

Understanding Mexican Migration Flows to the United States

Course Description and Objectives

The labor migration of workers from Mexico to the United States constitutes the largest contemporary international migration flow in the world. What motivates individuals to migrate across borders? What are the social and economic implications of sending migrants for origin households and communities? This tutorial will guide students through the preparation of an empirical research paper that explores these broad questions.

We will use statistical methods and analyze survey data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP). This survey is the result of a multidisciplinary research effort between investigators in Mexico and the United States. In addition to basic demographic data, the survey gathers information on family composition, fertility, infant mortality, marital history of the household head, labor history of the household head and his/her spouse, and ownership history of properties and businesses. Moreover, detailed information on individuals' internal and international migration moves, and multiple aspects of key U.S. trips (work experience, income, social networks, and remittances) are also collected.

We will begin with a broad overview of the theories of migration, and then be exposed to a variety of substantive problems and research approaches to the quantitative study of migration. Through critical reading of existing literature, preparation of research proposals, and reviewing the projects of other classmates, we will collectively obtain a better understanding of issues surrounding contemporary migration to the United States, and gain experience in conducting original empirical research.

Requirements

Students are expected to attend each meeting, do the readings thoroughly and in advance, and participate actively in class. Basic familiarity with statistics is necessary. (The course will provide a brief review of statistical concepts and their applications in STATA as a reminder.) Other requirements for the course are as follows:

1. First four weeks will be dedicated to reviewing the recent literature on international migration. For each week (excluding the first), students will prepare a 1-page response paper, describing the major themes of the week's readings and presenting some questions for discussion arising from them. (All assignments should be typed in 12-font Times New Roman, double-spaced, and posted on the course website by 5pm Sunday evening. Late assignments are penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day past the deadline.)
2. Students will provide several drafts of their research paper over the course of the semester (see the schedule in the syllabus). Each student is required to read other students' work before class. In selected weeks (indicated in the schedule), students will prepare a short (½ page) written review for each of the submitted drafts. Hand two copies to me in class. The reviews are not meant to be evaluative, but should be used to raise questions, offer clarifications and constructive criticisms, and suggest potential readings or analyses. These reviews will allow us to share our own research experience and wisdom with others in the classroom, and help improve each other's work.
3. In the final three weeks of the semester, students will prepare a formal in-class presentation that describes their research question and preliminary findings. Each presentation will be approximately 20 minutes, and followed by questions and discussion.
4. Final paper (20-25 pages) is due on the last day of the reading period, May 9 by 5pm. The final paper will constitute 60% of the grade. Participation in class discussions and the formal presentation of ongoing research will each account for 10%. Response papers, interim drafts and reviews of others' work will add up to the remaining 20% of the grade.