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Convention attracts quorum, Association representatives

For the first time in many years, the AAUW/Ohio Convention held May 7 at the Marriott Northwest in Dublin attracted a quorum of branches – 33 sent 115 representatives. Ninety delegates were credentialed to vote during the business meeting chaired by AAUW/Ohio President **Alice Schneider**. It was our 81st Annual Convention and Meeting. Forty attended our 10th Annual Equity Conference, also at the Marriott.

Three representatives of the Association attended to present and solicit input from Ohio members. They included **Seth Chase** of the public policy and government relations department, **Mariama Boney** of the program department, and **Pam Thiel**, our Great Lakes Regional Director.

Planned around the theme, “Expand Your Horizons Both Globally and Locally,” the two-day event focused strongly on what AAUW branches can do to help our international sisters, both here and abroad.

Dr. Karen Johnson-Webb of Bowling Green detailed in her conference keynote the status of immigration through current data, explained the history of immigration and the various legislative acts that have been passed to encourage or regulate it, and gave her views on the social and political advantages and disadvantages of immigration. Two breakout tracks explored legal and educational aspects of immigration and offered ideas for how branches can help immigrants. The theme was also explored in our All Convention Book Read, which reviewed Mary Pipher’s *The Middle of Everywhere—Helping Refugees Enter the American*

Community. **Ginny Palmer** and **Pam Kallner** each led a discussion session.

Great Lakes Regional Director **Pam Thiel** carried the theme into the convention with a luncheon keynote, entitled “Mending the World,” in which she detailed the many ways the Association advocates for its issues internationally. She explained why AAUW is unable to pay IFUW dues and how we can help IFUW individually.

The convention also featured a keynote by **Sharon Steele** and **Bobbie Garber**, who detailed their research about women in central Ohio summarized in a report entitled *Count on Her: The Status of Women and Girls in Central Ohio*. Three breakout tracks gave members an in-depth look at two stellar branch projects, two public policy areas, and Association and state projects.

Marcia Speakman of the host Columbus Branch won the LAF computer while the EF

Silent Auction and centerpiece auction brought in \$910–\$722.50 from the Silent Auction and \$188.50 from the centerpiece auction.

Member reviews of the conference and convention were favorable. Middletown’s Membership Vice President **Cindy Grau** said, “I want to thank you for a great convention. There was a lot of enthusiasm and networking going on. I really enjoyed it.”

Thanks to the Columbus Branch and **Joan Smith** for hosting the event, to Program Vice President **Mary Lou Baty** for arranging the program, and to Conference Chair **Pam Kallner** for coordinating the conference.





Conference Keynote

Dr. Karen Johnson-Webb, Assistant Professor, Bowling Green State University*
**“The Impacts of Immigration on Ohio:
Demographic, Geographic, Social and Economic Aspects”**



DR. KAREN JOHNSON-WEBB of Bowling Green State University introduced the conference topic of immigration illustrated by a detailed Powerpoint presentation.

By Jackie Evangelista, Ohio Orbit Editor

Noting that immigration has never been as important in our era as it is now, Dr. Karen Johnson-Webb shared a plethora of statistics illustrating the point. She has kindly permitted us to post her Powerpoint presentation, which she was not able to cover completely in her address. It includes many charts presenting data about specific cities in the state. Click here to read it:

<http://www.aauwohio.org/newsletters/summer2005/Conference%20Keynote%20show.pps>

The majority of the population in six states—all in the south and west—consists of immigrants, and the impact is spreading to other parts of the country including Ohio. Immigration has been the major source of population growth in this country, a fact which has had two main economic consequences—the contribution of immigrants to the labor force has boosted economic output and it is reducing the dependency ratio. That is, because immigrants are primarily in the younger age group, they are increasing the number of workers available to cover Social Security for the baby boom generation.

Johnson-Webb noted that due to declining job opportunities, Ohio's population between 1990 and 2000 grew only 4.7 percent whereas population grew nationally 13.1 percent. These increases included a 1.3 % increase in the white population, 12.7% increase in the Black population, 45.5% increase in the Asian population and 55.4% increase in the Hispanic population.

