide workers in North America with the knowledge and skills for the 21st Century (FOBESII, 2017).

The election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States in 2016 put a halt (if not a full stop) to the orderly integration of North America. News organizations have covered widely President Trump’s critical views of NAFTA and Mexico (e.g., Diamond, 2018). As such, and as of this writing (April 27, 2018), FOBESII and other educational projects between the two countries may appear to be on their “last legs.” However, NAFTA is not dead and there is a possibility that it may survive in a revised form. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce continues to lobby strongly for NAFTA (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2017) and individual states continue trade missions to Mexico. In addition, with respect to education, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has recently approved for Mexican universities to participate in Division II athletics (Bauer-Wolf, 2018).

This article consists of five sections. The introduction is followed by a brief discussion on Mexican immigration to the U.S., the growth in the Mexican/Hispanic population, and the development of Mexican transnational communities in the U.S. The third section provides an overview of the educational status and challenges present in the Mexican community and for other Latinos when relevant. A discussion on a number of educational projects developed between my institution, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and government and educational officials in Mexico and the U.S. are covered in section four. As discussed later, the development of these projects are guided by some of the objectives in public anthropology. In the conclusion, we provide a short summary of the interdependency of the two countries and the need for continuing educational partnerships between the two societies, albeit in a challenging context of U.S.-Mexico relations.

Globalization, Migration, and Transnational Communities

Contemporary globalization can be broadly defined as the increasing flows of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people produced by improvements in technology, communication, and faster travel (Lewellen, 2002). A key feature of globalization is that the impact of economic interdependence is uneven and differentiated between and within countries. A good example of this situation is the North America Free Trade Agreement. The agreement was created to promote economic growth and to facilitate trade between Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Economic growth and more trade have indeed taken place. Mexico, however, has experienced uneven growth between different economic sectors and regions of the country. Furthermore, the passage of NAFTA did not create the necessary jobs to reduce continuing migration to the United States (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2017; U.S.-Mexico Binational Council, 2004).

Mexican immigration to the U.S. is not a new phenomenon and dates back to 1848. Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) and Heyman (1991) view Mexican immigration to the U.S. as part of the capitalist penetration of Mexico by U.S. interests at the end of the Mexican War. They see these economic linkages as leading to the subordination of Mexican laborers who worked for U.S. companies on both sides of the border. This initial condition contributed to later forces influencing more migration including civil war in Mexico (La Revolución Mexicana), labor shortages in the U.S., and collaborative agreements between the two governments like the border industrialization program and later NAFTA (Henderson, 2011). As mentioned above, NAFTA had a limited effect in curtailing Mexican immigration (Bacon, 2014; U.S.-Mexico Binational Council, 2004). For example, in 2005 the Pew Hispanic Center estimated 6.2 million undocumented immigrants from Mexico (Passel, 2006). These periods of documented and undocumented immigration from Mexico contributed greatly to the growth of the Latino population, which by the year 2001 had become the largest minority group in the U.S. (Clemetson, 2003).

Mexican immigration to the U.S. and the growth of the Latino population slowed down considerably after the housing crisis in 2008. Economic stagnation along with enhanced border security brought down the number of immigrants coming to this country (Passel et al., 2012; Rosenblum and Meissner, 2014). Notwithstanding these factors, Mexicans and other Latino groups are still expected to grow in relationship to the Anglo-American population. For example, the latter is expected to decline from 198.103 million (62.2% of the total population) to 181.930 million (43.6% of the total population) from 2014 to 2060. Meanwhile, Latinos are expected to grow from 55,410 million (17.4% of the total population) to 119,044 million (28.6% of the total population) in the same period (Colby and Ortman, 2015). Furthermore, this number may increase if there is an eventual immigration reform. Phillips and Massey (2000) point out that immigration from Mexico increases when the immigrant has a relative living already in the U.S.

