

6-2012

# In Search of Opportunity: Foreign-Born Residents in Oregon

Jason R. Jurjevich  
*Portland State University*, [jjason@email.arizona.edu](mailto:jjason@email.arizona.edu)

Ryan Dann  
*Portland State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/prc\\_pub](https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/prc_pub)



Part of the [Urban Studies Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

## Citation Details

Jurjevich, Jason R. and Dann, Ryan, "In Search of Opportunity: Foreign-Born Residents in Oregon" (2012).  
*Publications, Reports and Presentations*. 6.  
[https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/prc\\_pub/6](https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/prc_pub/6)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications, Reports and Presentations by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).

# Metropolitan Knowledge Network

[Home](#)[About](#)[Charts](#)[Links](#)[Site Map](#)

## In Search of Opportunity: Foreign-Born Residents in Oregon

*Jason Jurjevich and Ryan Dann*

*Population Research Center*

June 2012

### Highlights

Important highlights specific to the foreign-born population include:

- Since 1970, foreign-born persons, as a percent of the total U.S. population, have increased from 4.7 to 12.9 ( /- 0.04) percent;
- In 2010, Oregon's proportion of foreign-born persons is 9.8 percent ( /- 0.3 percent);
- Slightly more than one-half (53.2 percent; /-0.2 percent) of immigrants to the United States were from Latin America, compared to 46.6 percent ( /-1.9 percent) of immigrants to Oregon;
- Almost half of foreign-born individuals in the Portland metro area are naturalized U.S. citizens;
- In the Portland metro area, foreign-born persons in Washington County have the highest level of educational attainment at 38 percent ( /- 3.2 percent) (measured as the number of persons with a bachelor's degree or higher);
- Because naturalized U.S. citizens have higher levels of formal job training and higher levels of educational attainment than non-citizens, employment occupation among foreign-born persons differs considerably [see Table 2];
- Households headed by foreign-born naturalized persons earn roughly \$10,000 more than their native-born counterparts and about \$24,000 more than households headed by foreign-born non-citizens.

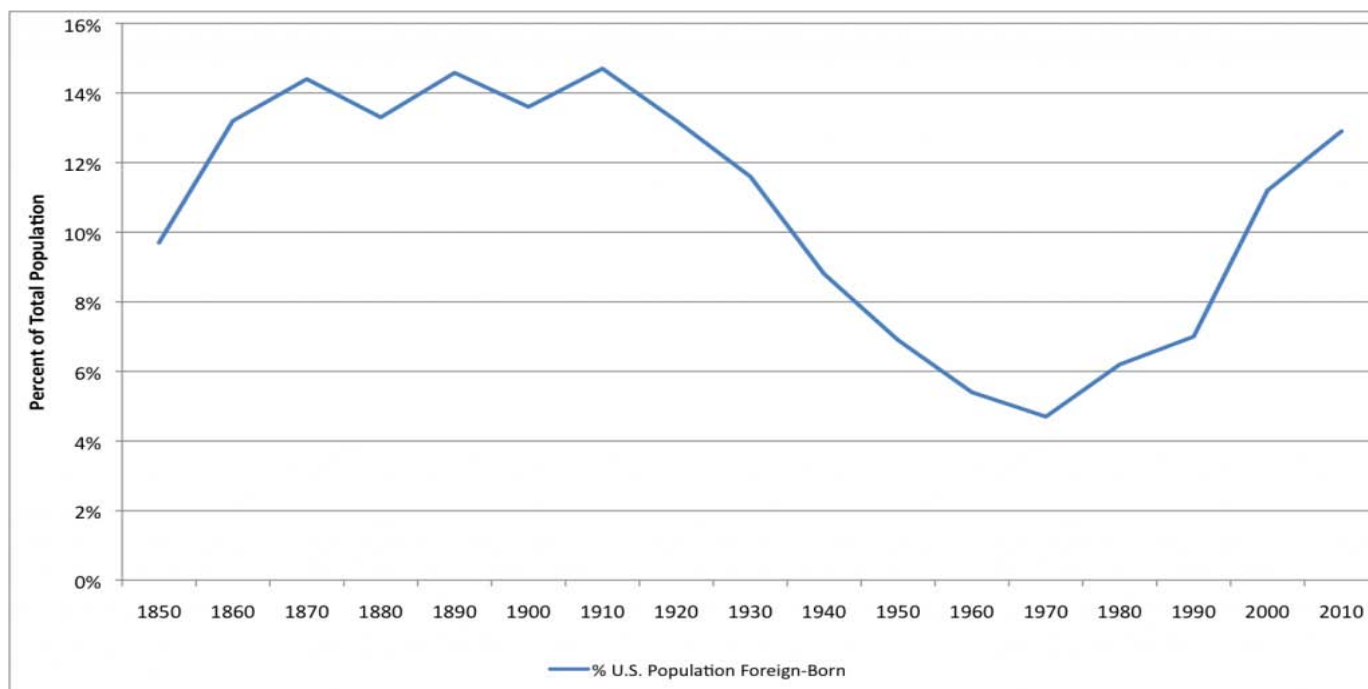
### Introduction

From our earliest beginnings and to present day, the social fabric of the United States continues to be shaped by immigration. Americans are generally aware of their families' personal stories and the inextricable link to immigration, but they are likely less familiar with historical and current trends. Focusing in Oregon and more specifically, the Portland metropolitan area, we provide a statistical portrait of the foreign-born population by examining recent growth patterns, identifying geographic origins, and describing individual-level characteristics.

### Historical and Recent Growth Trends

Figure 1 shows that during the late 1800s, foreign-born persons comprised around 13 percent of the U.S. population, and peaked at 14.6 percent in 1890. Beginning with the implementation of more restrictive immigration policies in the 1920s, the share of the foreign-born population dropped precipitously through 1970 to around 5 percent.

