

English Language and Professional Training Programs for Immigrants in Miami

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Abstract

This paper describes a sample of the existing English language and professional training programs available to immigrants in Miami. By outlining the basic elements for a number of programs, my goal is to provide readers with an awareness of the efforts that are being made by both immigrant actors and educational institutions to serve the skilled, education-driven immigrant population in Miami. All of my research was gathered through first-hand interviews, second-hand published works and census data. The results of the interviews do not allow for generalizable knowledge. However, the preliminary study presented here is intended to shed some light on the issues of interest.

Introduction¹

With a foreign born population of 51.1%, a measured 71.9% of Miami-Dade County's population speaks a language other than English at home.² The local diversity is obvious. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007), there are 79 different spoken languages in Miami-Dade County including Spanish, Portuguese, French Creole, Chinese and Russian.³ And yet, English is generally valued as the primary spoken language. In this paper, I discuss how language holds immigrants back from realizing their full potential in American society. Then I point out how in Miami, English language and professional training programs are working to help immigrants overcome this challenge. Arguably, they are making life improvement for immigrants in Miami possible by affording them the chance to close the language gap and put their skills to use for educational and professional advancement.

This paper presents a general summary of such programs. I begin by providing a history of Miami as an immigrant destination with historical conflict regarding the role of language in society. From there, I move to profile five programs. When I began this study, I did not anticipate so much variety among the English language and professional training programs, but I now understand that there is variety because the skilled immigrant population demands it. They need it. This paper is just the beginning of an effort to track how such needs are being met and

what effects they are having on the skilled, education-eager foreign born population within Miami.

