Durham and its downtown first grew as a thriving commercial center fueled by the tobacco trade. The eventual decline of agriculture and manufacturing brought about a new era for the region. Starting in the 1950s, Durham fell into a period of decline crippled by the loss of population, jobs and investment. The residents who stayed weathered stagnating property values, increasing unemployment, and crumbling infrastructure.

Recently, Durham is on the rebound. Over the last twenty years, the city and county have experienced significant growth in both population and investment. The area’s recent successes can be attributed to many causes, but one key component is Durham’s rapidly growing foreign-born population. These new residents are renting and purchasing homes, patronizing and opening local businesses, expanding the city and county tax bases, and lowering the average resident age. Durham’s economy today is much more stable and sustainable than it was twenty years ago.

This major migration has triggered real changes in the demographic composition of Durham. This new reality will have profound and lasting implications for all Durham residents, local governments, and the business and cultural community.

**New demographics**

Historically, Durham and other counties of the Southeastern United States have had limited experience with large-scale immigration (C. Flippen and E. Parrado, 2012). Populations of foreign-born residents and the number of Latinos living in counties like Durham remained relatively low as late as 1990. In that year, only 4% (6,000) of Durham residents identified as foreign-born and only 1% (2,000) of the total population (182,000) identified as Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990).

Over the next decade, Durham’s foreign-born population increased significantly to 11% (24,000 of 223,000 residents). In 2000, 8% (17,000) of residents identified as Hispanic/Latino, with foreign-born residents reaching 14% (36,000) of the population. In 2010, these numbers continued to rise to 14% (38,000) for Hispanic/Latino residents and 14% (38,000) for foreign-born residents. The one population that has seen little to no growth from 1990-2010 is Durham’s non-Hispanic/Latino.

**Percent Hispanic/Latino**

[Graph showing the percentage of Hispanic/Latino population in Durham from 1990 to 2020]

Hispanic White population, which increased only 4% to 113,000. Because of the growth of the Hispanic/Latino and African American communities, Durham’s non-Hispanic White population has fallen from 60% of the county’s population to 42%.

**Forecasting growth**

Durham has seen a remarkable increase in the number of foreign-born residents. Over the next decade that population is certain to grow even using very conservative growth assumptions. To forecast growth, we used a cohort projection growth model*. The model predicted the following changes:

- Durham’s population will grow by 47,000 people from 2010 to 2020.
- More than half, 25,000, of these new residents will be Hispanic/Latino.
- Sixty-four percent of new Hispanic/Latino residents will be “migrants” coming to the region from other parts of the state, country, or from other countries.
- One-in-three children born in Durham will be Hispanic/Latino.

These findings are conservative and assume that rates of immigration will fall. If Durham’s immigration rates continue at current levels, these figures will be even higher.

*A cohort projection growth model for Durham County forecasting population growth by ethnicity.


* This technique (Cohort Projection Growth Model) starts with the collection of U.S. Census Bureau data by age, gender and ethnicity for 2000 and 2010. Then, using death rates and birth rates for the state of North Carolina available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we predict the ten-year survival rates for the 2000 population. These results are compared to the observed 2010 population to calculate a “migration factor” or the rate of population change that cannot be explained by death rates or birth rates. The birth rates, death rates, and a revised “migration factor” are then used to calculate the 2020 population. We used a revised migration factor because very high migration factors were observed for Durham’s Hispanic and Latino population. In some cases, Durham’s population of Hispanics and Latinos was five-times higher than birth and death rates would predict. These figures were revised down for the 2020 forecast using averages and weights consistent with a gradual leveling off of immigration to the County.
Immigrant neighborhoods

Immigrants from different regions of the world have settled in different parts of the county. Although all neighborhoods in Durham are home to some foreign-born residents, three parts of the County have disproportionately high foreign-born communities.

