

On November 9, 2007, as part of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice's Conversation at Lunch series, Kristin Butcher, Ph.D., led a discussion about the "economics of migration." Butcher, an Associate Professor of Economics at Wellesley College, conducts research on the effects of immigration on native economies and native workers, among other areas.

Butcher explained possible effects that immigrants have on native wages from several different perspectives. In her discussion she clarified that the commonly-held assumption that immigrants cause a decrease in wages is not entirely accurate. By least conservative estimates, the presence of immigrant workers decreases wages by only four percent. Moreover, a ten percent increase in immigration over time would not lower wages by more than one percent. She explained that when immigrants work in low-skilled jobs, native workers are freed to occupy higher status jobs. Also, when there is a large supply of laborers, industries may choose to hire inexpensive workers rather than adopt new technology to complete the same task. Most importantly, Butcher pointed out that immigrants create demand for goods and services when they are living in a country, which contributes to the local economy.

Butcher concluded that there is very little evidence that immigrants create economic hardships for native workers. She emphasized that academics are largely in agreement about this point, although the common population is still pervaded with false, negative assumptions about immigrant presence. Butcher then answered questions from students in the audience and discussed controversial economics aspects of migration with the Boston College professors and Center directors in attendance.