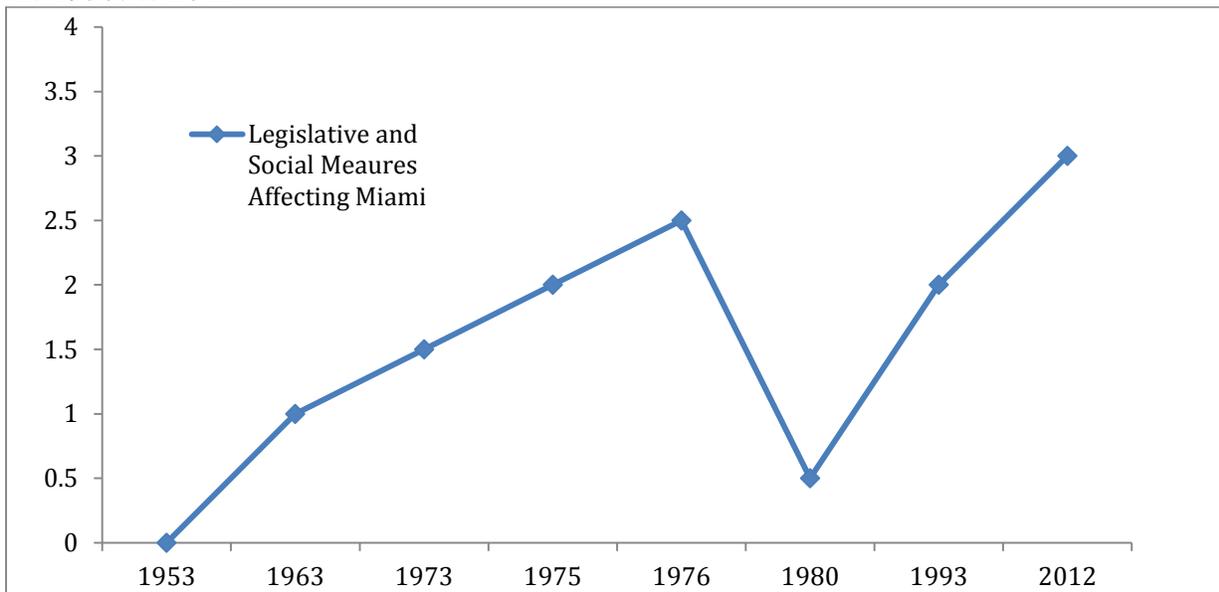
Miami as an Immigrant Destination

Today, Cubans dominate the makeup of the foreign-born population within Miami. According to 2010 U.S. Census data cited by the Pew Hispanic Research Center, 48% of the national share of Cubans in the United States reside in Miami-Dade County.⁴ Cuban migration began in the 1960s, when Cuba experienced a mass exodus during its revolution. The island suddenly became a “refugee generating”/labor-exporting society where people were emigrating by the thousands.⁵ Historical trends show a sustained increase in the number of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County since 1960, while Cuba’s population has decreased in absolute terms in recent years.⁶ Most of these immigrants were highly skilled and led to the supply of an educated workforce in Miami, but despite these economic and international advances, the issue of language rose up to challenge the role of the new arrivals to Miami.⁷

Chart 1 presents a timeline tracking the legislative and social measures that were taken to promote and weaken linguistic and cultural initiatives from the 1950s to today. In 1963, initial social efforts were made when Coral Way Elementary School incorporated bilingual classes into its curriculum. By the end of the 1960s, there were 14 Miami public schools with bilingual programs,⁸ and in 1973, the Miami-Dade County Commission formally declared Miami-Dade County as both bilingual and bicultural.⁹ In 1975, the U.S. Supreme Court decided, “schools had a legal obligation to provide children of limited English proficiency with some sort of special program” in *Lau v. Nichols*.¹⁰ Moves to ease the language barrier for the Hispanic population in Miami continued in 1976 when the *Miami Herald* released a daily Spanish edition of the

newspaper called *El Herald*.¹¹ All of this progress, however, was halted with the passage of an anti-bilingual bill in 1980.¹² The bill was eventually revoked in 1993,¹³ and today, immigrants are seeking new ways to integrate into the political, economic and social sphere through English as a Second Language (ESL) and professional training programs.

Chart 1: The Rise and Fall of Support for Bi-Lingual and Bi-Cultural Initiatives in Miami from the 1950s to 2012



Sources: Mackey 1997, Castro 1992, Garcia 1985.

Miami's English Language and Professional Training Programs

In this study, I contacted a total of nine programs in Miami, but three were unavailable to comment at the time. Table 1, therefore, only features fundamental information on six programs. The data was gathered through a total of eight, semi-structured, in-person and phone interviews that took place with various program faculty and administrative members. Overall, my findings address the foundation, goals, successes, struggles and future of these programs.

Table 1: A Comparison of Characteristics Among Miami’s English Language and Professional Training Programs as of Spring 2013

	Institutional Affiliation	Date Established	Student Type	Student Goals
English Language Institute: Intensive English Program	Florida International University	1987	Skilled immigrants	Continue education at the U.S. university level or in home country
Project A.C.E. (Accelerated Content-Based English)	Miami-Dade College, InterAmerican Campus	2008	Skilled immigrants	Continue education at the U.S. university level
English as a Second Language	College of Business and Technology, Kendall Campus	2003	Skilled immigrants	Continue education at the U.S. university level
Advanced Standing for Foreign Lawyers	Florida International University College of Law	2002	Foreign Educated Lawyers	Become a lawyer in the U.S.
Foreign Educated Physician to Nursing Program	Florida International University	2010	Foreign Educated Physicians and Nurses	Pass the National Counsel Licensure Examination for a U.S. nursing license
International English Program	University of Miami	1951	International Students	Continue education at the U.S. university level

Sources: Table prepared by author based on information gathered through interviews with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University (2012), Ernesto De La Hoz, Miami-Dade College (2012), Dennis Beltrons, College of Business and Technology (2013), Julie Beineke, Florida International University College of Law (2012), Donna Yff, Florida International University College of Law (2012), Maria Olenick, Florida International University (2012), Cara Wenig Mori, University of Miami (2013).

