

Nomination for 2016 Tom L. Popejoy Dissertation Award

Title: “The Political Economy of Remittance-led Development in Guanajuato, Mexico.”

Nominee: Dr. Benjamin James Waddell, Adams State University (UNM Ph.D. Spring 2013)

Nominating Department: Department of Sociology, UNM

Nomination:

Benjamin Waddell began our doctorate program in the spring of 2010. After finishing his coursework, he left UNM in 2011 to take a tenure-track position at Adams State University (ASU). Over the course of the next 2 years he took his comprehensive exams (spring 2011), defended his dissertation proposal (fall 2011), wrote his dissertation (2012-2013), and defended his dissertation with departmental distinction (spring 2013). The dissertation was written under my direction of Dr. Richard L. Wood in Sociology, but with substantial guidance also from Dr. Matias Fontenla of the Department of Economics, who functioned essentially as a co-chair of the dissertation. Dr. Manuel García y Griego of the Department of History and Dr. Bob Fiala of Sociology also provided valuable guidance. As a doctoral student Ben eagerly absorbed feedback on his work while simultaneously demonstrating a keen ability to work independently. Since graduation he has continued to excel by publishing his work in relevant peer-reviewed journals, through his dedicated teaching in the classroom at ASU, and by co-leading study abroad trips to Nicaragua and Cuba for students at both ASU and UNM. Over the course of the last several years, Dr. Waddell has established himself as a scholar while maintaining a steadfast commitment to improving the social world through meaningful teaching and community engagement. We outline this overall record simply to demonstrate the breadth of excellence to which Dr. Waddell is committed; we nominate him for the Tom L. Popejoy Dissertation Award on the basis of his outstanding 2013 dissertation.

Overview:

Dr. Waddell’s dissertation, which was funded by the Fulbright Foundation, analyzes the economic, social, and political effects of international migration on migrant-sending regions in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. His study evaluates the human development outcomes of household remittances (i.e., raw cash transfers between migrants and their families) with collective remittances such as those made through the Mexican government-sponsored program *3x1 para migrantes*, which pools migrant remittances with federal, state, and local funds in an effort to increase the pro-development effects of household remittances. His research employs a mixed methods approach that adroitly combines qualitative fieldwork with sophisticated quantitative data analysis as a means of understanding human development outcomes in migrant-sending communities in central Mexico. While his work is grounded in a specific context, the results of his study are generalizable to other parts of the developing world.

Outline of Dissertation:

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to migration in the 21st century; it situates Mexico-to-U.S. migration within the context of global migration flows, pointing out that more people currently live in a country other than the one in which they were born than ever before in history. As a result, migration plays a fundamental role in shaping economic, social, and political conditions in countries around the globe. Chapter 2 reviews extant research regarding the relationship between international migration and human development. As this analysis reveals, there is a clear intellectual lacuna concerning the actual impact of migrant remittances back on development outcomes in migrants’

hometowns, i.e. on outcomes in “sending communities.” Chapter 3 introduces the reader to the study’s setting with ethnographic snapshots from three Mexican villages in the state of Guanajuato in north-central Mexico. The case studies were chosen carefully so as to create variation across the key determinants of remittance impact and to provide grounded examples of key patterns. The case studies allow the reader to glean insight into the potential relationships between remittances and development in the state of Guanajuato, and in doing so, help the reader understand the practical importance of the statistical output discussed in subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 develops a complex econometric model as a means of empirically evaluating the relationship between local political factors and remittance-led development. Regression runs demonstrate that from 2002-2011 in the state of Guanajuato investments made through the *3x1 para migrantes* program hinged on election cycles, such that investments peaked in pre-election years and fell in post-election years. In turn, Chapter 5 focuses on the specific relationship between household remittances and human dimensions of economic development. Statistical results indicate that household remittances alone repress municipal development levels; whereas investments made through the *3x1 para migrantes* program (all else being equal) result in better human development outcomes, thus improving the quality of life enjoyed in migrant-sending communities. These findings highlight the importance of state-sponsored investment and coordination in underpinning effective development projects. Chapter 6 analyzes the relationship between the *3x1 para migrantes* program and good governance. Results demonstrate that 3x1 investments stimulate relatively more transparent and accountable governance across municipalities. Finally, Chapter 7 integrates findings from the study as a whole, reflects on their relationships and importance, and offers several conclusions for wider audiences. The author concludes by arguing that, “In the long run, by improving living conditions in hometown communities, RLD [remittance-led development] has the potential to ameliorate the very factors that drive individuals to leave their homelands in the first place. In the end, this is the only way to truly ‘control’ migration.” Thus, this is a methodologically sophisticated study of a crucial contemporary dynamic, grounded in the author’s human concern and in the actual lives and communities of immigrants.

