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**Becoming the New Utah**

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Utah is in the midst of an unprecedented economic, demographic, and cultural transformation that has its origins in national and international trends. The cumulative impact of these trends is that Utah, along with the rest of the nation, will continue to become much more diverse in many ways, including age, culture, language, nativity, race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomics.

The Great Recession, accompanied by a series of financial crises (beginning in 2007), have accelerated the structural shift to an economy based on information, and which is subject to intense global competition and rapid technological innovation. Success in this New Economy is based on knowledge production and information management, and depends critically on the development of human capital. In the Information Economy, investment in people - education - is the key to the economic success of individuals and regions.

**From Geographic Isolation to Global Integration**

Until about 1970, Utah remained somewhat geographically isolated as well as economically specialized, particularly in extractive and federal defense industries. This left the state vulnerable to the booms and busts of these industries, with net in-migration during the expansions and net out-migration during the contractions. Since then, the state’s economy has grown significantly, simultaneously becoming much more diversified and more fully integrated into the national and international economies.[1] The Utah economy, along with that of the Intermountain Region, has grown more rapidly than the nation, generating relative economic opportunity and more consistent net in-migration.[2] With the exception of the years 1984–1990, annual net migration rates have remained positive since 1970. After 1990, Utah has had sustained net in-migration, often at rates equal to those of natural increase. Notably, even when unemployment rose in the state (and for a period it actually lost jobs) between 2001 and 2003, people continued to come. This is a significant break with the past. Because young adults compose the majority of employment-based migration, this has reinforced the relative youth of the state and the region. The favorable labor market conditions, especially since 1990, have attracted a steady stream of workers to the state. These new residents have further contributed to population growth by bringing children and continuing to have them after they arrive.

As the state has developed a larger and more diversified economy, it has become more fully integrated into global financial, production, and labor markets. Within the past 30 years and continuing into the new century, Utah has emerged as a destination for those seeking employment opportunity (both native and foreign born) and increasingly for retiring Baby Boomers. Meanwhile, life expectancy continues to increase. The net result of these trends is that Utah, along with the rest of the nation, is becoming much more culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and racially diverse as well as having a rapidly growing older population. These trends mean that the age structure and ethnic composition of the future population will be significantly different than that of the past. Below are brief descriptions of how the population has changed and how it is expected to continue to change.

**Immigrants Contribute to Population Growth**

Over the past 30 years, immigrants have come to the U.S. and also to Utah in record numbers, primarily for employment and have worked in large numbers in construction, landscaping, hospitality, and manufacturing. Immigrants also are concentrated in the highest-level scientific and technical occupations in the state, especially at our institutions of higher education. Immigrants work in professions at the extremes of the occupational distribution, as has long been the case.

Over the past 30 years, forces external to Utah have greatly accelerated immigration flows to the state and have simultaneously shifted the origin regions from Europe to Latin America and Asia, although people have come from many other regions. The shifting origins of the Utah foreign born from 1900 to 2007 are shown in Figure 1.
Utah’s Racial and Ethnic Composition is Changing
About three-quarters of the foreign-born population in Utah is classified by the federal government as a racial or ethnic minority, compared with only 10 percent of the native-born population. Economic migrants (foreign and native born) are generally young adults in prime childbearing years. Some groups of recent migrants, notably Hispanics and Pacific Islanders, have higher fertility rates than the native-born Utah population. The demographic contribution of in-migrants includes the original migrants, their offspring, and all future descendents who remain residents. The cumulative demographic impact on Utah (and the nation in general) is that the population is younger as well as more racially, ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse than it would have been in the absence of these most recent immigrants. The minority share of the Utah population, which remained between one and two percent for many decades, is estimated to be 18 percent in 2007. Salt Lake County, which leads the state in convergence to national demographic trends, is approaching one-quarter (24 percent) minority share in 2007, while the nation has surpassed one-third (35 percent). Again, Utah remains less diverse than the nation, but it is, like the nation, trending towards more diversity.

