

The challenge of migration

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Stefan Scherer, U of A project co-ordinator for the Worldwide Universities Network

Canada has used immigration as a population expansion policy resulting in the country's highly diverse society. And often among the challenges brought on by large-scale immigration, are individual stories of struggle faced by migrants.

Gina Higginbottom, nurse researcher at the University of Alberta wanted to find out the health care challenges pregnant migrant women face. The issues these women face in their new country are at times very personal, Higginbottom says.

“Large-scale immigration and increasing ethno-cultural diversity is a feature of many high-income nation states and increasing diversity often presents challenges for practitioners in health care,” she says. “For some immigrant women, it's not acceptable to have a male obstetrician.” That's one example of the culturally-based challenges faced by health care

providers in higher-income countries and the migrant women they provide [maternity care](#) for.

To help deal with such problems, Higginbottom, who's also a [Canada](#) Research Chair in Ethnicity and Health, successfully won a grant from the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) that she will use to bring researchers from the leading immigrant-receiving countries – Canada, the United Kingdom, United States and Australia – to the U of A for a symposium. The scholars will present and compare scientific studies related to the experiences of pregnant migrant women. Higginbottom says they will work to help close the gap in maternity care in some immigrant communities.

“For some women, maternity may amplify the socio-economic marginalization that they may experience and increase their vulnerability,” she says. “So we will compare and contrast the evidence from different countries to see if there are common threads in the experience of migrant women in maternity services and see if we can then move on to form an international research collaboration.”

The aim to improve care for pregnant immigrant women is consistent with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals initiative, Higginbottom says. The UN list of eight development goals to achieve by 2015 includes the improvement of maternal health. “Our international symposium coalesces very well with that strategic intent,” Higginbottom says.

The WUN grant allows her symposium participants to enhance “the cultural appropriateness of maternity care that is provided to immigrant women and, at the same time, provide some insights and possibly educational and professional development opportunities for maternity care providers.”

Like Higginbottom, Linda Hall is another recipient of this year's WUN research development fund. Hall is a U of A researcher in agriculture, food and nutritional science. She's organizing a workshop that will bring together international and interdisciplinary researchers to discuss the impact of climate change on the occurrence, distribution and the economic impact of invasive species in agricultural and forestry.

Researchers like Hall and Higginbottom are accessing funds that they couldn't otherwise. The WUN funds enable them to engage in international collaboration at a preliminary level before moving to a full-scale research program. WUN gives an international dimension to their research programs.

Stefan Scherer has seen up close the benefits WUN funds offer researchers.

A WUN project co-ordinator at the U of A, he knows partnership in the network goes both ways. U of A researchers and students benefit, but the university's participation since joining in 2009 has also bolstered the network, which comprises scholars from 18 research-intensive institutions around the world. This year President Indira Samarasekera will begin serving as chair of WUN's partnership board. The board advises the network about matters of strategy.

"Since joining, the U of A has benefited from its participation in this network and has led five successful research development fund projects," Scherer says. "The U of A has expanded its international research collaborations with involvement in 15 other projects. There's been an uptake in the mobility fund that provides travel money for researchers visiting WUN partner institutions."

And that is partly because researchers such as Higginbottom have been informing students about the opportunities with the network "I've encouraged my students to apply for the mobility funds WUN offers to

spend some time in a different university,” she says. “Leading universities in the world are characterised by the international dimension of their research collaborations.”

Scherer says the University of Alberta is strengthening its commitment to its partnership in the network. “The connections have a significant impact on international research collaborations,” he says. “These developments – and the fact that our president is chair of the network’s partnership board – indicate that research fostered through WUN will continue to grow.”

Provided by University of Alberta

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