

**Nomination for an Area of Research Excellence in Migration Studies  
February 2021**

**Title:** Migration Research Network

**Participating Units:**

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

- Department of Anthropology
- Department of English
- Department of Geography and Earth Sciences
- Department of Global Studies
- Department of History
- Department of Languages and Culture Studies
- Department of Political Science and Public Administration
- Department of Sociology
- Public Policy Program

College of Education

- Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education
- Department of Reading and Elementary Education

College of Health and Human Services

- School of Nursing
- School of Social Work

College of Arts + Architecture

- School of Architecture

**Cluster Leaders:** Beth Whitaker  
Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Heather Smith  
Professor, Department of Geography and Earth Sciences

Lan Kolano  
Professor, Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education

**Target Category:** Existing and Emerging Excellence

**Keywords:** migration patterns, immigration policy, public opinion, immigrant inclusion, climate migration

## Executive Summary

Globally, 272 million people—3.5 percent of the world’s population—live in countries other than where they were born, three times as many as in 1970.<sup>1</sup> Driven by economics, political violence, social dynamics, and climate change, most migrants relocate within their own regions while others move farther away. The top destination country remains the United States, where immigrants increasingly are bypassing gateways like New York and California to settle in cities and towns in the Southeast, particularly in North Carolina, a leading new immigrant destination. Today, nearly 1 in 6 people in Mecklenburg County is foreign-born, up from 1 in 27 in 1990.<sup>2</sup> No matter where they settle—Nairobi, New York, or Charlotte—migrants, their hosts, and the communities they left behind must find ways to adapt to these transformations.

Migration is thus a complex and urgent issue that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries. The Migration Research Network brings together UNC Charlotte faculty in departments across four colleges who are conducting research on migration with a view toward strengthening existing collaborations and building new ones. We have established a significant record of scholarship on immigration to the New South, migration governance, migrant communities, host-migrant relations, and more. Existing collaborations are examining forced and return migration patterns and language use in immigrant communities. With the addition of several junior faculty, we have exciting opportunities to build new collaborations around topics such as immigration attitudes and policy, immigrants’ access to education and healthcare, and climate migration.

This network will facilitate interaction among participating faculty through workshops, speaker series, and public events. Smaller clusters will identify shared research questions and seek external funding to develop deeper collaborations. We will work toward establishing one of the first global migration studies centers in the Southeast.<sup>3</sup> It will bring together core and affiliate faculty to collaborate on interdisciplinary research, engaged scholarship, and outreach in Charlotte and beyond through policy analysis, seminars, internships, professional development, and other initiatives.<sup>4</sup> Over the long term, we aim to develop academic programs (certificates, minors) in a growing interdisciplinary field that is relatively new in the United States.

With the formation of the Migration Research Network, UNC Charlotte is poised to take a leadership role in the study of migration nationally and internationally. Participating faculty examine migration from multiple disciplinary perspectives using an array of methodological approaches and with regional expertise in Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. We work with many local, national, and international organizations and are committed to policy-relevant engaged scholarship. As North Carolina’s urban research university, UNC Charlotte has many immigrant and international students and faculty, reflecting the diversity of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century gateway city in which it is located. It is the ideal place to strengthen and support existing and emerging excellence in the study of global migration.

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<sup>1</sup> International Organization for Migration, [World Migration Report 2020](#).

<sup>2</sup> [U.S. Census Bureau](#) data show a rise in the foreign-born population from 3.7% in 1990 to 15.4% in 2015-2019.

<sup>3</sup> Several universities have started global migration studies centers, including [Georgetown University](#) (1998), [University of California at San Diego](#) (2002), [University of Maryland](#) (2011), [Stanford University](#) (2014), [University of California at Los Angeles](#) (2015), and the [University of British Columbia](#) (2020).

<sup>4</sup> A center at the [University of Missouri](#) engages in research and outreach on Latinos and changing communities.