The growth of the Mexican and Latino population is transforming U.S. society in many ways. Even with the possibility of a border wall and less interaction between the United States and Mexico and Latin America, the Mexicanization/Latinization of the U.S. has had a huge impact and influence in this society. The country is becoming more Mexicanized and Latinized with the increasing importance of the Spanish language and cultural influences from Latin America. Mexican food is becoming a staple element in the diet of mainstream U.S. An increasing number of Anglo-American families are introducing their children to Spanish through television programs like *Dora the Explorer* and *Run Diego Run*. And notwithstanding a reduction in the number of students studying Spanish in college, Spanish has become the most spoken non-English language in the U.S., even among non-Latinos (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013).

Acknowledging variability in Mexican communities in the U.S. and among immigrants (i.e., social class, citizenship and generation status, geographic location in the U.S., etc.) (see Castañeda et al., 2014; Correa-Cabrera and Staudt, 2014), many immigrants are better able to stay in close contact with their relatives in Mexico. Cell phones, Skype, and Facebook allow for instant communication. In addition, satellite and cable television provide immigrants with a great variety of Spanish language-programs, many of which they also saw in Mexico. Moreover, Univision (the largest Spanish language network in the country) has become the top broadcast

network in the U.S. (Fernholz, 2013). This and other outlets allow many people to follow news in Mexico, watch their favorite soccer teams, and follow their favorite dramas and comedies. Similarly, many Spanish language radio stations in the U.S. collaborate with Mexican radio stations to transmit live programs in both countries (i.e., El Programa del Genio Lucas). In this country, furthermore, we see the growing presence of Mexican priests, professional soccer teams, and cultural and musical groups performing in cities throughout the U.S. Thus, it is no longer necessary for Mexican immigrants to travel to Mexico to “be in Mexico.”

The continuity of the Mexican community from Mexico to the U.S. has led social scientists to refer to it as a transnational community (Roberts et al., 1999; Portes et al., 1999). Noticing changes in migratory patterns since the 1980s, Canales and Montiel Armas (2007, p. 233) argue that migratory circuits have turned into transnational communities “because the density of movements and social ties have extended from the community of origin to all the places where its migrants are to be found.” In many ways, these communities are more vibrant and dynamic, and have a greater degree of influence in the political, social, and economic arenas of both countries. Immigrant remittances are the second source of revenue for Mexico (oil being the first source). This economic power influences government, church politics, and decision making at the local, state, and national levels. In the United States, the government of Mexico, through its 50 consular offices and its Institute for Mexicans Abroad, focuses on the protection of Mexican nationals’ human rights and fosters health and educational programs for the population (Bakker, 2010). The latter foment the maintenance of Mexican culture and the Spanish language.

The Mexicanization of the United States is not, however, a one-way street. Globalization and NAFTA have also increased U.S. influence in Mexico. In addition to tourism and the increasing number of Pizza Huts and McDonalds, there has been an increase in the number of retirees now living in their own communities in places like San Miguel de Allende, Lago de Chapala, and Cuernavaca. High-level executives and management for companies like General Motors, Ford, and Kerry now live in Leon, Queretaro, and Mexico City. Television stations in Mexico carry Spanish language versions of comedies like *Friends* and *The Simpsons*. In addition, Mexican immigrants themselves are introducing U.S. customs and practices in their own communities in Mexico. Some of the more popular are Halloween and the exchange of gifts for adults during Christmas (personal communication with friends and relatives in Mexico). At a deeper level, educational institutions are restructuring the curriculum to emphasize the acquisition of English and the internalization of higher education (Barrow et al., 2003). For example, there is a push at the federal level for public schools to start teaching English at the early primary grades. In higher education, the School of Nursing at the University of Guanajuato made English a requirement with a minimum score of 450 on the TOFEL exam in 2005. This is a recognition of the importance of English in the business world and for professionals interested in studying or working in the United States.

