

The Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) at American University in Washington, DC engages scholars and practitioners to promote cutting-edge research to enrich understanding of Latin America, the Caribbean, and of Latino communities in the U.S. Our mission reflects American University's commitment to promoting knowledge in the public interest and to fostering an active, informed citizenry. To that end, CLALS pursues partnerships and distinct public engagement strategies.

MEET THE STAFF



- Dr. Ernesto Castañeda, Director
- Dr. Robert Albro, Associate Director
- Dr. Maria De Jesus, Associate Director of Community-Based Research
- Sergio Ovalle, Assistant Director
- Diana Garay, Program Coordinator

CONTACT US

CLALS@AMERICAN.EDU

FOCUS AREAS



Governance



Environment



Regional-Country Studies



Regional-Country Studies

KEY PROJECTS

- Immigration to the Washington Area
  - DC-Metro Latino Research Initiative
- New Institutions of Participatory Democracy
- Central American Migration Research Initiative
- Emergent Challenges for Latin American Economies
- Religion & Environmentally Induced Displacement
- Robert A. Pastor North America Research Initiative
- China's Messaging in Latin American & the Caribbean (LAC)
  - Science and Technology Diplomacy in LAC
- Western Hemisphere Regional Transnational Crime Assessment & Analysis
  - The Cuba Initiative
  - The Ecuador Research Initiative
- Latino businesses in the Washington Metro Region

AFFILIATED NETWORK

Our community includes faculty & researchers across American University focusing on Latin America & Latino communities, alongside external Research Fellows from academia, journalism, policy, & practice spheres.

77

AFFILIATED FACULTY

16

CURRENT FELLOWS

71

PAST FELLOWS

SCHOLARSHIP

CLALS produces up to date research and public reports, including working papers, policy briefs, the AULA Blog, and print publications (books, journals, articles, reports).

62

WORKING PAPERS

871

AULA BLOG

26

PRINT PUBLICATIONS

EVENTS

Since the Center's founding in 2010, CLALS has hosted over 200 events, ranging from lectures and panels to workshops and public forums.

31

2025

25

2024

25

2023

MEDIA IMPACT

2025

FOLLOWERS

30.5K

WEBSITE VISITS

78.2K

MEDIA APPEARANCES

400+

MEDIA REACH

INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE: 7+ LANGUAGES

YEARLY METRICS

2024

FOLLOWERS

26.7K

WEBSITE VISITS

32.5K

MEDIA APPEARANCES

250+


MEDIA REACH

INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE: 7+ LANGUAGES

KEY PARTNER







The Immigration Lab focuses on producing rigorous, evidence-based research that informs public understanding and policy related to immigration. Our mission with this project is to humanize the immigrant experience and inform effective policy making. Our largest ongoing project, Immigration to DMV/NYC, has collected over 400 in-depth interviews with recently arrived migrants in the Washington D.C. and New York City metropolitan areas.

The immigration Lab



MEET THE DIRECTOR

Ernesto Castañeda, PhD is the Director of CLALS and The Immigration Lab. Full Professor, College of Arts and Sciences and School of International Service, American University. He has published over a dozen books and dozens of articles. Castañeda's insights and commentary are frequently featured in public talks, policy discussions, and major media outlets, making him a prominent voice in public debates on immigration and Latino issues.





2025



CENTER FOR  
LATIN AMERICAN  
& LATINO STUDIES  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY | WASHINGTON, DC

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and regardless of their background,  
that they can become researchers





MEET THE STAFF



- Dr. Ernesto Castañeda, Director
- Kathryn Olmos, Lab Coordinator
- Marshall Plane, Research Coordinator
- Students from across AU
- Scholars from across the US

CONTACT US

THEIMMIGRATIONLAB@AMERICAN.EDU

WEBSITE

THEIMMIGRATIONLAB.ORG

The Immigration Lab at American University conducts research on all aspects of migration, including immigration (settling in), emigration (leaving), transnationalism, integration, categorical inequality, health disparities, demographics, social mobility, racism and exclusion, exiles and refugees, social movements and contentious politics, race and immigration history, and ethnicity and space in relation to human mobility.

KEY PROJECTS

IMMIGRATION TO DMV

The Immigration to DMV project is the lab’s largest ongoing project. This study began in May 2023 and consists of 233-in depth interviews with recently arrived migrants who reside in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, including Salvadorans, Ukrainians, Afghans, and Venezuelans. These interviews shed light on migration drivers, migration journey, and integration challenges related to healthcare access, employment, and housing.

IMMIGRATION TO NYC

The Immigration to NYC project began in December of 2024. This study consists of 233-in depth interviews with recently arrived migrants who reside in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, including migrants from Ecuador, Senegal, Guatemala, and Venezuela. These interviews shed light on migration drivers, migration journey, and integration challenges related to healthcare access, employment, and housing.

AU IMMIGRATION IMPACTED

The AU Immigration Impacted study is a collaboration with AUWCL’s AU Dream Initiative. Together we have conducted 54-in depth interviews with undergraduate and graduate students at American University who are children of immigrants or immigrants themselves. This study was created to highlight the experiences of students at American University who are impacted by immigration policies.

SEXUAL/REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The purpose of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) study is to better understand the sexual and reproductive health knowledge and experiences of migrants residing in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and the United Kingdom, including access to SRH services, reproductive health issues, attitudes toward sexual health and behavior, and the future of sexual and reproductive health programs. 20 interviews were conducted in the D.C. area and 10 in the UK.

RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

The Immigration Lab projects are supported by 40+ research assistants, interns, and volunteers per semester.

RAs, interns, and volunteers assist in research, including, but not limited to: conducting interviews, transcribing, translating, writing case summaries, writing blogs, op-eds, book chapters, and papers, preparing policy reports/briefs, and presenting research at conferences.

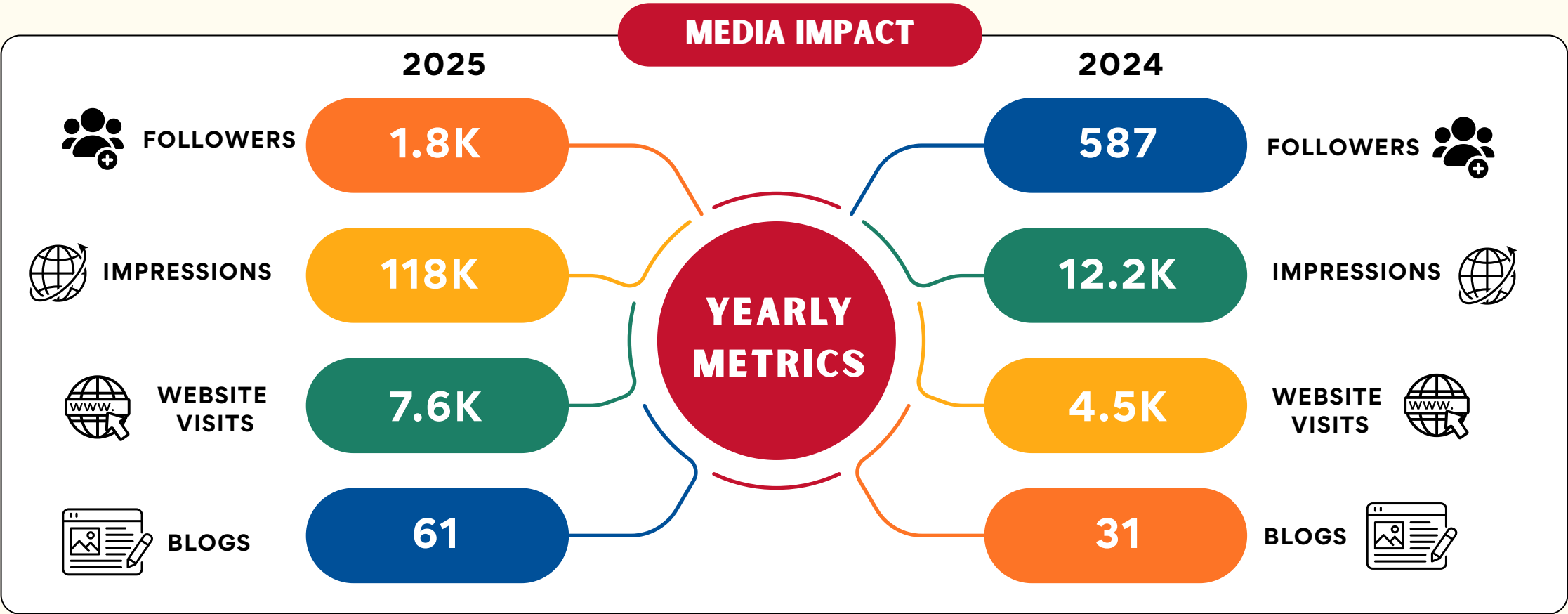
TESTIMONIES

“The Immigration Lab has provided me a welcoming and supportive space to grow as a professional, academic, and as a person.”

“I really liked that the Lab made it easy to meet people with similar interests and talk about topics that matter to us.”

“Lots of different opportunities and ways to be involved.”

MEDIA IMPACT



MEET THE DIRECTOR



Ernesto Castañeda, PhD is the Director of CLALS and the Immigration Lab. Full Professor, College of Arts and Sciences and School of International Service, American University. He has published over a dozen books and dozens of articles. Castañeda’s insights and commentary are frequently featured in public talks, policy discussions, and major media outlets, making him a prominent voice in public debates on immigration and Latino issues.





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**Understanding Deportation for Children, Teens, and Their Parents**

December 28, 2025 | asylum, belonging, deportation, Detention, ICE, immigrant detention centers

By Ernesto Castañeda, PhD  
December 28, 2025

If you are a young student in the United States and you are worried that you, a classmate, or a loved one could be deported by ICE agents, as you have seen on social media, TV, or in your neighborhood, this short text is for you.

Because of this, families with undocumented members are afraid of spending time in public and may always fear it may be their last day together. So, it is important to be patient and supportive of people who could be in that situation. It is understandable if your classmates or even friends do not want to talk about this. Their parents may have told them not to share their immigration status or that of their parents, afraid that it could be used against them. Many live with the continuous fear that an enemy could call *la migra* (ICE) on them. They have lived with this fear sometimes for decades.



People who are undocumented have to try to act perfectly. Afraid about her only daughter being caught by surprise, an interviewee we talked to confidentially, recounts that she told her 13-year-old daughter this year that she was "illegal," and that she should be careful not to skip class, misbehave, or even think about experimenting with illegal drugs, alcohol, or marijuana because this could cause her deportation and that of her mother and maybe other family members too. She had never before realized she was undocumented; she thought she was like anyone else in her class, and she is and so she is at risk of deportation. She cannot help but be worried, but how worried should her best friends be? Well, there were around 11 million individuals who were undocumented when Trump became president again on January 20, 2025. Because of changes to immigration laws, procedures, and programs, there may be 14 million people out of status as the end of 2026. In 2025, the Trump admin. with its aggressive policing, raiding, and detaining, forcibly deported between 200k and 600k people. Self-deportation is a luxury that many immigrants do not have. The official estimates for this are not credible.

LEARN MORE AT THEIMMIGRATIONLAB.ORG