Additional Program Information

To complement the data presented in Table 1, I also gathered information on the ethnic and gender majority in each program, the student age range and the approximate class size. I found that program length varies depending on the number of learning levels and/or credits participants have to complete. Hispanics, most commonly Cubans, make up the ethnic majority for every program except at the University of Miami. Cara Wenig Mori, the Director of Curriculum and Faculty for UM's Intensive English Program, said that the majority of her students come from Saudi Arabia and China because of the private university's price point.¹⁴ Overall, the gender representation is usually split, with neither males nor females dominating a program, and the age range for most programs ranges from about 18 years old up to 71 years old.¹⁵ I also learned that small classroom sizes are typical and preferable for the programs, with about 15 to 25 students per classroom. The smaller the classroom size, the easier it is for teachers and students to interact. But at FIU's Intensive English Program, limited space for the number of classrooms is starting to challenge classroom sizing; classroom size might have to increase to be able to accommodate the program's high enrollment rates.¹⁶ Some other challenges these programs are experiencing include garnering more institutional support for the proliferation of the program to other college campuses, student work schedules conflicting with class schedules, and, a language barrier. Despite these challenges, though, every program I studied showed marked success in its retention rates and steady and/or rising enrollment rates. In our interviews, faculty and administrators expressed a passion for their jobs as guidance counselors, advisors, mentors and friends to their students. The remaining portion of this paper includes excerpts from my interviews and more information to help distinguish one program from another.

Florida International University's English Language Institute & Intensive English Program

While FIU's English Language Institute offers night classes, summer classes, conversational classes and test preparation classes to non-English speakers, it was the Intensive English Program (IEP) that caught my interest. IEP caters to non-English speaking individuals who plan to learn English then continue their education either in the United States or in their country of origin. Luis Sanchez, the program director, described the participants as "people who are coming here, getting there English skills then passing their TOEFLs, their SATs, their GMATs or whichever exam they have to pass to get into universities on the graduate or undergraduate level."¹⁷

Prospective IEP students must take a placement test evaluating their grammar, reading, vocabulary, writing and conversation skills. The test score then places them into one of six learning levels. Once placed, a student will move from one level to the next under the instruction of teachers who are required to have a minimum of a Masters degree in teaching English as a second language or in a related area like modern languages.¹⁸

Sanchez characterized the teaching method at IEP as an eclectic one that incorporates language lab work and most closely fits Genesee's (2005) direct instructional approach by focusing on enhancing students' reading and writing skills.¹⁹ There is marked success with students moving on to enroll in college level courses after completing the ESL program; 10% to 20% of these students continue on to enroll at FIU.²⁰ As one of eight members of the Florida Intensive English Consortium, the Intensive English Program's membership and adherence to broad initiatives serves as a model for English language programs at large institutions.

Miami-Dade College's Project A.C.E.

As a community college, Miami-Dade has taken a different approach with its Project A.C.E. The Title V funded project started in 2008 with the goal of having English training serve as a supplement to academic instruction in the classroom instead of the other way around.²¹ According to Program Director Ernesto De La Hoz, A.C.E. students are interested in pursuing a degree to increase their chances of getting a job, making money and taking care of their families.²²

Now in its fifth year of the grant, De La Hoz reports that Project A.C.E. has a 97% completion rate with 87% of the program graduates continuing on to taking classes at Miami-Dade College.²³ A defining factor of A.C.E. is that it has two levels of instruction (intermediate and advanced) instead of six. The reasoning for this is that “second language learners with higher academic literacy skills in the first language more easily transfer such skills into learning a second language.”²⁴ In other words, because these students are either highly educated or already working professionals in their countries of origin, they are considered to have experience that would allow them to pick up on a new language faster than other immigrants. Project A.C.E., therefore, moved to combine college coursework into the English learning classroom by adopting a new teaching approach – Content Based Instruction. De La Hoz simply defines this curriculum as one where “English classes link to students’ majors.”²⁵