The North America Free Trade Agreement has had a major impact in increasing the economic and social interdependency between the two countries (Selee, 2018). This interdependency has pushed for the development of a labor force with a common set of bilingual and transnational features. This reality called for a more pragmatic collaboration between the two governments and their educational institutions. The objectives of the Bilateral Forum in Higher Education, Innovation, and Research (FOBESII) captures this scenario. As such, it is important for educational institutions in both countries to develop new programs to better serve the needs of the two populations. In addition, these programs should also target the educational needs of

the Mexican population in the U.S., for they along with other Hispanics lag behind the non-Hispanic white population.

The Educational Challenges of Mexicanos and other Latinos in the U.S.

Demographic projections indicate that Latinos will play a key role in the demographic and economic growth of the United States. The Latino population will grow 115% and will account for most population growth from 2014 to 2060 (Colby and Ortman, 2015). By the year 2060, Latinos will make up about 29% of the total U.S. population and 35.5% of the k-12 student population (up from 24.4%). In contrast, for the same time period, the Anglo-American student population will decline from 52% to 35.6%. For comparison purposes, the African-American student population will decline from 13.8% to 13.2%. And the Asian student population will grow only from 4.7% to 7.9% (Colby and Ortman, 2015). According to James Canton (2006, p. 90), "Hispanics and women will dominate the future U.S. workforce." As such, educational institutions must do a better job in providing Latino students with a quality education and the knowledge and skills to function in a global economy.

In the last 15 years, there has been improvement in the educational attainment of Latino students but they still lag behind the Anglo-American population. For example, high school completion rates for Latinos increased from 63% in 2006 to 81% in 2016. Meanwhile, the completion rate for Anglo-American students remained steady 94% and 95% in the same time-period. With respect to college, the percentage of Anglo-American students with a B.A. or higher increased from 34% in 2000 to 43% in 2016. The figures for Latino students increased from 10% to 19% for the same years (IES, 2017). Here, it is important to mention that the percentage of Mexican origin students with a B.A. or higher was even lower at 10% in 2013 (STATISTA).

The lower educational attainment of Latinos can be attributed to social stratification in society which denies equal opportunities to many minority students. Some of the factors for inequality include unequal school funding, attending highly segregated minority schools, and lack of access to a rigorous curriculum, skilled teachers, and quality bilingual programs (Gandara and Contreras; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018). At the elementary school level, Latinos are 44% less likely than Anglo-Americans to participate in gifted programs (Pals and Oms, 2016). The situation is similar at the high school level. Washington (2016) reports that while Latinos and African-Americans account for 40% of the student population, they account for just over 25% of the students enrolled in college preparatory courses (AP). It is reported that many of the schools attended primarily by minority students do not offer rigorous courses. Students' scores in the ACT test support this claim. In 2016, only 23% of Latino students were college-ready while the figure was 49% for Anglo-American students (ACT, Inc. 2016).

The lower educational attainment of Latinos is more worrisome by their lower participation in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Only 10% of STEM workers are Latinos and most of them are in the service sector with only a certificate or an A.A. degree (Leonard, 2016). To make matters worse, thousands of Latinos face an uncertain future due to their undocumented status (Perez, 2011). All these factors lead to a serious situation not just for Latinos but for society as a whole. Canton (2006, p. 104) fully perceived this crisis a few years ago when he considered Latino students to be "the most likely to be unprepared to cope or succeed in the future." He then goes on to make an urgent call for political, business, and educational leaders to make immediate changes to the education system.

As mentioned above, Latinos are growing at a very fast pace, and they will represent a very large percentage of our student body and our labor force. A low academic achievement in conjunction with limited skills represent lower economic contributions to U.S. society, higher reliance on government social programs, and a labor force without the knowledge base required by the expanding global economy. Low educational levels for Mexicans and other Latinos will have a negative effect in this country's level of competitiveness in a global market (Peterson et al., 2011).

