Over the next three decades, it’s expected that non-Hispanic whites will no longer make up the majority of Americans. How will this historic demographic shift reshape our nation’s schools, workforce and electorate, and redefine long-held notions about race?
On Jan. 1, 2040, first-grade teacher Manuel Rodriguez looks out over his class and is greeted by pupils of various skin tones and cultural heritages. ... CEO Li Shu addresses her board of directors and sees no clear racial or ethnic majority. ... Susan Johnson looks up from lunch in her retirement community and notices that while most of her fellow residents are white and female, her caregivers are a much more diverse group.

These fictional scenarios are based on projections by the U.S. Census Bureau, which predicts that by the year 2040, America will be a “majority-minority” country. In other words, if current trends continue, by 2040, there will be no ethnic or racial majority group in the United States.

While some people find that forecast intriguing, others may look at the numbers with trepidation. They ask themselves: With such a shift in demographics happening so rapidly, how do we plan for the future?

Four Creighton professors aim to answer that question. This fall, they began teaching “The 2040 Initiative,” an interdisciplinary seminar that asks students to visualize what America will look like 27 years from now, and then find proactive solutions to any potential problems that may occur with immigration laws, education, healthcare, housing, political polarization, criminal justice and family dynamics, including child care and elder care. We asked these professors to gaze into their crystal balls, and tell us what life may be like in America in 2040.

Immigration is a Big Concern

David Weber, associate professor in the School of Law, specializes in immigration law, and he’s familiar with how, in the past, laws were created to control the ethnic distribution of the population. For example, at one time, regulations existed to curtail Chinese immigration, and before World War II, under the Immigration Act of 1924, there were quotas created to limit immigration from Southern and Eastern European countries, in part to restrict how many Jews were permitted into the country.

Joel Kotkin, one of the nation’s premier demographers, noted in *Smithsonian* magazine that in 2000 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an association of 30 democratic, free-market countries, found the U.S. was home to 12.5 million skilled immigrants, equalling the combined total for Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Japan. “The United Nations estimates that 2 million people a year will move from poorer to developed nations over the next 40 years, and more than half of those will come to the United States, the world’s preferred destination for educated, skilled migrants.”

Weber points out that Americans have worried about the influx of immigrants ever since the Declaration of Independence was signed.

“People have been decrying the evils of immigration for over 200 years. Benjamin Franklin wrote about the fear that the country wouldn’t be able to assimilate all the new peoples coming here,” he says. “Today, we get gloom-and-doom forecasts from both the left and the right. Pundits scan studies, pick out five-second sound bites and call it truth.

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... But under an employment-based meritocracy, the government instead grants visas to people who are experts in technologies like science, engineering, math and computers.

“And for every computer programmer who gets a visa, that means there’s one less visa for somebody’s parent,” Weber says. “While some will undoubtedly favor that approach, it is important to keep in mind that it is not a cost-free trade-off. For every additional scientist or engineer entering the country, there is one less family being reunited.”

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“There’s still a lot of polarity today, but my gut feeling is our country in 2040 will look a lot like what it looks like today. I believe the country is very adaptable, because young people are very open to change.”