## Evidence of Strength and Excellence

The Migration Research Network brings together 23 faculty members across multiple disciplines and ranks, including 9 assistant professors, 6 associate professors, 7 full professors, and 1 distinguished professor. These scholars have a robust record of research on global migration. Collectively, we have published 674 books and journal articles, 241 of which relate to migration and 146 of which involve collaborations with colleagues at UNC Charlotte. According to Google Scholar, our work has been cited 15,069 times.<sup>5</sup> Over the past five years, we have received 42 external grants yielding more than \$7.94 million. Of these, 21 (\$2.29 million) have focused on migration and 20 have involved UNC Charlotte collaborators. Our work has been featured by *Newsweek*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Toronto Star*, Huffington Post, *La Noticia*, Charlotte Talks, Radio Times, Radio France International, Al Jazeera, and other outlets.

Migration scholars at UNC Charlotte have been recognized for research and other contributions with external and internal awards. Twelve of our publications have received best book or article awards from professional associations. Heather Smith was recognized as the 2019 Distinguished Scholar by the Ethnic Geography Specialty Group of the American Association of Geographers. Several members of our network have received college- and/or university-wide recognition for their excellence in research (Maren Coffman, James Walsh), teaching (Lan Kolano, Roger Suclupe, Beth Whitaker), graduate mentoring (Heather Smith), community engagement (Lan Kolano, Heather Smith, Roger Suclupe), and globally networked learning (Adriana Medina).

Faculty in this network contribute significantly to student education and training, including through two doctoral programs that are especially relevant to the study of migration. Heather Smith directs the Ph.D. program in Geography, supported by core faculty Colleen Hammelman and Jean-Claude Thill and new faculty Michael Ewers and Joseph Kangmennaang. Multiple faculty teach and/or supervise students in the Ph.D. program in Public Policy (Jurgen Buchenau, Stephanie Potochnick, Dale Smith, Jean-Claude Thill, James Walsh, and Beth Whitaker). Many faculty members in this group also have provided advanced research training to masters and undergraduate students. By our estimates, we have directly trained 227 graduate and 165 undergraduate students by supervising theses and dissertations, employing research assistants, co-authoring articles, and otherwise involving students in our research.

Scholars in this network are actively engaged with a remarkable number of community groups, government agencies, and other external entities. Our local partners include International House, Refugee Support Services, ourBRIDGE for KIDS, Southeast Asian Coalition, Latin American Coalition, Project 658, Camino Community Center, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte Bilingual School, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council, Levine Museum of the New South, and Mecklenburg County Public Health. Nationally, we work with the Migration Policy Institute, Freedom for Immigrants, the Urban Institute, the Center for Global Development, and the U.S. Departments of State and Defense. We have provided expert testimony in asylum cases and served as observers in immigration courts. International connections include the World Bank, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, the United Nations High Commissioner for

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<sup>5</sup> This total is especially impressive given that a significant portion of participating faculty are in the humanities and other fields where citation counts tend to be lower, in part due to the focus on solo-authored monographs.

Refugees, and the International Labour Organization. Through these interactions, we learn about and influence the formulation and implementation of migration-related policies and practices.

Substantively, our research examines migration and migrants across a broad range of time and space, from mobility within the Ottoman Empire to the history of U.S. detention centers to contemporary migration patterns and policies in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Our network also has extensive expertise on recent immigration to the New South and immigrant communities in this region. This balance is important given global migration patterns and their local impacts. Media attention tends to focus on migration from developing countries to wealthier ones, but more than half of international migration takes place among countries within the Global South. Our collective work thus helps put Charlotte's recent transformation as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century gateway city into broader historical and comparative perspective.