Looking at these 10 years plus another 15, population growth in Ohio between 1990 and 2015 is projected to be only half of the anticipated national growth level—11.2 vs. 24.6 %. As has been widely publicized, Ohio is losing native-born population but gaining in immigrants about half as many as are lost. They are coming from Latin America (53% including legal and illegal), Europe (18%), Asia (27%), and Africa (3%).

In 2000 alone, Ohio had resettled 1790 refugees, mostly Somali but also some from Bosnia, Croatia, Rwanda, Iran, Belarus, and Iraq. Columbus is one of the top 20 cities where refugees are resettled in the U.S. The numbers appear to be increasing with each passing year.

The northern tier of the state has been affected more strongly by the influx of 14,000 immigrant farm workers—90% of whom are Mexican and 70% of whom are illegal. Johnson-Webb noted that the Hispanic population is redistributing itself in the U.S. due to employer demand that results in both formal and informal recruitment and networking and that immigrants come to the U.S. primarily for economic reasons.

Johnson-Webb characterized immigrants in general as economic migrants, young, male (though this is changing), more highly educated, and more motivated. In Ohio 42.8% of immigrants are Asian, most of whom live in urban areas, especially Cleveland, and 77% have a high school diploma. She pointed out that Ohio's approximately 18,000 foreign students made a contribution of about \$425 million to the state economy in tuition and living expenses.

Among the primary immigration issues that need attention, she cited the fact that they can offset a shortage of non-family labor, but a significant portion is undocumented and earns low wages and their presence creates a variety of cultural issues. She said the H-2A program too cumbersome for farmers and asserted that immigration reform is needed to sustain agricultural production.

Immigrants nationwide contributed one-third of the growth in the labor force, purchased homes and paid taxes, contributed more if they were highly educated, added to the profit of companies due to their low wages, served in the military and participated in labor struggles. The economic impacts of immigration include: competition with native citizens for jobs, medical costs, pressure on housing infrastructure, and costs of incarceration.

The social impacts of immigration include: decreasing exposure of citizens to diversity because of residential segregation, increasing challenges to local public schools who are bearing the brunt of language education and integration, modeling the value of family, and increasing xenophobia after 9-11 by citizens who feel their prejudice is "righteous." Johnson-Webb sees new immigrants not wanting to acculturate and positively embracing their identity as a coping mechanism.

The political impacts of immigration are primarily that even with increased numbers of immigrants, Ohio is

expected to lose residents, which will reduce our influence in Congress. Immigrants tend to be more conservative because they believe that they made it on their own, so others should be able to also. They buy into the image of Americans as self-sufficient.

Her **conclusions** were:

- Immigrants are and will continue to be an asset of the state.
- Immigrants are attracted to Ohio's desirable qualities.
- There is the attractive of diversity here.
- There is a need for reform of the temporary worker program.

Outlining a brief history of immigration, Johnson-Webb discussed **six key events**:

- 1880-1924 when the "Great Immigration" occurred bringing 25 million new citizens to America
- 1920s when the National Origin Quota System was implemented giving favor to persons of German or English origin because it was based on the percentage of the nationality that was already here.
- 1965 when the Immigration and Reform Act was passed which instituted the principal of "reunification"—that is, those who were already here could bring relatives in.
- 1986 when the Immigration Reform and Control Act was passed giving amnesty to three million immigrants who were here illegally.
- 1990 when the Immigration Act of 1990 was passed increasing the number of immigrants permitted entry by 150,000 annually.
- 2001 when the U.S.A. Patriot Act was passed, which still permitted entry of immigrants based on the family reunification principle rather than what skills they might bring to the country.

Johnson-Webb also explained the **seven categories of immigrants**:

- **Legal immigrant** – A foreign-born individual permanently admitted to the U.S. for family reunification purposes or desirable technical skills.
- **Legalized alien** – Unauthorized or undocumented immigrant who because of residence since 1982 or proof of special agricultural worker status was granted legal status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.
- **Asylee** – Alien either in the United State of applying to enter at a U.S. port of entry who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality due to persecution.
- **Refugee** – Alien who is unable to remain in his/her country of origin due to persecution.
- **Parolee** – Individual who is temporarily permitted to reside for emergency humanitarian, legal or medical reasons. When the annual number of permitted refugees is exceeded, a person fearing persecution may be paroled to the U.S.
- **Illegal alien** – Persons who cross the border illegally or overstay their visas or other immigration documents.
- **Non-immigrant** – Person in the country temporarily such as a student, temporary worker, tourist, or diplomat.

2004 DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

NATIONAL

OHIO

Population:	293,655,404	11,459,011
Foreign Born Population:	34,600,000	380,800
Naturalized U.S. Citizens	12,542,626	169,295
Legal Immigrant Admissions	8,355,849	99,313
Illegal Alien Population	8,705,421	1,368
Refugee Admissions	630,000	40,000
Projected 2025 Population	393,883,000	12,724,000

* **DR. KAREN JOHNSON-WEBB** is an assistant professor in the Department of Geography and the Center for Policy Analysis and Public Service at Bowling Green State University. She earned her B.A. and M.A. in geography at Michigan State University and her Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research specializations are in social geography including the social and economic effects of immigration and in population geography with emphasis on Hispanic labor migration and labor force demographics. She also serves on the board of the Lake Erie West Economic Development Organization and as member of the Toledo Area Chamber of Commerce's Workforce Development/ Education Committee. In 2003 she was named National Volunteer of the Year by Rural Opportunities, Inc.

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<http://www.aauwohio.org/newsletters/summer2005/Page3.pdf>



Conference Breakout Reports

BREAKOUT TRACK 1: Legal Aspects

Mark Hansen, District Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service
"Whatever Happened to INS? Learning About USCIS" – One Review



MARK HANSEN, director of the Cleveland office of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, at left, is introduced by friend Diane Regan, right. *Photo by Pat Chaloupek*

By Diane Regan, AAUW/Ohio Legal Advocacy Fund Chair

Whether or not you've ever met an immigrant, the term INS is likely to bring certain reactions to Americans --and internationals--everywhere. This year's Equity Day provided opportunities for participants to learn more about immigration trends with specific attention to their impact on Ohio. In one break-out session, USCIS District Director, Mark Hansen, from Cleveland, provided an overview of developments since 9-11 related to immigrant services and security. First, he reminded the group that the old INS is dead! It was replaced by three separate agencies within the new Department of Homeland Security, on March 1, 2003. His office is the unit of Citizenship and Immigration Services and handles the benefits and services promised to immigrants and foreign travelers; ICE is Immigration Customs Enforcement; and CBP is Customs and Border Patrol.

Mr. Hansen provided an historical overview of the changes to INS under the Department of Justice to its

new home with clearer goals within the Department of Homeland Security. The bottom line for his division is to be certain that the RIGHT person get the RIGHT benefit at the RIGHT time. The goal is not to be a barrier to a legally admitted international hoping to obtain legal status within the U.S, but to protect against fraudulent attempts as much as possible. Based on current public policy, most immigrants come to the U.S. on a family-based petition since the U.S. has always stood for family reunification.

Mr. Hansen gave listeners a fascinating look at a typical day in the life of a USCIS. The numbers reveal an agency confronted with huge numbers of petitions for service and benefits and piles and piles of documents to be examined and certified. On any given day, the USCIS conducts 140,000 national security background checks, receives 150,000 visitors to their website www.uscis.gov answers phone inquiries from 80,000 individuals at the toll-free number, processes 30,000 applications for benefits, answers in person inquiries from 25,000 visitors to information centers at 92 local offices, issues 20,000 permanent resident cards ("green cards"), captures 8,000 sets of fingerprints at 130 Application Support Centers around the country, welcomes 2,300 new citizens, welcomes 3,000 new permanent residents, welcomes nearly 200 refugees from around the world, helps American parents adopt nearly 80 foreign-born orphans, grants asylum to 80 individuals already in the U.S., and processes the naturalization applications of 50 individuals serving in the U.S. military!

Linda Silakoski, Painesville Immigration Attorney and EF Recipient “Immigration 101” – Three Reviews



LINDA SILAKOSKI, Conference Legal Track breakout speaker, gives her breakout, entitled “immigration 101.”

1. By Ruth Altneder, Toldeo Branch President

Linda Silakoski, attorney from Painesville, OH, has a practice limited to immigration and naturalization law (90%) and ad litem representation in juvenile court (10%). Linda was the recipient of an Educational Foundation Career Development Grant to switch from teaching music to law at age 40. She indicated that immigration is a hot button topic in the United States today. Health, labor and immigration issues are in the

foreground of today's political arena.

Three movies were suggested for AAUW members who wish to learn more about the issues that face immigrants entering our country. These movies are *American Tale*, a cartoon presentation about a mouse who believes the streets in the U.S. are paved with cheese; *Green Card*, a story about marriage fraud; *The Terminal*, a recent Tom Hanks movie about a man who enters the U.S. and then finds there is no government in his country that can provide him with a visa because of a coup.

The legal term alien, which means any person not a citizen or national of the U.S. and includes immigrants as well as legal and illegal non-immigrants, is not suggested to be used in general conversation as it portrays to many a picture of a strange looking being. An individual termed a "lawfully permanent resident" is the holder of a Green Card (so named as initially was a card of that color and now contains a hologram and has a different color). These immigrants are entitled to have positions in which they can earn money but are not allowed the privilege of being a voter; however, due to voter registration errors, misunderstandings have occurred. The only status not subject to deportation is that of a U.S. citizen. Jury selection is limited to citizens also, but because these individuals are taken from voter lists, confusion again may result. A fast track to citizenship is entering the military. Recently there was a soldier killed in Iraq, who was not a citizen, but was granted this status posthumously.

The speaker indicated that unless the immigrant seeks help from knowledgeable people when entering job positions, going to school, or seeking driver's licenses, for example, they often have many problems. Laws that provide for immigrant status have been modified in 1952 and 1996, but old laws are not taken away and it is imperative that guidance be provided by skilled lawyers who know the past legal issues as well as the current status for such individuals.

Persons seeking entry to the U.S. are required to have an immediate relative sponsor them or be in an employment based category. The immigrant becomes a lawful permanent resident and holder of a "green card," which allows that person to legally live, work and travel in and out of the U.S. The sponsoring relative must sign an affidavit of support agreeing to reimburse the federal government for any public benefits his/her relative may need; however, not many such benefits are available. If the lawful permanent resident has a child born in the U.S., then the child is a U.S. citizen and may be eligible for public benefits such as food stamps.

Aliens who require emergency medical attention while in the U.S. may be treated at a hospital, which can then apply for reimbursement under provisions of the Alien Emergency Medical Act. The majority of lawful permanent residents do not apply for Medicare as they are more likely to be of a younger age. However, even when they are eligible, they tend not to apply for Medicare because it is counter-cultural . . . they simply don't ask the government for any type of assistance because such a thing would not be done in their native country. As indicated earlier, there are exceptions to every rule. Children born in the United States to foreign nationals have equal rights as they are U.S. citizens and are eligible for the same benefits as any child of citizens. This includes programs such as the Women, Infants and Children food supplementation. A child born in this country and therefore a citizen can not apply to be a sponsor for their parents until they are 21 years of age. A child born of a diplomats to this country are not citizens.

A handout was presented to the AAUW participants in this track that detailed the eleven fallacies and misconceptions that cause fear and anxiety among people. The three most common fallacies are:

- Being undocumented is a crime—wrong. The immigration laws of the U.S. are not criminal laws. Immigration law cases are heard in a separate court system, not criminal courts. The court system is referred as the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR).
- Marrying a U.S. citizen automatically makes you a citizen—wrong. Through a process that might be lengthy, involves filing documents with Citizenship and Immigration Services. After being a lawful

permanent resident for three years, married and cohabitating with a U.S. citizen spouse, application can be made for naturalization.

- Puerto Ricans must have a Green Card, or they are illegal—wrong. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens as they come from a territory of the United States.

There is no single document in the U.S. immigration law that is a "work permit." Citizens, nationals, and lawful permanent residents in the U.S. are automatically authorized to be employed. An Employment Authorization Document may be obtained limited to time and may be also limited as to the type of employment for non-immigrants. Currently there is legislative action in Congress requiring License Bureau employees to review documents of aliens applying for a driver's license, which makes these individuals enforcement officers. They are not trained to do so at the present time.

Nationals of countries where there are reciprocal agreements may enter the country for up to 90 days as visitors for business/pleasure without first obtaining a visa at a consulate in their home country. There are 24 countries with this agreement. Passports are absolute documentation of identification. This means that they are the number one source of information about an individual and the requirements have not changed in recent years though the cost has increased. In 2006, the passport will be needed to travel to Canada and Mexico rather than a birth certificate or other forms of identification.

