

Biculturalism and Persistence

Cynthia Feliciano (of UCLA's Department of Sociology) recently published the results of a study that should help analysts and parents appreciate the benefit of an immigrant culture. She used 1990 Census data to see how language use, household language, and presence of immigrants in the household relate to dropping out of school. In her analysis, she controlled for important predictors of dropping out of school (nativity and age at immigration; age; sex; marital status, and home ownership, among others).

Her main findings were as follows:

...biculturalism and exposure to immigrant culture, as measured by language ability, household language, and presence of foreign-born family, do not increase the likelihood of dropping out of school for any of the major U.S. immigrant groups. In fact, these factors seem to serve as some protection from dropping out. This article suggests that loss of immigrant culture may negatively affect youths' school attachment and that these findings apply to a much wider number of ethnic groups than have thus far been examined. Living with immigrant family members is especially beneficial for Filipinos, Japanese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, whereas bilingualism is advantageous for Vietnamese, Chinese, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans... Those least likely to drop out are able to speak English very well but also are embedded in bilingual, immigrant households; they have acculturated to some degree, but also maintain their ethnicity... This article's findings should be treated as preliminary and tentative given several limitations...

This study has relevance for institutional researchers. At one level, the factors that may affect high school dropout rates among Asian and Latino will tend to affect the ability of these groups to attempt a postsecondary education—an issue in terms of participation rates and enrollment projection. At another level, researchers may consider the potential for such effects to have a similar effect on the persistence of students who are enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Analysts who model attainment of degrees, certificates, transfer, or course completion may gain some insight into the complexity of the factors behind academic success among Asian and Latino youth.

Interested parties may find Feliciano's article, "The Benefits of Biculturalism: Exposure to Immigrant Culture and Dropping Out of School among Asian and Latino Youths," in the following journal: *Social Science Quarterly*, Volume 82, Number 4, December 2001, 865-879.

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