We are engaged in multiple interdisciplinary research collaborations. With funding from the U.S. Department of Defense, James Walsh and Jean-Claude Thill are using survey experiments and spatial analysis to study patterns of forced and return migration in conflict zones. Elise Berman and Rebecca Roeder have a National Geographic grant to examine language and racialization among Marshallese immigrant children in Arkansas. Heather Smith, Colleen Hammelman, and Maren Coffman are members of the Receptivity, Integration, and Settlement in New Gateways (RISING) Research Group and conduct participatory, action-based research with immigrants and refugees. Maren Coffman, José Gámez, Lan Kolano, Adriana Medina, and Roger Suclupe work through the Academy for Research on Community Health, Engagement and Services (ARCHES) to improve health and education in vulnerable communities. Many of us also collaborate on other grants and publications not directly related to migration, contributing to the group's cohesion.

The Migration Research Network builds on past collaborations and fosters new ones. Thanks in part to recent hires (including David Dalton, Michael Ewers, Ella Fratantuono, Colleen Hammelman, Joseph Kanmennaang, Alexander Kustov, Stephanie Potochnick, Kristina Shull, and Roger Suclupe), UNC Charlotte now has a critical mass of scholars who conduct research about migration and migrants. Together, we have identified several areas of synergy in which our interdisciplinary collaborations can have an important scholarly and policy impact: 1) migration patterns and flows; 2) public opinion on immigration; 3) immigration policy past and present; 4) immigrant inclusion and communities; and 5) migration and climate change. Sharing our diverse methodological expertise (spatial analysis, survey experiments, community-based research, ethnography, etc.), we will work together to further explore the complexities of global migration.

The R1 Commission's recognition of migration studies as an area of research excellence at UNC Charlotte would strengthen and expand this nascent network. Institutional support will allow us to work toward the establishment of an interdisciplinary center for research and outreach on migration, from local to global. Seed grants will support workshops, pilot projects, and travel toward the development of collaborative proposals within the network for major grants from external partners. Cluster hires would attract additional and diverse faculty to round out our expertise in these areas. Fellowships would facilitate the recruitment of an interdisciplinary group of doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers who work on migration using innovative methodologies and approaches. Such investment will help UNC Charlotte firmly stake its claim as a national and international leader in the study of migration.

## Alignment with Regional and National Priorities

The proposed area of research excellence in migration aligns strategically with university, regional, national, and international priorities. As a diverse urban research university, UNC Charlotte promotes several [core values](#).<sup>6</sup> By researching and teaching about migration and migrants, faculty members in this group equip students with “an international perspective” and promote a “robust intellectual environment that values social and cultural diversity.” Moreover, the development of a research network across departments and ranks helps foster a “respectful workplace environment that develops the professional capacities of our faculty and staff.”

[UNC Charlotte’s mission](#) seeks to address the “cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region.” North Carolina is now home to more than 800,000 immigrants, and that population continues to grow and diversify. 200,000 U.S. citizens in the state live with at least one family member who is undocumented.<sup>7</sup> Research and outreach by UNC Charlotte faculty and students can help to understand and address the needs of immigrants in our region and serve as a model for other new destination communities. Our work also provides insights into underlying race, ethnic, and class divisions in Charlotte, which was ranked as the least economically mobile of the 50 largest U.S. cities in the [2014 Chetty Report](#).

Migration is important to the nation’s economy<sup>8</sup> and security, and to the health and diversity of its society. Immigration and climate change (an increasingly important driver of migration) are two of [seven immediate priorities](#) identified by the Biden-Harris Administration upon taking office. Reflecting this importance, many agencies support interdisciplinary research on migration and migrants. The [National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities](#) funds work on health disparities in immigrant communities, an area of focus for several in our network. The [Institute of Education Sciences](#) has a funding portfolio for research on English learners. With 1 in every 4 children in the U.S. the child of an immigrant, the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) supports many immigrant-focused projects. The [Russell Sage Foundation/Carnegie Corporation Initiative](#) sponsors research on immigrant integration, political incorporation, and migration to new settlement areas. The National Science Foundation’s [Future of Work](#) “big idea” on the relationship between humans and technology has implications for labor migration patterns. Other funding sources for research on global migration include the [Social Science Research Council](#), the [Army Research Office](#), the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the World Bank.

The interdisciplinary field of migration studies is established in Europe and Canada, but fairly new in the U.S. Few universities (none in the South) offer minors (i.e. [UCSD](#), [UCLA](#)) or graduate degrees.<sup>9</sup> With migration’s growing importance in this region and beyond, UNC Charlotte has an opportunity to develop research, education, and outreach programs that have a local to global impact. We will join an international network of scholars as we prepare the next generation of leaders to address the challenges associated with mobility around the world.

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<sup>6</sup> This proposal also promotes values listed in the university’s new draft strategic plan, including integrity and respect; diversity, equity, and inclusion; access and social mobility; and local to global community engagement.

<sup>7</sup> [“Fact Sheet: Immigrants in North Carolina,”](#) American Immigration Council, August 6, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> A [2017 National Academies report](#) concluded that “immigration has an overall positive impact on long-run economic growth in the U.S.”

<sup>9</sup> [City University of New York](#), [DePaul University](#), and [University of San Francisco](#) have masters programs.

## Participating faculty members

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title/Department</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
Elise Berman	Associate Professor Anthropology	Marshallese migration to the New South; language and racialization in schools
Jurgen Buchenau	Professor and Chair History	Migration in and out of Latin America; migration and national identity
Maren Coffman	Associate Professor Nursing	Health in the Latinx community
David Dalton	Assistant Professor Languages and Culture Studies	US-Mexican migration
Michael C. Ewers	Assistant Professor Geography and Earth Sciences	Labor markets and human capital; migration regimes; skilled migration; decision-making; Middle East
Ella M. Fratantuono	Assistant Professor History	Forced migration; migration governance; historical and contemporary migration in Middle East and Southeast Europe
José Gámez	Professor and Interim Associate Dean Architecture	Latinx urbanism
Colleen Hammelman	Assistant Professor Geography and Earth Sciences	Migrant entrepreneurship; migrant food systems; Latin American migration in the US South; cities and migration
Joseph Kangmennaang	Assistant Professor Geography and Earth Sciences	Immigrant wellbeing; immigrant health; transnationalism; African-born immigrants
Lan Kolano	Professor & Interim Chair Middle, Secondary, and K12 Education	Language and identity development of immigrant children; multicultural teacher attitudes and preparation
Alexander Kustov	Assistant Professor (2021) Political Science and Public Administration	Immigration attitudes and policy in high- income countries; experimental methods; race and ethnicity
Adriana Medina	Associate Professor Reading and Elementary Education	Immigrant children and families in schools
Juan Meneses	Associate Professor English	Cosmopolitanism; global migration; citizenship, environmentalism, and foreignness in literature and culture
Stephanie Potochnick	Assistant Professor Sociology	US immigration; immigrant health and education; immigration enforcement; undocumented immigration
Rebecca Virginia Roeder	Associate Professor English	Language diversity and migration; dialect change in urban areas; Mexican American English; Marshallese English

Kristina Shull	Assistant Professor History	Immigration detention; immigration law and policy; Latin American migration; climate migration
Dale Smith	Professor and Chair Global Studies	Immigration attitudes; anti-immigrant sentiment; survey experiments
Heather Smith	Professor Geography and Earth Sciences	Immigrant settlement, adjustment, and receptivity; new immigrant gateways; Latin American migration in US South
Maya Socolovsky	Associate Professor English	Latinx literature; Latinx children's literature; citizenship; US-Mexico border
Roger Suclupe	Clinical Asst Professor Social Work	Health and wellness in Latinx communities
Jean-Claude Thill	Distinguished Professor Geography and Earth Sciences	Population displacement; economic migrants; migration as flows; rural-urban migration; spatial modeling; networks
James Igoe Walsh	Professor Political Science and Public Administration	Forced migration; return migration; population movement and reconstruction
Beth Elise Whitaker	Professor Political Science and Public Administration	Immigration attitudes; immigration policy; migration within Africa; refugees; diaspora politics