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# Survey asks about effect of immigrants on workforce



Vicki Ikeogu, vikeogu@stcloudtimes.com 4:53 p.m. CDT June 13, 2015



(Photo: Photo courtesy of St. Cloud State University)

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Concerns over worker shortages in the St. Cloud area has prompted a look at the influence immigrant populations have in addressing employment needs.

In the latest St. Cloud Area Quarterly Business Report, local economists King Banaian and Rich MacDonald posed three questions to area businesses about the effects immigrant populations are having on the workforce.

"In our 17 years of doing the QBR, I don't recall asking a question about immigration," QBR co-

author MacDonald said, who is serving as interim director of the St. Cloud State University School of Public Affairs Research Institute.

MacDonald said the report's Business Outlook Survey has asked other questions about workforce characteristics, but they have not explored the effect of the visible immigrant population.

More than 50 percent of the 69 surveyed firms said they employ no immigrants.

MacDonald said given the sample size, those numbers may not necessarily be entirely reflective of the St. Cloud area.

Employers were asked about barriers to hiring immigrants. While 38.2 percent of firms indicated language as the primary barrier, lack of education or skills was ranked second at 34.8 percent.

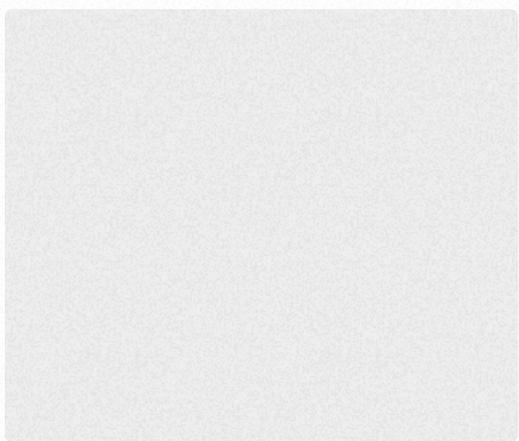
"Area firms are really filtering their applicants," MacDonald said. "And they are mostly looking for skilled workers."

MacDonald said employers' concern about education and skills extends beyond the immigrant population.

Finally, the area firms were asked if the influx of immigrants to the area would reduce the labor shortage in Central Minnesota.

"That question received about as wide a range of responses as any I've ever seen," MacDonald said.

The data found 39.7 percent stating immigrants will not help with the labor shortage. The remainder was evenly split among agreement and neutral reactions to the statement.



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MacDonald said the mixed results particularly on the final question warrant further study by economists and the community. He anticipates returning to this question in future reports.

For a closer look at the survey and other regional economic data, as well as explanations from Banaian and MacDonald, read the entire Quarterly Business Report here:

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