Figure 1: Foreign-born as a Percent of U.S. Population (1850-2010)

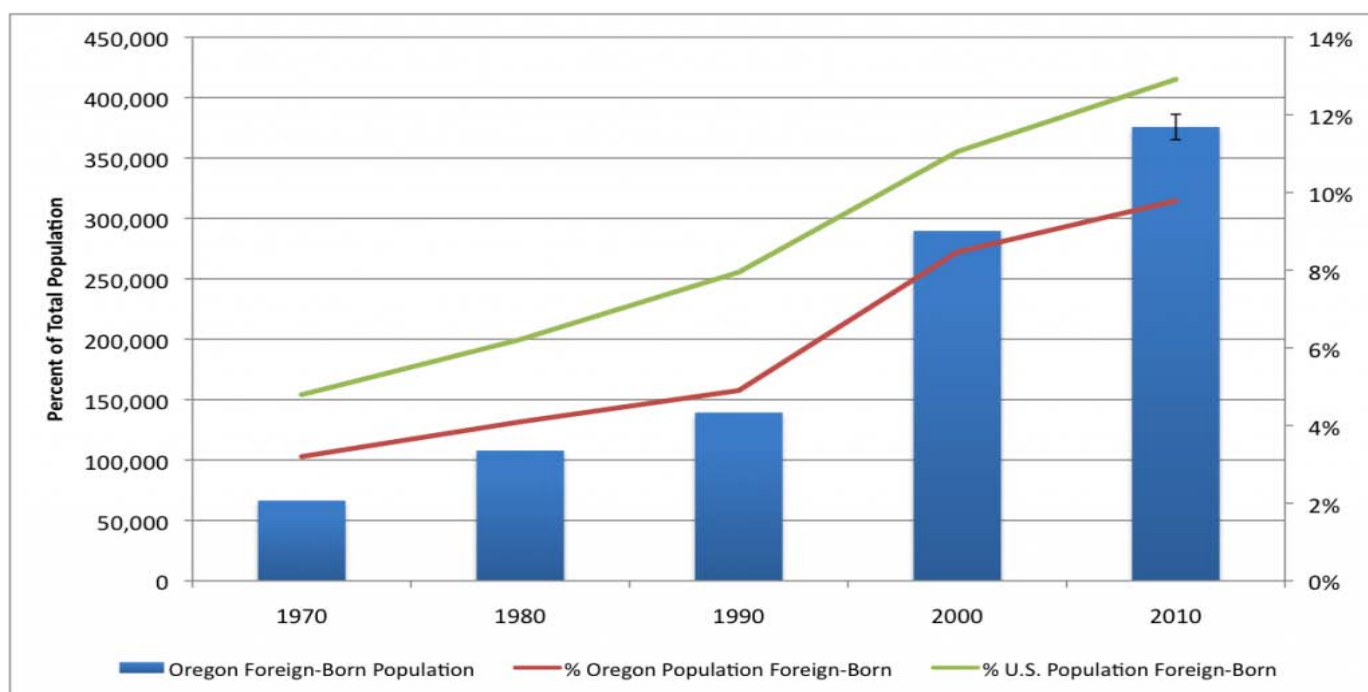


Source: Decennial U.S. Census (1850-2000) and American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 1-year estimates

During the most recent period, 1970 to 2010, foreign-born persons are again making up a greater proportion of the total U.S. population—from 4.7 to 12.9 percent ( /- 0.04 percent), during the 40-year period.

Similar to national trends, foreign-born individuals are increasingly calling Oregon and the Portland metropolitan area home. As Figure 2 shows, the number of foreign-born individuals in Oregon increased from just over 50,000 in 1970 to almost 375,000 (with a /- 10,484 margin of error) in 2010. The largest relative increase in Oregon’s foreign-born population occurred during the 1990s, when the state saw a 108 percent increase. In the most recent decade, 2000 to 2010, Oregon’s foreign-born population increased by 30 percent.

Figure 2: Foreign-born as a Percent of Oregon’s Population (1970-2010)



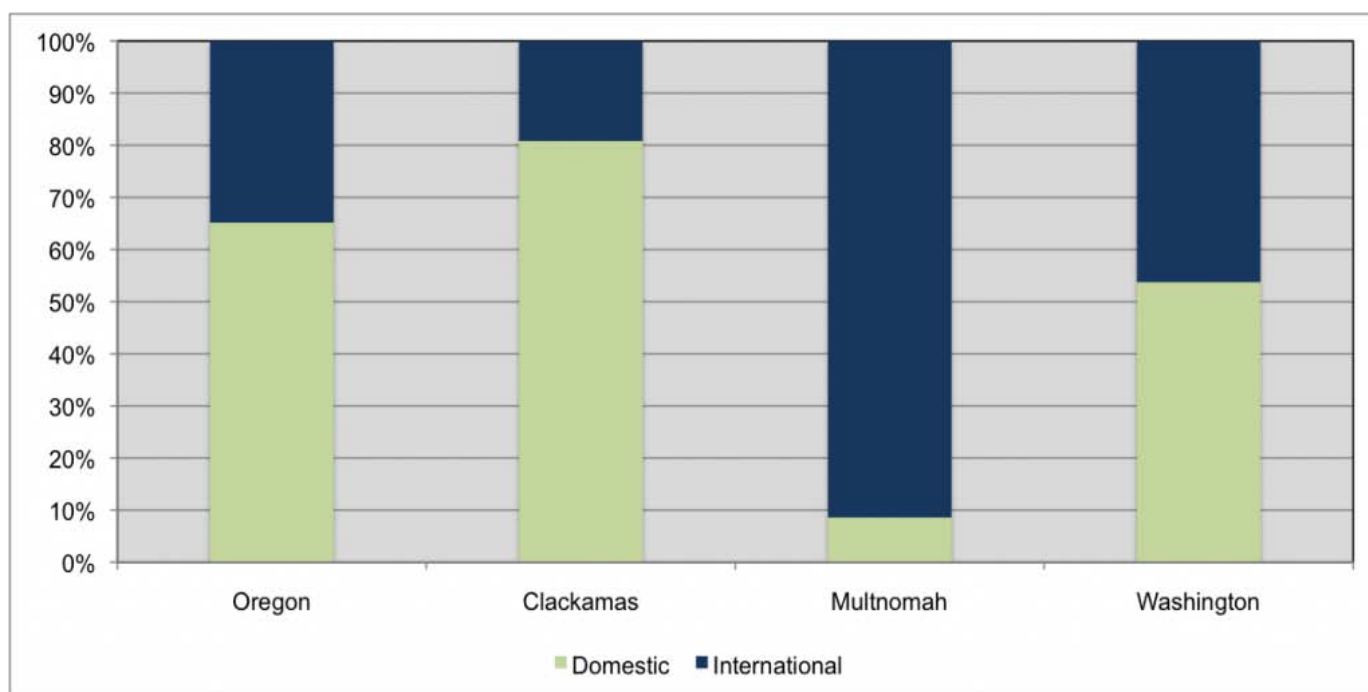
Sources: Decennial U.S. Census (1970-2000) and American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 1-year estimates