College of Business and Technology's English as a Second Language Program

Miami's College of Business and Technology takes a more flexible approach with its English instruction. Unlike some other programs that are structured with levels and have a clear directive in the way that they teach their students English, ESL at CBT does not break its

students up into levels based off of their English skills prior to classes.²⁶ In lead instructor Dennis Beltrons' opinion, this less structured method is preferable. During an intensive eight-month period, these students work together and spend significant one on one time with their teacher. Here, the gaps in understanding the language at the beginning do not matter because every student is there for the same reason.²⁷ They all share a goal of continuing their education:

All of them come with skills. And what they need is just to make those skills available also in the English language...they have certain job skills, but for them to get a better position, to switch to a higher or different one, they are required to have better communication in the English language.²⁸

Without having to meet any enrollment requirements, the students in CBT's ESL program are there because of the need to be there. They say, "I need it for my future, for my family, for myself."²⁹ The ESL program is currently offered at four of the five CBT campuses in South Florida. Beltrons said teachers are drawn to the program because they feel the flexibility in classroom organization allows for creativity, which they find motivating.³⁰

Florida International University's Advanced Standing for Foreign Lawyers Program

Like the English training programs, professional training programs exist and thrive in Miami because there are students who wish to enroll. According to Donna Yff, an administrator in FIU's College of Law Office of the Registrar, the Advanced Standing for Foreign Lawyers Program gained popularity when a woman in France called to say she was moving to Florida and wanted to know how she could continue practicing law in the area. As a result of the call, foreign educated lawyers started to be welcomed into the JD with advanced standing curriculum at FIU. The thought was that these students were coming in with credit from previously obtained law degrees, so a certain number of credits were granted to them. Again, these types of students can

be classified as “highly skilled immigrants” defined by Hall (2011) as immigrants who have a college degree or any degree from an institution of higher education.³¹

While language learning in the form of reading, writing and speaking is not part of this program, Yff stressed that a command of the English language is extremely important for foreign lawyers because they must understand the “nuances of the legal language in the United States.”³²

Florida International University’s Foreign Educated Physician to Nursing Program

Professional training programs that focus on nursing may be one of the more balanced institutions within Miami in terms of need driving program creation and support. Since World War II, foreign educated nurses “have been, and continue to be, aggressively recruited to fill health care vacancies, especially during times of nursing shortages.”³³ Maria Olenick, the Assistant Director of FIU’s Foreign Educated Physician to Nursing Program, credited the nursing shortage in the United States as a relevant issue today. Foreign nursing students, like hers, however are helping to solve the problem in two ways. First, they are enrolling in professional training programs like the one offered at FIU where class sizes average from 30 to 40 students.³⁴ Second, “they also help to solve the issue we have with nurses being culturally competent.”³⁵ In this case, the diversity among students is welcomed, but Olenick still highlights the issues that language pose. Thus, strategically, the program has paired up with the FIU English Language Institute to improve speaking and writing skills.

Conclusion³⁶

Through my research, it has been made clear to me that English language and professional training programs exist because effective communication in the workplace heavily

impacts success in the United States. Immigrants who come to Miami with certain skills recognize this. They have goals, hopes and dreams for their future and invest in these programs because they view them as a means to improve their human development in the way that they lead to an increased number of opportunities in educational and professional fields. It is my hope that readers leave this paper with an understanding of how the desires of immigrants to learn English and expand their professional opportunities are being met by the available programs in Miami.