Impact of Study:

This dissertation adds clarity to our understanding of how immigrants continue to influence their homelands and communities of origin. In the most basic sense, people risk leaving the comforting confines of the land in which they were born when they are no longer able to adequately control the factors that condition their lives. The findings of Waddell’s dissertation (both the results outlined here and its broader findings) have important implications for migrant sending communities in Mexico as well as other parts of the developing world. In particular, Waddell’s dissertation provides insight into how migrant-sending communities in Mexico can leverage remittances in their favor, thus contributing to a better quality of life in these communities *and* a greater sense of agency among immigrants themselves as they contribute back to those communities. More broadly, this study contributes to a better understanding of how migrants impact human development in their homelands, how governments in migrant-sending countries can better channel remittances into effective development, and how future migrants can contribute to improving the wellbeing of those they leave behind.

Publication of Results:

Results from this dissertation have been published widely. Since graduating in 2013 Dr. Waddell has published the following articles based on his dissertation:

- Waddell, B.J. (2015). “Remittance-led Development: An Untapped Resource for International Development?” *Sociology of Development*, 1(4).
- Waddell, B.J. (2015). “Old Habits Die Hard: Political Patronage and Remittance-led Development in Guanajuato, Mexico.” *Latin American Research Review*, 50(1).
- Waddell, B.J. (2014). “Remitting Democracy? The Role of Migrant Remittances in Promoting Social and Political Change in Guanajuato, Mexico.” *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, XIV(1).

These are well-placed articles in prominent area studies (*LARR*), good disciplinary (*Soc of Development*), and good sub-disciplinary (JCPP) journals. In addition, he has extended the dissertation research into related new terrain, as summarized below.

Current Research:

Dr. Waddell has also expanded his research into two new lines of inquiry. The first area addresses how migrants returning personally to Mexico impact human development. Currently, the number of immigrants going back to Mexico outpaces the number of emigrants leaving. This historic shift leads to important questions regarding the effects of return migration within Mexican communities. To that end, Dr. Waddell combines qualitative fieldwork with statistical models to measure how return migrants affect human development levels. Early findings from this project are reported in *The Social Science Journal* (2015), where he and his colleague find that return migrants improve civic participation and contribute to advances in health care, education, and income.

- Waddell, B.J. and Matías Fontenla. (2015) “The Mexican Dream? The Effect of Return Migrants on Hometown Development.” *The Social Science Journal*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2015.02.003>

Dr. Waddell’s second area of interest concerns the relationship between rising crime and emigration in Mexico. Crime rates in Mexico have spiked dramatically over the last decade and while many people draw associations between drug trafficking and violence, surprisingly little research addresses the role of emigration in underpinning violent crime. He hypothesizes that emigration out of Mexico contributes to the type of social conditions that foster crime; i.e., social disorganization, rising inequality, lack of public infrastructure, and divided families. His theory represents an innovative trajectory, a kind of “inverse mirror” to a well-established literature in the U.S., which finds that immigrants contribute to lower crime rates in *receiving* communities by revitalizing communities and creating social bonds in areas traditionally marred by violence. In this work, Dr. Waddell argues that if in-migrants lower crime rates in the U.S. then one might expect out-migration in developing countries to contribute to higher crime rates by draining areas of the exact individual bearers of the social and cultural capital that mitigate crime in the immigrant neighborhoods in which they settle. He outlines his theoretical argument in a forthcoming book chapter concerning human rights violations and forced disappearances in Mexico. He is working on this project with colleagues from the University of Minnesota and Mexico’s Center for Investigation and Economics (CIDE).

- Waddell, B.J. (2016). “The Third Law of Migration: Emigration and Violence in Modern Mexico,” University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming.

Dr. Waddell is also in the process of empirically testing this theory with data from central Mexico. Preliminary work confirms his hypothesis, revealing a positive association between out migration and crime in the state of Michoacán. He is currently writing an article summarizing these findings for submission to *Social Forces* (one of the top few journals in sociology) and has intentions of expanding his study to other parts of Mexico and Central America. Dr. Waddell outlines the basic tenets of his theory here:

- Waddell, B.J. (2015). “Rodrigo’s Theory: Mass Emigration, Violence, and Human Rights Violations in War-torn Mexico.” *OpenGlobalRights*, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/openglobalrights/human-rights-mass-or-elite-movement>

Academic Trajectory:

At Adams State University (ASU), Dr. Waddell largely teaches first-generation, under-represented, and non-traditional students. Dr. Waddell’s work in the classroom was recently recognized with the ASU 2014-2015 Teacher of the Year award. In addition, since joining ASU’s ranks in 2011, he has chartered ASU’s membership to the International Sociology Honor Society, and founded a sociology club for undergraduates. As noted above, he also organizes and co-directs annual summer study abroad trips to Nicaragua (2011-2014) and more recently Cuba (2015). The program provides students with the opportunity to study sustainable development on the ground in Latin America. He also serves on the board of trustees for University Press of Colorado, and is involved in several campus-wide committees at ASU including the Faculty Senate, where he serves as Vice President. Finally, Dr. Waddell directs *Voices of the Valley*, which is an undergraduate research initiative run through his Field Studies in Sociology course. This project is supported by grants from the Bureau of Land Management (\$30,000), the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Center (\$15,000), and Title V (\$5,000).