The growing importance of Mexicans and other Latinos to the viability of the United States is also connected to the increasing importance of Mexico to the economic stability of the U.S. As mentioned above, the economies of the two countries have grown more interdependent since NAFTA. In the Midwest for example, exports from Illinois to Mexico grew 703% since 1993. In 2016, exports to Mexico totaled \$9.5 billion creating 200,200 jobs in the state (Wilson Center, 2016). In Wisconsin, exports to Mexico totaled \$3 billion in 2015, creating 120,000 jobs in the state (Tragesser, 2017). Thus, not surprisingly, President Trump's calls for the elimination of NAFTA have received severe criticisms from the business sector in the U.S. (Donnan, 2017).

The economic interdependency of the two countries has been acknowledged by Mexico's educational and business sectors. The former is changing in order to include more courses in English-as-a-Second-Language and in science and technology. The latter are hiring more bilingual workers and in the adoption of quality control standards similar to those found in the U.S. As a result of NAFTA, Mexico has had to raise the quality of its products in order to be competitive in a global market. Fostering economic growth in the two countries has been a policy in the administrations of Mexico and the U.S. And fostering educational partnerships to create economic growth for the region is at the core of the FOBESII agreement signed by the two presidents in 2013. As discussed below, we began a number of educational projects with Mexico prior to FOBESII with a focus to serve better the Mexican and Latino population in Wisconsin.

Partnerships with Mexico and the Educational Convergence of the Two Countries

Although it may vary across states, Latinos in the United States face a situation of a shortage of bilingual professionals to meet the needs of the population. This is a result of the growth in the population along with the inadequacy of many educational institutions to graduate more Latinos and other bilingual professionals in the country. This condition is precarious especially in the fields of health and education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Camera, 2015; NSHP, 2005; Dibble, 2008). In some states, the shortage of Mexican bilingual teachers, counselors, and principals may further undermine the schooling of Mexican students. For many years now, educational research has shown that Latino students do better in schools staffed with educators who understand the students' linguistic and cultural experiences. Furthermore, non-English fluent Latino students perform better when enrolled in good bilingual programs rather than in English only instruction (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Baker, 2011). In the field of health, Latinos also experience a shortage of bilingual professionals. As such, many school districts and hospitals are developing programs to recruit bilingual teachers and nurses from Mexico (McGee, 2015; Dibble, 2008). These programs, however, have been created on an ad hoc basis with a high level of variability. They vary with respect to the professionals' level of bilingualism, their knowledge of the U.S. educational and health systems, and the nature of their employment conditions in this country. With respect to education, a guide has been created to facilitate

teacher exchange programs between the two countries (McGilvra, n.d.). However, it is not known how many programs have been developed nor the extent of their scope.

As mentioned above, it has been at the local level where school districts and hospitals have developed partnerships with Mexican institutions for the recruitment of bilingual teachers and nurses (Dibble, 2008; McGee, 2015). At the university level, there are two primary types of programs pertaining Mexico. In the first group, university centers and departments receive resources from private and public sources to foster some relationships with Mexico. Mostly, the bulk of these programs pertain to academic research and education opportunities for graduate students (see for example the mission statement for UC Mexus). The second group consists primarily of study abroad opportunities for students. Although these programs have certain value, centers for international education and their study abroad programs often view Mexico as any other international program and thus fail to address the growing interdependence of the two countries and the shortage of bilingual professionals in Mexican communities in the U.S.

It is in this context that we begin to develop educational projects with Mexico in order to address the pressing needs for bilingual professionals in the state of Wisconsin. In a way, these projects fall under the umbrella of public anthropology. Peacock (1997, p.14) calls for anthropologists to “head projects that reach beyond anthropology and beyond the academy.” Similarly, Borofsky (2011) acknowledges that people use public anthropology in different ways for different purposes, but in his view, it has to go beyond our disciplinary walls. Finally, De Lauri in the journal *Public Anthropology*, “encourages shifts outwards from the purely academic realm towards wider publics . . . engaged in cultural and political exchanges and collective collaborations for change” (journal website). In the development of these projects, we formed collaborations with high-level government and education officials in Mexico and in Wisconsin.

Phase one of the projects covers the 2001-2010 time-period. As in many areas of the U.S., the Mexican and the Latino population increased greatly in Wisconsin in the last 25 years. The Latino population more than doubled from 1990 to 2000 where it grew from 93,232 to 192,921 (Wisconsin Extension, 2001). The growth in the Latino population led to a great need for bilingual service providers, especially in the areas of education and health. For example, in 2002, the Milwaukee school district had 54 openings for bilingual teachers while the university was producing only 1.2 bilingual teachers per year. Nursing was in worse shape, for the university was producing only 0.3 bilingual nurses per year.

In order to mitigate the great need for bilingual professionals, we developed a collaborative education exchange project between the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, our university (the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), the school district, and the government of Wisconsin. Recognizing the efforts of the Mexican government to assist Mexican communities in the U.S. from the 1970s to the present (Garcia-Acevedo, 2003; Bakker, 2010), we contacted the office of Gov. Juan Carlos Romero-Hicks in Guanajuato. Gov. Romero-Hicks pledged his support for the project and visited our university in 2001 to sign an agreement of collaboration with the provost of the university. In broad terms, the agreement called for cultural and educational exchanges and the recruitment of bilingual teachers and nurses to provide services to the Mexican community in Wisconsin.

Developing this collaborative project between the two states was not an easy process. Besides all the time spent in meetings in the two states and doing all the necessary paperwork, it was also necessary to deal with the bureaucracy of government, universities, and individuals’ specific quirks. Notwithstanding the great need for bilingual professionals in the community and the few bilingual graduates coming out of our institutions of higher education, mid-level

university administrators were reluctant to support the project, arguing that universities do not sign agreements with governments. This first hurdle was overcome with persistence and after seeking and obtaining the support of Latino leaders in the community. With the backing of the community, the provost gave the green light to the project resulting in the visit of Gov. Romero-Hicks to our institution in 2001. We made an invitation to Wisconsin's Gov. Scott McCallum to attend the event. He was not able to attend, but he called Gov. Romero-Hicks to welcome him to the state. McCallum also sent his secretary of regulations and licensing (Oscar Herrera) to the signing ceremony. Secretary Herrera, a person of Mexican descent, played a key role in the nursing partnership discussed below.

The component in education for the project developed along the following lines. Gov. Romero-Hicks requested his secretary of education to identify and recruit bilingual teachers interested in working in the U.S. Our university helped to facilitate the J1 visas for the teachers (these are 1-3 year visas and are not renewable). The local school district provided the salaries and school placements for the teachers recruited from Mexico. A total of 15 teachers were recruited in three different cohorts from 2003-2008. Most of the teachers returned to Mexico at the expiration of their visas. Others, especially in the last cohort, returned after two years when the district did not provide the necessary support for them. Three people remain working in the district. Through sponsors in the community, they were able to obtain H1 visas and began the process to become permanent residents. The influence of the Mexican teachers in the community was favorable. One school principal and one district administrator report that the Mexican teachers had a positive impact in the education of the students. A local Catholic priest informed us that the teachers were embraced by the Mexican families in the neighborhood. Moreover, one of the Mexican teachers recalls how parents in the school were grateful that she was able to explain to them in a way they understood the school's expectations for each grade level.

Meanwhile, the two governors had continued their communication and Gov. McCallum visited Mexico in December 2001. In this visit, the two governors agreed to continue to foster trade and educational exchanges between the two states. To move forward with the project to recruit bilingual nurses from Mexico, Gov. Romero-Hicks provided additional resources to the University of Guanajuato. These resources were used first to translate into English the curriculum for a B.A. degree in nursing. Other funds were used to expand English language instruction for nursing students and other expenses needed by the nursing faculty. The curriculum was shared with the dean of nursing from our university and a copy was submitted to the office of Secretary Herrera. He was born and raised in Mexico and supported the project fully. His office sent the document to the proper state and federal authorities, where upon evaluation provided equivalency to the nursing programs from the two states.