Discussion was held about passing through immigration interrogation at the border of the country. This is when Border and Customs Enforcement agents ask those seeking entry to the US how long they will be in the country and what they plan to do while here. If an individual answers yes to the question "Are you coming to the US to be married?" additional information will be sought. Anyone giving false information in order to gain entry to the US is generally denied entry. If it is discovered after entry that a person gave false information to gain entry, the person can be arrested and placed in removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (immigration court), and subsequently deported from the US.

The processes that must be adhered to when seeking due process with the immigration services means that volumes of evidence must be presented and many people need to review the documents. Ms. Silakoski referred to this process as the "great black hole" and indicated that she recommends that all documents be copied before mailing and sent by certified mail. Such items as police records for the at least six months must be submitted. She indicated that there are problems with receiving materials from countries that are in revolt or war as various government agencies make it difficult to obtain the necessary documents.

Research has been conducted with college students about the questions asked on naturalization documents. Their inability to answer the questions accurately highlights the problems that individuals who do not have English as a first language have with answering the questions. The presenter gave examples of what it is like "in the trenches" working with the immigration laws. While the US has had immigration laws since the late 1700s, our laws are extremely complicated and confusing. Canada's immigration policies are clearer, relying on a points system to determine who is eligible to enter Canada as an immigrant. This points system is readily available online so people can determine if they might qualify for immigration to Canada.

Generally, the American public knows little to nothing about our immigration laws. Americans have no idea how difficult and complicated the immigration process is, and the news media has a tendency to oversimplify to the point of printing inaccurate information. The speaker urged AAUW members to learn more about our immigration policies and proposed changes, and to contact their members of Congress to discuss this hot-button topic. She also said that the American Immigration Lawyers Association has information available to the public about proposed and pending legislation. Anyone with legal issues in immigration should seek the assistance of an experienced immigration attorney to guide them through the complex and confusing immigration system.

Many questions were asked of Ms. Silakoski regarding such issues as polygamy where immigrants are told if they wish to declare more than one wife; this is not possible—"pick one." He may bring in all his children, however. She cautioned the breakout participants to consider how they classify immigrants in their minds: we tend to think of them as being "different" in how they dress, speak or generally appear. In fact, most immigrants look just like Americans, since America is a country of immigrants.

2. By Ruth McGaha, Ohio Public Policy Co-Chair

Want to learn about the immigrant experience? Linda Silakoski suggests that we go to the movies. Cartoons are good. Try "An American Tale" the cartoon classic of the Russian mouse immigrating to New York City to elude the pogroms at home. He is a prime example of the class of immigrants who fled to United States to avoid persecution for political or ethnic reasons. Or rent "Green Card" to learn about the vast underground, illegal network which accommodates those seeking economic benefit. Then there is "The Terminal," which perhaps best of all portrays the frustration and confusion of the immigrant experience.

The four page list of "Key Definitions" Linda provided identified and explained the points where immigrant status is most likely to be confusing. "Conditional permanent resident status" is an example of this, which can occur on the basis of marriage to a U.S. citizen or permanent resident spouse entered into less than two years prior to obtaining said status; or as an immigrant investor, in which case it applies to the investor and members of his or her family. And that is vastly different than "Lawfully admitted for permanent residence." The definitions, carefully read, explain away the common fallacies, but lest we fail to correct them they will persist (even on television).

Being undocumented is a crime. Wrong! The immigration laws of United States are not criminal laws! These laws are administrative in nature, which means they are not part of the criminal code. Violations of these laws are not heard in criminal court. These are "status" violations.

Marrying a United States citizen automatically makes you a U.S. citizen. Wrong! Marriage to a U.S. citizen may make you eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship, but there is a lengthy process involved.

Puerto Ricans must have a green card, or they are illegal. Wrong! Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. They do not need a Green Card. (Since Puerto Rico has special status as a territory of the U.S., Puerto Ricans have a non-voting representative congressional representation.) Puerto Ricans cannot vote in U.S. elections.

Green Cards are green. Wrong! They may be any color; they may or may not include holograms.