Westgate Towers-Knollwood has the highest proportion of immigrants. More than one-in-three residents in this area are foreign born, and most of these residents are non U.S. citizens. Half the immigrants in this neighborhood are from Mexico, 10% are from Guatemala, 9% are from Honduras, and 7% are from El Salvador. Crest Street-Duke Manor is 35% foreign born. Unlike Westgate Towers, most of the immigrants are from Asian countries (44%). Twenty-five percent of immigrants in the neighborhood come from Mexico. Finally, Scarsdale Village is 27% foreign born. Most immigrants come from Mexico (45%) and Honduras (27%). (American Community Survey, 2010)

Durham's immigrant communities face a distinct set of opportunities and challenges.** The average household living in an immigrant neighborhood has a median household income of $39,000, compared to $56,000, for non-immigrant neighborhoods. Immigrant neighborhoods are also more likely to be renter neighborhoods. Immigrant neighborhoods have 72% renter occupied units versus the nonimmigrant neighborhood average of 49%. (American Community Survey, 2010)

Generally, immigrant neighborhoods are younger. The average immigrant neighborhood age is 29 versus 35 in nonimmigrant neighborhoods. Also, immigrant neighborhoods are more likely to be renter neighborhoods. Immigrant neighborhoods have 72% renter occupied units versus the nonimmigrant neighborhood average of 49%. (American Community Survey, 2010)

** Durham County was divided into immigrant and nonimmigrant neighborhoods using 2006-2010 American Community Survey Data available for Census tracts. Tracts, areas roughly the size of a neighborhood, that had 1.5 times the National Average Foreign-Born population were labeled "immigrant neighborhoods". For Durham, 12 Tracts were classified as "immigrant neighborhoods". Forty-eight were classified as nonimmigrant.
neighborhoods have roughly average educational outcomes and average unemployment rates. It is important to acknowledge that these educational and employment outcomes reported by the U.S. Census Bureau for foreign-born neighborhoods reflect neighborhoods containing student and faculty attending Duke University. Isolating educational outcomes for Hispanics/Latinos in Durham County reveal that only 49% have completed high school, significantly lower than the rate of 83% observed by the general population. Unemployment is also higher among Hispanics/Latinos 8% versus the general population 6%.

One of the biggest challenges faced by Durham’s foreign-born population is English proficiency. Durham is home to 45,000 people who speak a language other than English, half of whom cannot speak English “very well”. One in ten Durham residents do not speak English “very well” according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Twelve percent of county residents speak Spanish, and 65% of Spanish speakers cannot speak English “very well”. Three percent of county residents speak an Indo-European language (other than English and Spanish), and another 3% speak an Asian/Pacific-Islander language. Most speakers of these languages can speak English “very well” (80% of Indo-European language speakers and 65% of Asian/Pacific-Islander speakers).

In addition to the challenges faced by Durham’s new foreign-born population, Durham’s growing immigrant population provides a number of promising opportunities for the region:

• More residents are good for existing residents, businesses and government. There will be fewer vacant homes, more customers, and increased tax revenue.
• The county is becoming younger. Durham will be better equipped to handle the retirement of “Baby Boomers” if young people move to and stay in the county.
• Economic development research suggests that there may be economic advantages for diverse and inclusive communities.
• New residents are bringing new economic opportunities and greater creative and entrepreneurial potential to the area. Businesses started by immigrants and minorities are employing other residents.

At the same time, the change may raise some other concerns:

• City and county leaders may be concerned of growing demands on government resources.
• Some residents may fear that new residents are taking jobs from other residents who “lived here first”.
• New and existing immigrants may be fearful of racial and ethnic-driven backlash to their community’s growth.

Regardless of these advantages or concerns, population projections for the county predict that growth of immigrant communities will continue. Acknowledging this growth will help residents, businesses and governments prepare for the future. Fortunately, towns and cities in North Carolina and across the United States are developing immigrant integration processes that can help communities address the challenges generated by a rapidly growing immigrant population.

The Latino Migration Project provides research and educational expertise on Latin American immigration and integration issues in North Carolina. Established in 2006, The Latino Migration Project is a collaborative program of the Institute for the Study of the Americas and the Center for Global Initiatives at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To read more about the Latino Migration Project and its programs, click on “The Latino Migration Project” at http://isa.unc.edu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparing Various Socioeconomic Attributes of Durham Neighborhoods Based on Density of Immigrants</th>
<th>Nonimmigrant Neighborhoods</th>
<th>Immigrant Neighborhoods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>214,208</td>
<td>53,375</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Born (%)</td>
<td>11.18</td>
<td>25.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White (%)</td>
<td>44.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-English Speaking (%)</td>
<td>15.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renter Occupied Housing (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (%)</td>
<td>5.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher (%)</td>
<td>42.49</td>
<td>38.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$56,338</td>
<td>$39,479</td>
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</tbody>
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Data source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey.