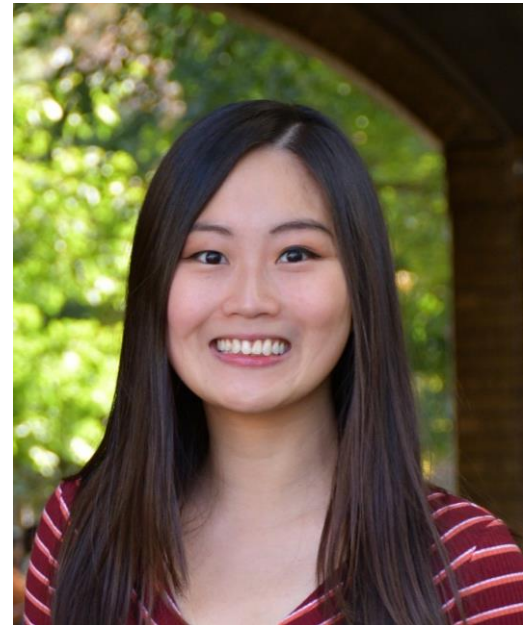


Is Assimilation a Double-Edged Sword? Reconciling Immigrants' Economic and Health Trajectories

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日時：2026年8月3日（月）14:00～15:30

場所：北海道大学人文・社会科学総合教育研究棟W517室

開催方式：対面とオンライン併用

言語：英語

Abstract

Immigrants to the United States experience paradoxical trends in economic mobility and health assimilation over time. They arrive in the U.S. with lower earnings but catch up to the native-born over time. Yet immigrants' health also deteriorates more quickly, and older immigrants have particularly vulnerable health profiles. This study uses Social Security earnings records linked with the Health and Retirement Study to understand whether these trends are connected. While immigrants experience earnings convergence with the U.S.-born on average, only about half of immigrants experience substantial upward mobility. These upwardly mobile individuals are able to maintain or expand their health advantage in activities of daily living from age 50 to 84. The other half of immigrants, who experience little mobility or are marginally attached to the labor force, experience faster health declines and drive the erosion in immigrants' health advantage in later life.

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