Oregon's proportion of foreign-born persons (9.8 percent; +/- 0.3 percent) was lower than the U.S. average (12.9 percent; +/- 0.04 percent) in 2010. However, sizable foreign-born populations in California, New York, and New Jersey skew the U.S. average. Oregon has a larger foreign-born population than most states, both in relative and absolute terms, at 9.8 percent (+/- 0.3 percent) (18th) and 375,743 (+/- 10,484) (21st), respectively.

Counties within Oregon have considerably different shares of foreign-born persons. According to the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), Washington County had the highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the three-county Portland metro area, at 16.4 percent (+/- 0.9 percent), followed by Multnomah County (14.2 percent; +/- 1.1 percent) and Clackamas County (8.8 percent; +/- 1.2 percent).

Much of the difference in the size of the foreign-born population across counties is driven by fundamentally different immigration patterns. For example, Figure 3 shows that between 2000 and 2010, about 90 percent of net migration to Multnomah County was attributable to international migration, compared to nearly 50 percent in Washington County and only 20 percent in Clackamas County. However, immigration patterns have changed considerably following the recent economic recession. Between 2010 and 2011, only 30 percent of net migration in Multnomah County was attributable to international migration.

Figure 3: Components of Net Migration for Oregon and Selected Counties (2000-2010)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates (2000-2010)

A number of factors explain the variability of foreign-born populations across Oregon counties; but to a large degree, the most significant factors driving migration patterns of the foreign-born, include: low- and high-skill employment opportunities; size of established communities; housing access and affordability; and access to transportation. Also, the primary factors influencing initial settlement are often replaced by other factors after residents gain familiarity with their surroundings.

### Geographic Origins

Table 1 compares the geographic origin of immigrants, by continental area, in 2010 for the United States and Oregon. Slightly more than one-half (53.2 percent; +/- 0.2 percent) of immigrants to the United States were from Latin

America, compared to 46.6 percent ( /-1.9 percent) of immigrants to Oregon. An important difference, however, is that compared to the U.S., few Caribbean and South American immigrants settle in Oregon. The state however, attracts a higher share of immigrants from Central America compared to the United States as a whole.

Table 1: Geographic Origin (by Continent Area) of the Foreign-Born Population, United States and Oregon, 2010

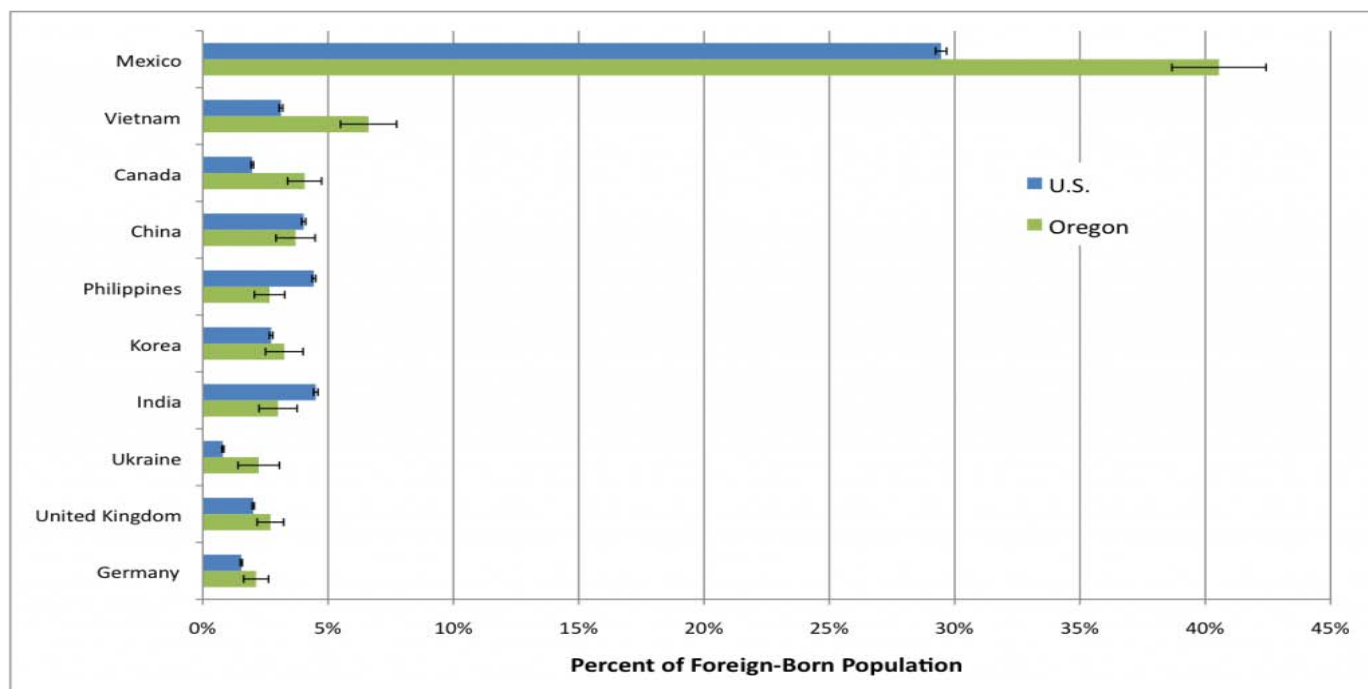
AREA	U.S.				Oregon			
	Number	MOE	Percent	Percent MOE	Number	MOE	Percent	Percent MOE
Europe	5,004,305	52,947	12.5%	0.1%	57,823	6,585	15.4%	1.7%
Asia	11,082,114	52,720	27.8%	0.1%	110,284	6,044	29.5%	1.3%
Africa	1,561,917	36,488	3.9%	0.1%	10,735	3,237	2.9%	0.9%
Oceania	180,307	10,131	0.5%	0.0%	5,419	1,768	1.4%	0.5%
Latin America	21,224,238	111,193	53.2%	0.2%	174,405	9,343	46.6%	1.9%
Caribbean	3,730,817	52,647	9.3%	0.1%	4,935	1,766	1.3%	0.5%
Central America	14,735,972	107,822	36.9%	0.2%	163,434	8,768	43.7%	1.8%
South America	2,757,449	46,691	6.9%	0.1%	6,036	1,632	1.6%	0.4%
Northern America	826,472	18,777	2.1%	0.1%	15,174	2,578	4.1%	0.7%
Unidentified	24,696	4,578	0.1%	0.0%	521	675	0.1%	0.2%

Note: ACS data contain corresponding margins of error (MOE), which are not reported in the above table.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 1-year estimates

As demonstrated in Figure 4, in both the nation and Oregon, a large share of recent immigrants are from Mexico. Given that Oregon has a greater share of foreign-born immigrants from Central America, it is little surprise that Mexican immigrants represent 40.5 ( /-1.9 percent) percent of all immigrants to Oregon, which is considerably higher than the U.S. average of 29.5 percent ( /-0.2 percent). Foreign-born immigration flows from Vietnam and Canada are the second and third highest relative flows, respectively, to Oregon. However, Vietnamese and Canadian immigrants rank lower among relative U.S. immigration flows.

Figure 4: Geographic Origin (by Country) of Foreign-Born Persons, United States and Oregon (2010)



\*Figure Excludes Hong Kong and Taiwan

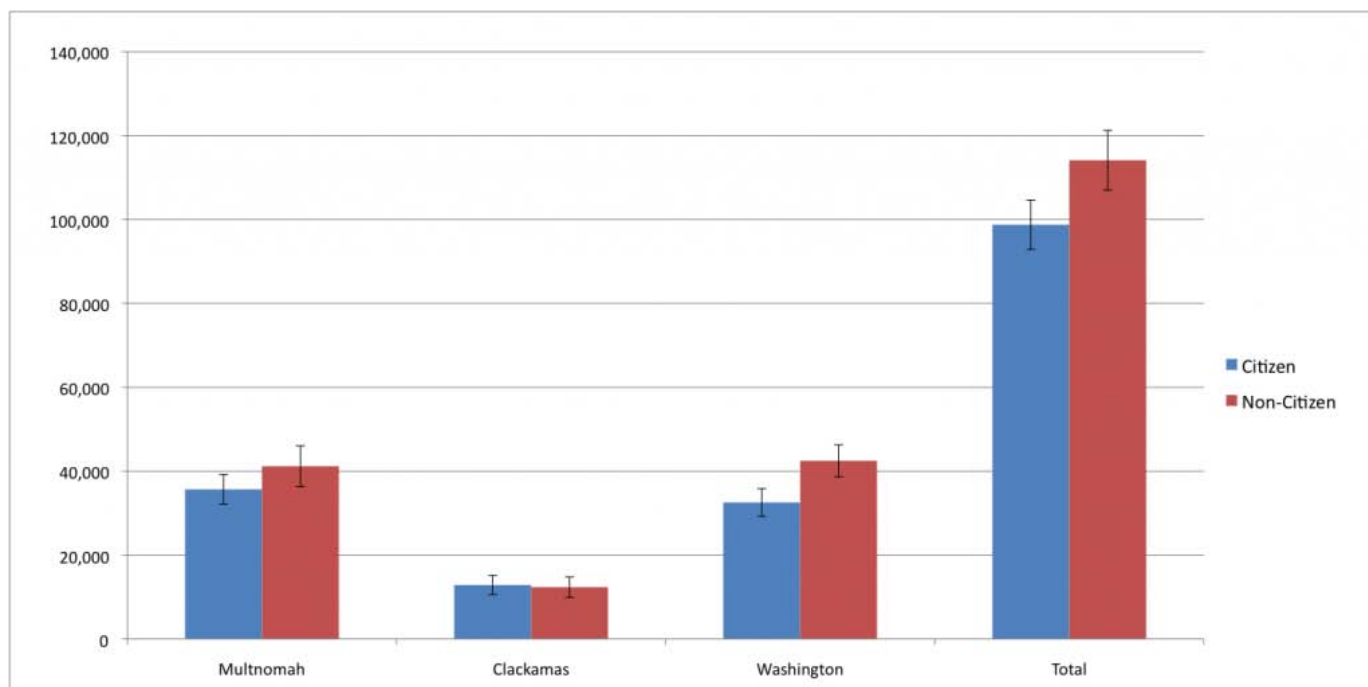
Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 1-year estimates

Shares of Chinese and Korean immigrants in the U.S. and Oregon are comparable. Oregon has greater shares of immigrants from the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ukraine, and lower shares of immigrants from the Philippines and India compared to the U.S. average.

### Citizenship

While the size of the foreign-born population varies across individual counties, Figure 5 underscores an important point: Almost half of foreign-born individuals in the Portland metro area are naturalized U.S. citizens. As we explain below, individuals born abroad often have radically different levels of job training and educational attainment, which has important implications for employment occupation and income.

Figure 5: Three-County Portland Metro Area Foreign-Born Population by Citizenship Status (2010)



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates

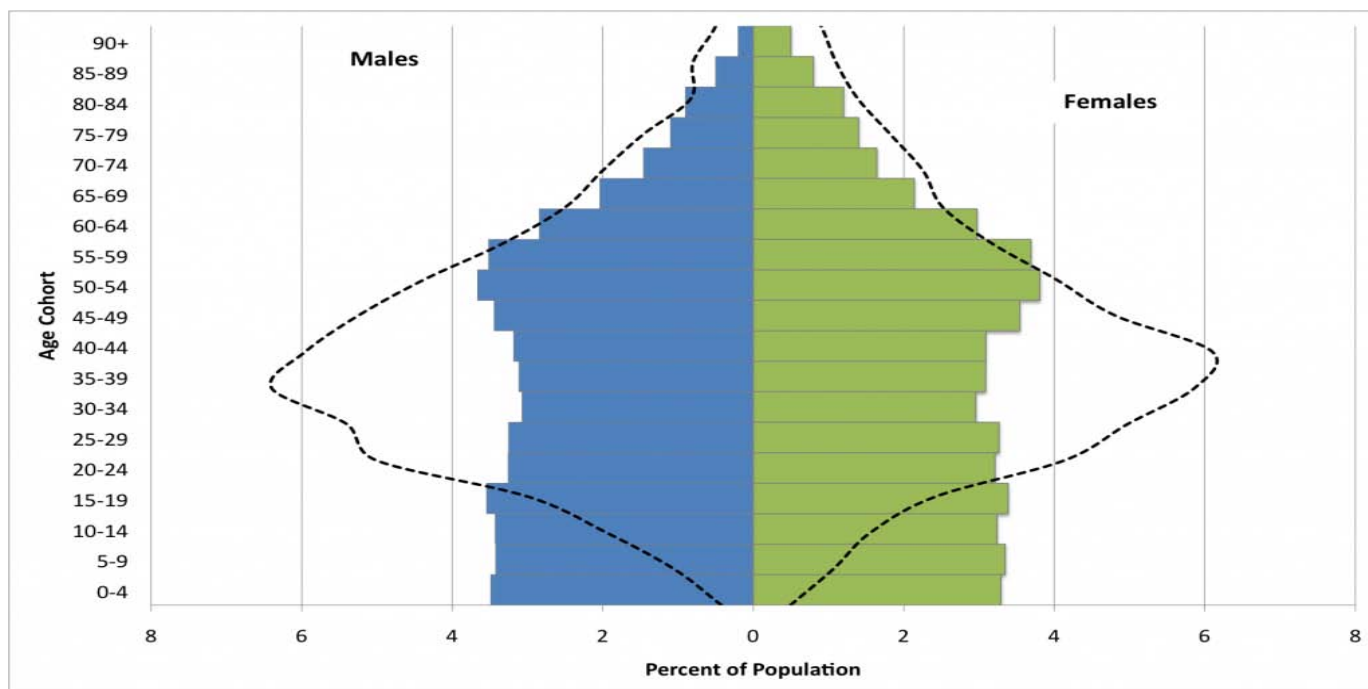
## Individual Level Characteristics

### Age and Sex

In the United States in 2010, foreign-born residents were 6 years older than native-born persons with median ages of 41 and 35 years, respectively. In Oregon, however, native-born persons are more than 3 years older than the national average, while foreign-born Oregon residents are 2.3 years younger.

Figure 6 represents the age and sex structure for Oregon's native-born (bars) and foreign-born (dashed line) population in 2010. Most interesting is that while the native and foreign-born populations have similar median ages, their age and sex structure vary considerably.

Figure 6: Foreign-Born as a Percent of Oregon Population (2010) [Native-Born indicated by bars and Foreign-Born indicated by dashed line]



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) (2006-2010) 5-year estimates

Beginning at birth and continuing through age 44, each five-year cohort of male and female native-born Oregonians represents approximately 7 percent of the total native-born population. The largest percentage of population is among ages 45-64, which represents the Baby Boom cohort. Foreign-born persons, on the other hand, are disproportionately represented in ages 20-54, with the largest shares in the 30-to-44 year old age groups.

#### *Educational Attainment*

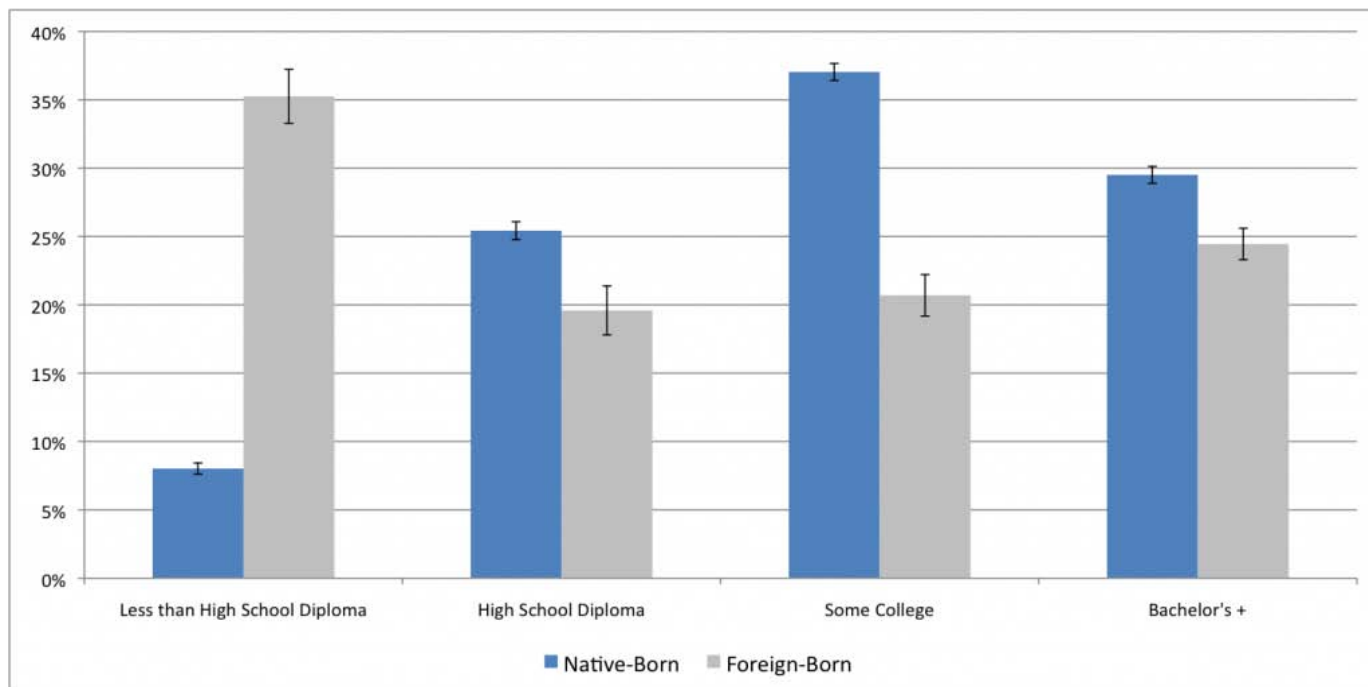
A key indicator of Oregon's long-term economic competitiveness is educational attainment, which represents the levels of formal training and individual skills.

As illustrated in Figure 7, there are significant disparities in educational attainment according to nativity. The largest disparity is among individuals with less than a high school education. In Oregon, 8 percent ( /-0.4 percent) of native-born persons have less than a high school education, compared to more than one-third of the foreign-born population. The share of foreign-born persons with only a high school diploma is marginally lower than for native-born persons, but foreign-born persons are at a disadvantage in terms of post-high school education. Here, more than one-third of native-born persons have some college education, compared to 20 percent ( /-1.8 percent) of the foreign-born population. In terms of persons with a bachelor's degree and higher, the native and foreign-born population have comparable attainment rates at 30 ( /-0.6 percent) and 24 ( /-1.2 percent) percent, respectively.

One of the major limitations of the statewide data shown in Figure 7, however, is that it does not reveal how immigrants differ in terms of geographic origins. These differences almost always lead to fundamentally different social and economic indicators of foreign-born persons across counties.

Figure 7: Oregon Educational Attainment\* by Nativity (2010)





*\*For the population 25 years and older*

*Source: American Community Survey (ACS) (2010) 1-year estimates*

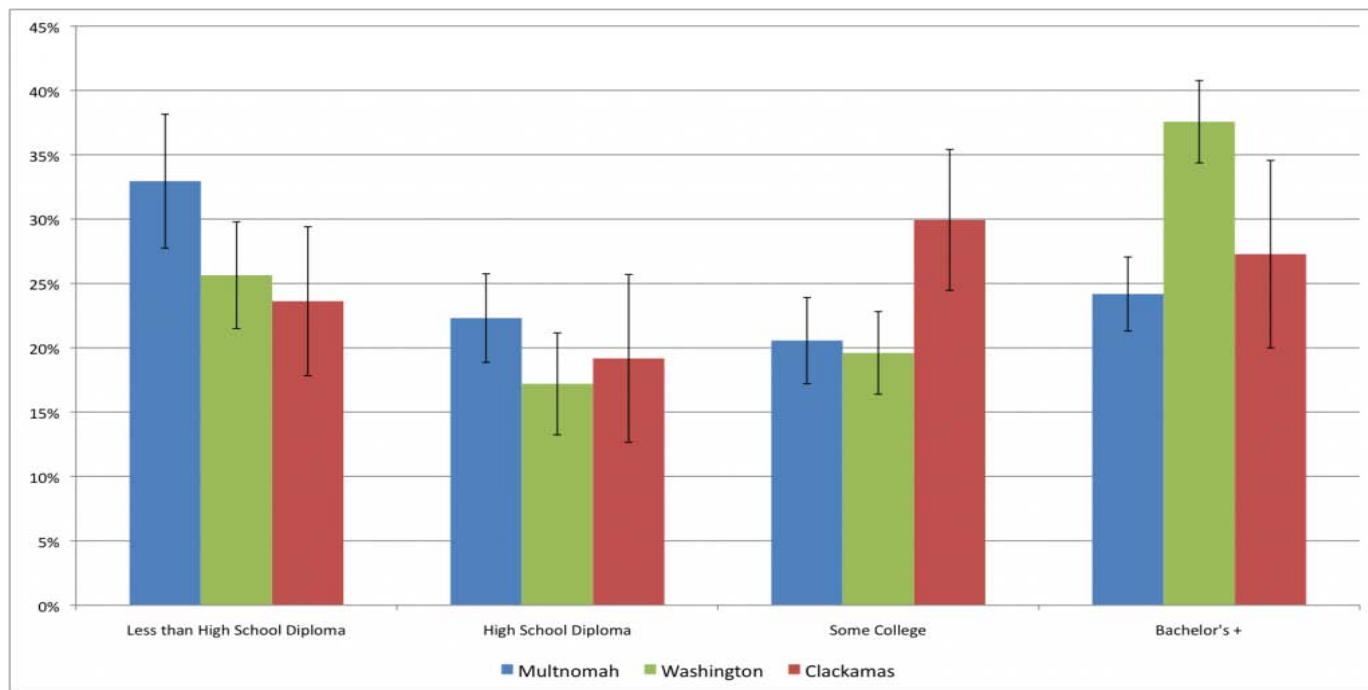
Consider then, Figure 8, which shows the educational attainment of the foreign-born population in the three-county Portland metro area. On balance, foreign-born persons in Multnomah County are more likely to have less than a high school education (33 percent, /- 5.2 percent). However, the lowest share with only a high school education is among foreign-born persons in Washington County (17 percent, /- 4 percent).

The highest level of educational attainment among the foreign-born population in the Portland metro area is in Washington County, where 38 percent ( /- 3.2 percent) of foreign-born persons have a bachelor's degree or higher. Clackamas and Multnomah county foreign-born residents with a bachelor's degree or higher have slightly lower rates of achievement at 27 ( /- 7.3 percent) and 24 percent ( /- 2.9 percent), respectively.

### *Employment*

While county-specific metrics such as those shown in Figure 8 provide additional insight relating to the educational attainment of foreign-born individuals, further disaggregation of foreign-born persons by citizenship status reveals more detailed information. More often than not, naturalized U.S. citizens have higher levels of formal job training and higher levels of educational attainment, both of which are represented in Figure 9.

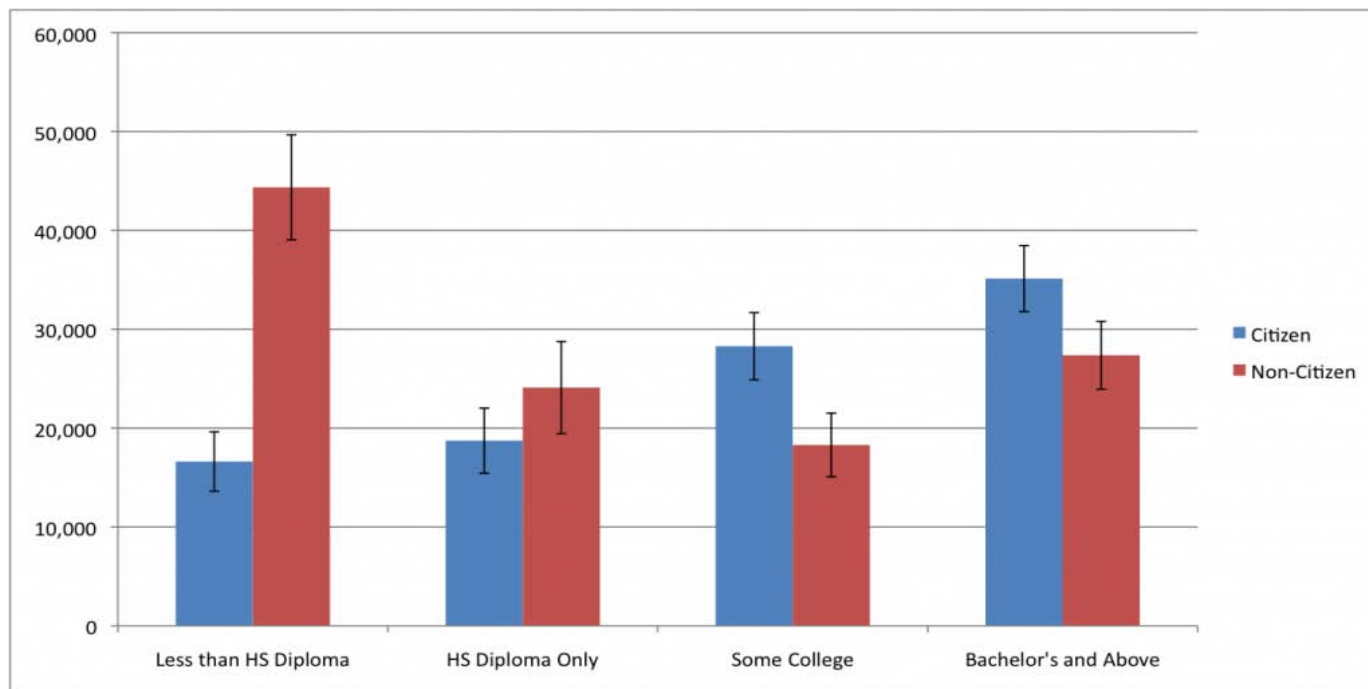
Figure 8: Three-County Portland Metro Area Educational Attainment\* for the Foreign-Born Population (2006-2010)



\*For the population 25 years and older

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) (2006-2010) 5-year estimates

Figure 9: Educational Attainment\* for Portland Metro Area Foreign-Born Residents (2010)



\*For the population 25 years and older.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) (2010) 1-year estimates

Because of the differences in formal training, naturalized U.S. citizens are more likely to work in primary labor markets, which provide higher-paying jobs and greater long-term employment security. Alternatively, foreign-born non-citizens are more likely to be employed in secondary labor markets. Jobs in secondary labor markets, in contrast,

are lower-paying, less-secure, and provide workers with little upward mobility.

Table 2 illustrates the differences in employment for Oregon residents by nativity for the 2006-2010 period. Where approximately one-quarter of foreign-born non-citizen Oregonians are employed in Farming, Fishing, and Forestry or Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Operations occupations, only 8.5 and 4.9 percent of foreign-born naturalized citizens and native-born citizens worked in these industries, respectively.

Table 2: Employment Occupation for Oregon Residents by Nativity (2010)

Occupation	Non-Citizens				FB Citizens				NB Citizens				Total Workforce	
	Number	MOE	%	% MOE	Number	MOE	%	% MOE	Number	MOE	%	% MOE	Number	MOE
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	20,591	3,238	12.2%	2.0%	3,413	1,235	3.2%	1.2%	27,703	2,684	1.3%	0.1%	51,707	4,451
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	20,779	3,451	12.3%	2.1%	5,634	1,469	5.3%	1.4%	74,077	6,288	3.6%	0.3%	100,490	7,387
Food Preparation and Serving Occupations	22,420	4,455	13.2%	2.7%	4,679	1,559	4.4%	1.5%	123,729	6,967	6.0%	0.3%	150,828	8,548
Production Occupations	19,192	3,096	11.3%	1.9%	11,789	2,278	11.0%	2.2%	106,319	6,247	5.2%	0.3%	137,300	7,122
Military Specific Occupations	3,392	1,553	2.0%	0.9%	657	363	0.6%	0.3%	24,069	3,022	1.2%	0.1%	28,118	3,485
Construction and Extraction Occupations	10,100	2,453	6.0%	1.5%	2,896	1,082	2.7%	1.0%	102,725	6,975	5.0%	0.3%	115,721	7,317
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	12,598	3,075	7.4%	1.9%	6,516	1,539	6.1%	1.5%	126,020	6,447	6.1%	0.3%	145,134	6,763
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	3,061	951	1.8%	0.6%	3,539	1,067	3.3%	1.0%	34,400	3,936	1.7%	0.2%	41,000	3,949
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	1,464	893	0.9%	0.5%	512	389	0.5%	0.4%	18,377	2,754	0.9%	0.1%	20,353	2,846
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	3,441	1,225	2.0%	0.7%	4,014	1,148	3.8%	1.1%	42,311	3,916	2.1%	0.2%	49,766	4,136
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers	4,408	1,499	2.6%	0.9%	2,792	1,053	2.6%	1.0%	64,273	5,147	3.1%	0.3%	71,473	5,279
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	7,043	1,630	4.2%	1.0%	5,181	1,369	4.8%	1.3%	118,566	5,459	5.8%	0.3%	130,790	6,314
Personal Care and Service Occupations	5,584	1,542	3.3%	0.9%	5,584	1,434	5.2%	1.4%	100,492	6,006	4.9%	0.3%	111,660	6,411
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	2,270	874	1.3%	0.5%	3,134	1,334	2.9%	1.3%	48,904	4,644	2.4%	0.2%	54,308	4,904
Sales and Related Occupations	10,033	2,818	5.9%	1.7%	9,535	2,009	8.9%	2.0%	237,464	8,380	11.5%	0.4%	257,032	9,870
Healthcare Support Occupations	1,781	678	1.1%	0.4%	3,254	1,173	3.0%	1.1%	47,784	4,417	2.3%	0.2%	52,819	4,714
Business Operations Specialists	1,771	963	1.0%	0.6%	2,201	920	2.1%	0.9%	48,808	4,061	2.4%	0.2%	52,780	4,159
Financial Specialists	1,180	753	0.7%	0.4%	2,359	885	2.2%	0.8%	39,133	3,999	1.9%	0.2%	42,672	4,235
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	2,722	1,097	1.6%	0.7%	5,899	1,476	5.5%	1.4%	90,386	6,279	4.4%	0.3%	99,007	6,512
Community and Social Services Occupations	1,208	746	0.7%	0.4%	1,009	505	0.9%	0.5%	41,918	4,418	2.0%	0.2%	44,135	4,471
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	8,275	1,812	4.9%	1.1%	12,542	2,239	11.7%	1.1%	292,312	8,931	14.2%	0.4%	313,129	9,066
Protective Service Occupations	1,039	759	0.6%	0.4%	1,965	851	1.8%	0.4%	38,580	3,781	1.9%	0.2%	41,584	3,776
Management, Business, Science, and Arts Occupations	4,672	1,142	2.8%	0.7%	7,321	1,731	6.8%	0.9%	188,361	7,115	9.2%	0.4%	200,354	7,477
Legal Occupations	222	271	0.1%	0.2%	580	566	0.5%	0.3%	19,410	2,788	0.9%	0.1%	20,212	2,839
<b>Total</b>	<b>169,246</b>	<b>9,009</b>			<b>107,005</b>	<b>6,494</b>			<b>2,056,369</b>	<b>13,487</b>			<b>2,332,620</b>	<b>13,133</b>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 1-year estimates