Undocumented persons have no right to receive even emergency medical treatment without paying cash up front. Wrong! If an undocumented person requires emergency medical treatment in which they are admitted to a hospital, the hospital may apply for reimbursement of its expenses in treating that person through the Alien Emergency Medical Act.

Most of the illegal persons in the United States are Mexican. Wrong! There are people from many nations who are in this country without proper documents. Persons who look like "average Americans" (for example, Caucasian, well dressed, without noticeable accent).

Ah, those immigrants! Especially those "illegal immigrants" (remember it is a status violation not criminal) should earn our respect and profound thanks. No matter how "illegal," they pay taxes right into our local and federal economy. The federal government, your Uncle Sam, collects approximately \$7 billion in Social Security taxes each year from illegal immigrants, and they will not receive one penny in benefits ever. It is

this immigrant windfall which gives us a Social Security surplus. They pay approximately \$1.5 billion in taxes for Medicare and they can never collect on any of that either. Undocumented persons are not only eligible for civil rights and due process, they are also entitled to human rights consideration and our sincere thanks when it comes to Social Security.

3. By Pat Chaloupek, Former Ohio President

“Who among you is a native American?” queried Linda Silakoski, as she discussed aspects of immigration. Only a few hands went up. The intent was to show that except for those descended from our original population, everyone else was from immigrant stock and was at one time “an ‘alien.’”

Basically, people come to America for economic reasons, Silakoski stated; they have in the past and continue to enter for the same purpose today.

To understand a bit about what immigrants face, she recommended several movies that deal with the issue: *Green Card*, with Gerard Depardeu; *The Terminal*, with Tom Hanks, and the animated film *An American Tale*.

Some facts help clear up terms and beliefs that Americans have about immigration:

- An “alien” is a lawfully admitted permanent resident.
- A Green Card is not green, but it is a “ticket” to making money. They permit the holder to work in this country and are generally good for 10 years before they must be renewed.
- Aliens have almost the same rights as citizens, but they cannot vote.
- Only a “citizen” cannot be deported.
- A “visa” is a piece of paper that gives an individual permission to ask to be admitted to a country.
- Marrying an American citizen does not automatically give a person citizenship. The person must apply to become a citizen – a process that can take a number of years.
- Generally speaking, aliens do not seek public benefits and support -- this kind of help is not a part of their culture: they tend to rely upon family.

In the classes she teaches in law school, Silakoski routinely gives the naturalization test to her American students. “Generally, only about two in the class will pass the test,” she said, “and they are usually foreign students who have recently studied the materials.”

Silakoski returned to college to study law at age 40 with the help of an AAUW Educational Foundation Career Development Grant and then found her interest in working in the highly specialized field of immigration. To gain experience, she offered to “volunteer” for a year and a half in the Northeast Ohio office of the Naturalization and Immigration Service. This gave her first-hand knowledge of what immigrants face as they try to become a part of this country’s citizenry.

After giving a summary of immigration trends over the years, she commented that our current laws are part of a broken system and need to be fixed. Meanwhile, she tries to work within a system that is “more like shades of gray than black or white.”

Because “immigration touches all of our lives in some way every day,” she knows the importance of her profession. She obviously loves her work: “I have the UN in my office every day,” she mused.

BREAKOUT TRACK 2: Educational Aspects

**Jill Kramer, ESOL Teacher with the Columbus Literacy Council
Pam Thiel, Great Lakes Regional Director
“Teaching English to Immigrants and How AAUW Branches Can Help” – One Review**



JILL KRAMER of the Columbus Literacy Council, an ABLF-funded program that educates primarily immigrants, with AAUW Great Lakes Regional Director Pam Thiel, who introduced Kramer and offered comments about how AAUW branches can grow by reaching out into the community.

By Jackie Evangelista, Ohio Orbit Editor

Jill Kramer opened her breakout by speaking to the group in Polynesian for a short while to give members brief exposure to what immigrants experience in their language classes every day. While most are familiar with the acronym ESL for English as a Second Language, she explained that the new preferred acronym is ESOL, which stands for English for Speakers of Other Languages. The new term was developed because many immigrants in language classes speak more than two languages. An immigrant herself from New Zealand, Kramer asked breakout participants to imagine what they would need to know to live and work in a foreign country such as China. The topic generated a long list.

Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) funds 134 programs around the state charged with helping immigrants learn to speak English and pass the U.S. citizenship test as well as helping citizen adults earn their GEDs. In 2004 ABLE helped 56,607 students of whom 15 percent were in ESOL classes, and it had 1552 staff members—78 percent were part time—as well as 1568 volunteers. Kramer explained the benefits of funding the ABLE program both statistically—187 were able to leave welfare and 15,574 got a job—as well as qualitatively—students learned such simple skills as how to call their boss, have a teacher conference and buy a stamp.

Her program—the Columbus Literacy Council—holds classes several times a week in both the morning and evening in different places. Funding is not sufficient to divide the students into the six levels covered in the

curriculum so multi-level classes are offered. She takes the largest classes and advises volunteers how to teach the smaller classes. Most of her 1136 students are registered for ESOL classes. Many potential students must be turned away due to insufficient space in the classes. The class composition is always in flux since members have many other job and family obligations. She shared a number of touching essays by some of her Somali students and showed them on an overhead projector.

Kramer stressed the importance of volunteers to running the program and gave attendees a handout listing the location of ABLE'S 134 literacy programs. It can be accessed at: www.ode.state.oh.us/ctae. Click on ABLE on the left and then the ABLE Program Directory in pdf on the right. The 134 programs are listed on pages 9 and 10. The Directory also reports detailed information about the ABLE program.

Pam Thiel spoke about how volunteering for the ABLE program “fits AAUW’s mission to a T.” She said, “It will help with equity for women and girls by helping them become more economically self-sufficient. And it’s about lifelong learning and positive societal change.” She noted that working on a project like this would also be great way for a branch to gain visibility and increase membership while at the same time doing something good for immigrants and their community.

Several California branches, she said, have developed relationships with immigrant communities and through them have developed ties to their countries of origin. Volunteering for ABLE would provide an avenue for becoming a “cultural broker,” Mary Pipher’s term for those who help immigrants understand our way of life. Thiel concluded, “Branches that do projects and reach out into their communities are more successful. It’s as simple as that!”



DAN FLECK of the Ohio Department of Education's Lau Resource Center spent a significant portion of his Conference Educational Track breakout session doing an exercise in Spanish to help attendees understand the difficulties immigrant children face in the classroom.

Photo by Alice B. Schneider

By Jackie Evangelista,

Ohio Orbit Editor

Dan Fleck has a personal motivation for working to make immigrants feel welcome—he is married to a Peruvian woman and his children were born in Peru. After they came to the U.S., Peru began experiencing problems with terrorism and they decided that they could never return. He understands immigrants because his wife had to give up her country. “Immigrant children have to deal with leaving things behind and how to fit in,” he noted. They worry about being made fun of because of their language differences.

Fleck explained that the mission of the Lau Resource Center at the Ohio Department of Education is to help immigrants feel welcome and help them adapt to their new culture. The program was initiated after a 1974 Supreme Court decision in a case brought by a Chinese family named Lau, who felt their children were not being helped sufficiently to overcome their language barrier by the public schools. The lower court sided with the local schools, but the Supreme Court decided schools should help immigrants just as they help students with a learning disability. Besides helping schools districts help children who don't speak English, the Lau Resource Center also helps develop tests to track the progress of immigrant students.

Fleck described a number of different local programs. In the Columbus Public Schools immigrant children are placed in a program called the “Welcome Center” at Mifflin Middle School for six months before they are enrolled in the neighborhood school. In Cleveland the Burher Elementary School has a language immersion program starting at kindergarten that consists of one half exclusively English-speaking and one-half exclusively Spanish-speaking children. All come out bilingual. He noted that Spanish immersion students in Columbus do better on English proficiency tests than regular students.

Fleck spent his remaining time carrying out an exercise designed to help us understand what it feels like to be an immigrant in a language class. He had a box of miscellaneous items including magnets of several sizes and plastic baggies filled with items—some of which were magnetic and some which were not. The object was to determine which items were magnetic. We divided into subgroups to work on this task, and then Fleck charted our results on

the board. However, the entire exercise was explained completely in Spanish, and the reporting session was also completely in Spanish. Our group had no individuals who spoke any Spanish so it proved to be a very challenging, frustrating and ultimately empathy-producing exercise for participants.

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<http://www.aauwohio.org/newsletters/summer2005/page4.pdf>