This increase in ethnic and racial diversity is not uniformly distributed across the age spectrum. Rather, it represents a generational shift, as nearly one-fourth (24 percent) of preschool age persons in Utah and one-third (32 percent) in Salt Lake County in 2007 were estimated to be racial or ethnic minorities. In contrast, less than 10 percent of retirement-age Utahns are estimated to be minorities. These age waves of diversity are also evident in school enrollment data. From 2000 through 2007, minorities accounted for one-third of the increase in the total population and two-thirds of the school enrollment increase in the state. Unless the elders in the community are associating with the youth, they could miss this wave of demographic change. There is also greater minority representation in the prime working-age population, many of whom are recent immigrants and who are the parents of the increasingly diverse student populations. Minority share of the Utah population by age is shown in Figure 3, while minority contributions to Utah population and school enrollment growth are shown in Figure 4.

Utah’s Age Structure is Evolving
Although Utah’s highest-in-the-nation fertility rate continues to result in the largest number of persons per household and lowest median age among states, these characteristics are trending towards the nation. Utah lags national demographic trends by about two and a half generations in these changes. However, the relative youthfulness of the nation is soon to be accompanied by the rapid growth of the retirement-age population. As the largest, most racially, ethnically, and linguistically homogenous generation – the Post WWII Baby Boom – approaches retirement, the median age of the U.S. and Utah population is pulled up with it. This, along with increasing life expectancy, means that older persons will be a larger share of the population. As it turns out, by 2050, Utah will have about the number of persons 65 and older relative to the working age population as the nation. But it will also have many more children. This means that the children who are in school today will inherit the greatest demographic burden ever.

Over the next several decades, Utah’s working-age population will be asked to continue supporting the largest number of youth per capita of any state. In addition, they will be asked to support an increasing share of retirees in the population. Once they reach adulthood, the youth of today will carry a much greater demographic burden than their parents’ generation. And these workers and caretakers of tomorrow are currently at the forefront of this increasing wave of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. These structural demographic changes are occurring within the context of increasing global competition, continued economic globalization, and the realization of resource and environmental constraints. Adults finance the education of our youth. This intergenerational transfer is an investment in individuals as well as in the future of the community. Eventually these same youth will join the workforce and will contribute to Social Security, Medicare, and other transfers to elders. This, too, is an intergenerational transfer, and can be viewed as a repayment to the retirees, who had earlier financed their education.

Conclusion
The extraordinary demographic transformation that is unfolding around us presents significant challenges to the policy makers of today. One thing is clear: planning for the future cannot be based on an obsolete view that the future population is simply a supersized version of an idealized past. How do we restructure our institutions and communities to not only accommodate but benefit from these changes? How do we reengineer our infrastructure and housing to create a physical environment that is livable, sustainable, affordable, and efficient? How do we prepare the youth of today to be the most productive and creative generation ever? In short, how do we redesign policies and plans to ensure the best possible future for this New Utah? These are the great challenges that we face.
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[3] The U.S. Bureau of the Census generated post-censal estimates (and components of change) for the 1990s for Utah, but did not revise these when the 2000 Census results became available. In these estimates, net domestic migration to Utah was negative beginning in 1997 and continuing through 1999, while net international migration to Utah was estimated to be positive for the entire decade. See: "ST-99-7: State Population Estimates and Demographic Components of Population Change: Annual Time Series, April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999," Internet release date: December 29, 1999.

[4] Arriving at a definitive count of cultures and ethnic groups would be an extraordinarily complex endeavor. The concepts of culture and ethnicity are complicated and dynamic, and the associated population groups are as well. “Ethnic” is not equivalent to “foreign.” Mormonism is an example of a “home grown” ethnic group. Extensive literatures in sociology and anthropology address these matters.

[5] Many of these recent prime working-age immigrants currently do not have the right to vote. But their native-born children will eventually have this right.