Unfortunately, the recruitment of bilingual nurses from Mexico came to a halt when the governor of Wisconsin lost his reelection bid and Secretary Herrera had to leave his office in 2003. The new administration had other interests, and we decided to take a different path involving more directly the schools of nursing in the University of Guanajuato and our institution. With additional funds provided by Gov. Romero-Hicks, two nursing professors from Guanajuato came to visit and met with our faculty of nursing in 2005. As a result of this visit, the dean and associate dean from our institution visited Guanajuato and met with the nursing faculty. In this meeting, the two parts agreed for a closer collaboration, including the facilitation of faculty and student exchanges. Afterwards, a nursing professor in our university created a summer program in Guanajuato. A total of 52 students participated in these programs from 2006 to 2010 (the professor left for another institution in 2010). In this program, the students studied

Mexican history and culture, medical vocabulary in Spanish, and Mexico's health system. The expectation was that the students would be better prepared to work in the Mexican community.

The first phase of collaborations between the two states took place from 2001 to 2010. During this period, there were changes in the governor's office in both states and changes in the chancellor's office in both universities. Meanwhile, the Latino population continued to increase in Wisconsin. For example, the Latino population more than doubled from 2000 to 2015 as the numbers increased from 195,295 to 381,181 (Wisconsin DHS, 2016). Of all Hispanic sub-groups, Mexican origin people represent the majority with 72% of the population.

The growth in the Mexican population in the state merited the development of a new set of collaborations between the states of Guanajuato and Wisconsin. New governors as well as new leaderships in the universities created a new window of opportunity for these partnerships. We refer to the new initiatives as phase 2 in collaborations with Mexico. With respect to the domain of government, we organized a breakfast meeting between Gov. Miguel Márquez and Gov. Scott Walker on April 2, 2016. The meeting took place in the executive mansion in Madison, Wisconsin. We knew that both governors had interest in fomenting trade as Mexico is Wisconsin's second largest trading partner. And we saw the meeting as an opportunity to include partnerships in education as well. Over breakfast, the governors agreed to continue to foster trade and to support initiatives in education. With respect to the latter, we led the development of a new collaborative agreement between our university and the University of Guanajuato. On April 27, 2016, the president of the University of Guanajuato (Guerrero-Agripino) came to our institution to sign an agreement of collaboration with our institution (again former Gov. Romero-Hicks played a key role by informing President Guerrero-Agripino of the importance of continuing a partnership with our institution). President Guerrero-Agripino signed the agreement with UWM's Chancellor Mark Mone. The purpose of the document reads, "The agreement paves the way for multidisciplinary collaborations, expands study abroad opportunities for both student bodies, and bolsters business partnerships between the state of Wisconsin and Mexico" (McManam, 2016). One of our expectations has been that through these collaborations, faculty and students in our institution would develop a greater understanding of Mexico and its people—an awareness that may radiate into a better understanding of the local Mexican community.

These collaborations involving government and education officials are moving forward in a slow, unsteady way. The election of President Trump in November 2016 created a severe strain in relations between Mexico and the U.S. and uncertainty for a large segment of the Mexican population. His calls for the termination of NAFTA or its revision in more favorable terms for the U.S. has created angst in Mexico and concern for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The political climate in the current administration has created instability in the relations between the two countries. This climate also appears to put in jeopardy the objectives of the Bilateral Forum in Higher Education, Innovation, and Research, and its major point in creating a skilled labor force for a more integrated North America.

However, under the shadow of this challenging context, there are signs for optimism. Globalization and economic integrations are likely to continue, albeit at a slower pace. In a survey conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations, Ian Bremmer states, "In advanced industrial democracies, established interests promoting continued globalization remain deeply entrenched and powerful." Similarly, Jeff Colgan states, "Populism is more likely to change the character of globalization and slow its advance than halt or reverse it" (Foreign Affairs, 2017). Currently, the North America Free Trade Agreement is not dead and its revision continues. Closer to home, Wisconsin led a trade mission to Mexico in January-February 2018. In

education, and as mentioned above, the NCAA voted in January 2018 to allow Mexican universities to join its organization (Bauer-Wolf, 2018). Moreover, at the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education continues to provide grants in foreign language instruction and area/international studies, teaching, and research (OPE, 2018).