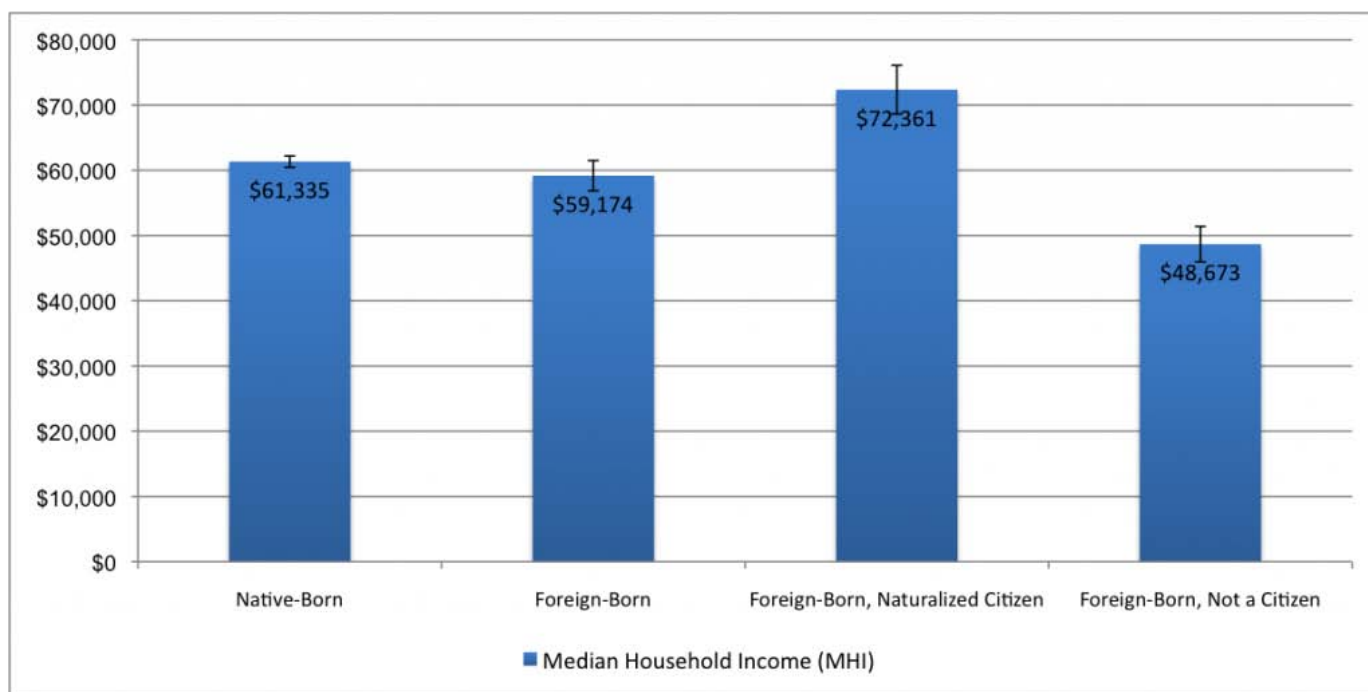
Conversely, occupations requiring formal education, such as Management, Business, Science, and Arts occupations, employ a small number of foreign-born non-citizens (2.8 percent, +/- 0.7 percent), but a much higher percentage of naturalized citizens (6.8 percent, +/- 0.9 percent). These differences in employment are not only strong predictors of personal and household income, but also represent the ability to achieve upward social mobility.

#### Household Income

Educational attainment is a strong predictor of income—both per capita and household income—so Figure 10 might come as no surprise. Across Oregon in 2010, both native and foreign-born households achieved a median household income of around \$60,000. Of critical importance, however, is the difference in income among foreign-born persons by citizenship. As Figure 10 illustrates clearly, households headed by foreign-born naturalized persons earn roughly \$10,000 more than their native-born counterparts and about \$24,000 more than households headed by foreign-born

non-citizens.

Figure 10: Median Household Income (MHI) for Oregon Residents by Nativity



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) (2010) 1-year estimates

Michael Burnham, Charles Rynerson, Lisa Yarbrough, and Sheila Martin also contributed to this report.