Endnotes

- ¹ This paper built upon a term paper I wrote for Dr. Margarita Rodriguez's International Migration and Development course at the University of Miami in Fall 2012.
- ² United States Census Bureau. "State and County QuickFacts." Retrieved from: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12/12086.html>
- ³ "Miami-Dade County, Florida Languages at Home Detail." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Retrieved from: http://www.bt.cdc.gov/snaps/data/12/12086_lang.htm
- ⁴ Motel, Seth and Eileen Patten. "The Ten Largest Hispanic Origin Groups: Characteristics, Rankings, Top Counties." *Pew Hispanic Research Center*, (2012).
- ⁵ Cervantes-Rodríguez, Margarita. *International Migration in Cuba: Accumulation, Imperial Designs and Transnational Social Fields*. Pennsylvania State University Press, (2010).
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Nijman, Jan. "Ethnicity, Class, and the Economic Internationalization of Miami." In *Social Polarization in Post-Industrial Metropolises*, edited by J. O'Loughlin, and J. Friedrichs. Berlin. Gruyter Aldine, (1996).
- ⁸ Mackey, William and Von Nieda Beebe. "Bilingual Schools for a Bicultural Community. Miami's Adaptation to the Cuban Refugees." Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, (1977).
- ⁹ Castro, Max. "The Politics of Language in Miami." In *Miami Now! Immigration, Ethnicity and Social Change*, edited by Guillermo Grenier and Alex Stepick III, 109-132. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, (1992): 116.
- ¹⁰ Garcia, Ofelia and Ricardo Otheguy. "The Masters of Survival Send Their Children to School: Bilingual Education in the Ethnic Schools of Miami." *Bilingual Review*, 12, (1985): 7.
- ¹¹ Today, the paper is named *El Nuevo Herald*.
- ¹² Castro, Max. "The Politics of Language in Miami." In *Miami Now! Immigration, Ethnicity and Social Change*, edited by Guillermo Grenier and Alex Stepick III, 109-132. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992.
- ¹³ Ibid. For a comprehensive analysis of the role of social movements, the media, transnational processes and other aspects shaping bilingualism and other language issues in the United States and South Florida before, during and beyond the 1980s, see Cervantes-Rodríguez, Ana Margarita and Amy Lutz "Coloniality of Power, Immigration, and the English-Spanish Asymmetry in the United States." *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 4, No. 3, (2003): 523-560.
- ¹⁴ In-person interview with Cara Wenig Mori, University of Miami. Intensive English Program. March 1, 2013.
- ¹⁵ In-person interview with Dennis Beltrons, College of Business and Technology. English as a Second Language Program. February 22, 2013.
- ¹⁶ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. November 16, 2012.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. This response was edited for publication.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Genesee, Fred. "English Language Learners in U.S. Schools: An Overview of Research Findings." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 10, (2005): 363-385.
- ²⁰ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. November 16, 2012.
- ²¹ Title V grants are authorized by The Hispanic Serving Institutions Program as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The purpose of HSI grants is to "expand educational opportunities for, and improve the attainment of, Hispanic students." Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/idueshsi/index.html>.
- ²² In-person interview with Ernesto De La Hoz, Miami-Dade College. Project A.C.E. November 19, 2012.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ellis, R., S. Miller-Cochran, J. Quinn, K. Hernandez, M. Thomas, C. Schuemann, K. Gennaro. "Special Issue: ESL Teaching and Learning: Writers in Diverse Voices." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 40, (2012): 2.
- ²⁵ In-person interview with Ernesto De La Hoz, Miami-Dade College. Project A.C.E. November 19, 2012.

²⁶ In-person interview with Dennis Beltrons, College of Business and Technology. English as a Second Language Program. February 22, 2013.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hall, Matthew, Audrey Singer, Gordon F. De Jong, and Deborah Roempke Graefe. "The Geography of Immigrant Skills: Educational Profiles of Metropolitan Areas." *State of Metropolitan America Series*, (2011): 1-25.

³² Phone interview with Donna Yff, Florida International University College of Law, Office of the Registrar. Advanced Standing for Foreign Lawyers. November 13, 2012.

³³ Davis, Catherine and Barbara Nichols. "Foreign-Educated Nurses and the Changing U.S. Nursing Workforce." *Nursing Administration Quarterly*, 26, (2002): 43.

³⁴ Phone interview with Maria Olenick, Florida International University. Foreign-Educated Physician to Nursing Program. November 29, 2012.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ I do not go into further detail on the University of Miami's International English Program because it is a private institution and therefore, student participation is more selective. The goal of this paper was to focus on publically offered programs with the idea that public institutions appeal to a wider portion of the immigrant population in Miami.