Conclusion

The North America Free Trade Agreement not only led to a greater economic integration between Mexico and the U.S., it also led to continuing immigration from Mexico, a phenomenon that began in the 1840s. Continuing migration from Mexico and other countries in Latin America contributed to the growth of the Latino community, which became the largest minority group in 2001. By this time, the Mexican community in the U.S. had been influencing greatly the language and culture in this country. However, the Mexicanization and Latinization of the U.S. has not been a one-way street. Mexican society as well as its industrial and economic sectors have incorporated many elements from U.S. society. Thus, for a period of time, it appeared as if the two societies were moving towards a greater level of integration.

This integration was, however, uneven with different sectors of society in both countries affected in different ways. Many regions in the United States experienced a shortage of bilingual service providers. The lower educational attainment of Hispanic students created by a number of factors including unequal opportunities (Gandara and Contreras, 2009; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018) created a context for a small percentage of college graduates in the Latino community. It is in this setting that we developed the first phase of partnerships with Mexico for the recruitment of Mexican teachers and nurses, and a summer program in Mexico for nursing students to develop the bilingual and bicultural skills needed to work more effectively in the Mexican community.

The second phase of the project involving government and educational officials in the two states falls broadly under the umbrella of the Bilateral Forum in Higher Education, Innovation, and Research. The hope is that collaborations in research, teaching, and faculty/student exchanges between the two universities will contribute to the economic growth in both states and foster greater multicultural understanding. The development of these partnerships is slowly unfolding under the current climate of strained relations between the two countries. Nevertheless, there are reasons for optimism for the continuing economic integration of the two countries and the need for more partnerships in education.

As mentioned above, globalization may be slowing down but it is not going in reverse. As of this writing, NAFTA talks continue in Mexico City. In late January 2018, Wisconsin completed a successful trade mission in Mexico. In higher education, the University of California continues with its partnerships with Mexico (UC Mexus portal). In April 2017, Southern Methodist University inaugurated its SMU Mission Foods Texas-Mexico Center (SMU, 2017). In our case, we will be meeting with government and education officials in Guanajuato in March 2019 to move forward with our educational partnerships. The vision of Pastor (2011) for a “North America Community” may not be dead. Mexico and the Mexican transnational community in the U.S. continue to coexist. On February 22, 2018, Guillermo Cantu (Secretary General of the Mexican Federation of Soccer) announced the launch of its English-language social media channels. He states, “Well, basically there are more than 40 million fans of the Mexican National Team in the United States. We practically have two territories—Mexico and the United States” (Arnold, 2018). In conclusion, we believe that there will be continuing

economic and social integration between the two countries. This integration can be slowed down by the current administration in the U.S., but it will not go on reverse. The world has become highly integrated and the present global order is highly resilient and can survive Trump (Sullivan, 2018).

That was the conclusion reached in April 27, 2018. Six months later, it was announced that Canada, the U.S., and Mexico will host the World Cup in 2026. On September 30, 2018, the three countries reached a new trade agreement. A key statement in the press release states, “It will strengthen the middle class, and create good, well-paying jobs and new opportunities for the nearly half billion people who call North America home” (U.S. Government, 2018). For Seele (2018, p. 283), “The . . . future seems clear. The frontiers that once separated us will continue to vanish as forces stronger and more dynamic than any presidential order or trade agreement continue to bring us closer together.” We share Seele’s perspective. Thus, it is important to continue to develop partnerships between the two countries, a partnership that may lead to a greater educational convergence and a higher level of multicultural understanding between the two societies.

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