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# How faculty members and administrators can help immigrant students

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## How faculty members and administrators can help immigrant students (essay)

Submitted by Anonymous on January 31, 2017 - 3:00am

Several days ago, President Trump issued an executive order <sup>[1]</sup> barring immigrants and nonimmigrant visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States -- significantly impacting many students and scholars. This follows on the heels of two other executive orders focused on immigration enforcement <sup>[2]</sup> and border security that he signed last week, which froze refugee admissions and called for the immediate construction of a wall along the southwestern border of the country.

In addition, the president has ordered federal immigration enforcement agencies to increase efforts to deport undocumented immigrants with criminal records, called for the construction of additional detention facilities and restored the controversial "secure communities" program that compelled state and local law enforcement officials to collaborate with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency to enforce federal immigration law.

None of the recent executive orders concerned the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, initiated by President Obama in 2012, which provides a two-year protection from deportation and employment authorization to select undocumented youth and young adults, many of whom are enrolled in our colleges and universities. However, Trump's aggressive approach to immigration enforcement and his characterization of unauthorized immigrants as "a significant threat to national security and public safety" has already begun to cause upheaval and hardship within immigrant communities -- and this will inevitably have a negative impact on undocumented students, as well as on U.S. citizen and permanent resident students from mixed-status families. Moreover, despite White House statements promising a more nuanced approach to DACA recipients, fears that the new administration may still rescind DACA are not without basis.

In anticipation of the Trump administration's promises to target the U.S.'s approximately 11 million undocumented residents <sup>[3]</sup>, over the past few months, campuses nationwide have developed sanctuary statements or issued declarations in support of educational access for all students, regardless of their immigration status. In the past few days, campuses are also now scrambling to provide emergency legal advice and services to faculty members and students from "barred" Muslim nations who, although visa holders, are confronting difficulties returning to America following authorized travel abroad. In many cases, campuses are advising those faculty and student members -- even those who are U.S. permanent residents, and all of whom have already been through extensive vetting during the visa application process -- to avoid leaving the country until the precise parameters of the new immigration enforcement directives are determined.

No one knows with certainty what policies the Trump administration will implement, or what impact they will have in the long term on faculty members and students who have immigrated legally to the United States from barred Muslim nations. What *is* certain is that undocumented students and

students from mixed-status families will also face increased challenges under this new presidential administration. It has long been difficult for such student to earn money, drive legally, travel and afford college tuition. Without clear pathways to legalization, many also experience anxiety about their futures. These are not new problems, but in light of the White House's recent orders, our undocumented students will face even greater obstacles to their academic success and well-being.

While most university faculty, staff and administrators may not be in a position to directly influence federal immigration law or enforcement priorities, we do have the ability -- indeed, we would argue, the responsibility -- to mediate the impact of immigration policies on undocumented students. As immigration scholars and engaged teachers who work closely with undocumented students, we offer the following suggestions for faculty and administrators to consider.

**Be aware of the wide range of people affected by proposed changes to immigration policy.**

About a fifth of the undocumented residents in the United States are youth and young adults who arrived in America as children, and an additional 16.6 million people live in mixed-status families where at least one member is undocumented [4]. It is important to recognize that anticipated changes to immigration policies will impact not only undocumented students but also permanent resident students concerned about their undocumented parents, relatives, friends and community members. These issues affect individuals from a wide range of ethnic, racial and national origins.

**Educate yourself about the laws and policies that impact undocumented students'**

**educational access.** Learn the details of your own state laws here [5]. For example, in California, certain undocumented students can pay in-state tuition at public universities, and the California Dream Act [6] makes state financial aid available to those students. We often find that students do not distinguish those laws from their DACA status, which leads to unnecessary anxiety. Review the recommendations provided by national organizations such as United We Dream [7] and the National Immigration Law Center [8]. Even after educating yourself, recognize your limitations and the high stakes involved for the student who is seeking your advice. It is better to say, "I don't know," than to give out misinformation.

**Signal to students that you are supportive.** Undocumented students often rely on stereotypes to identify faculty and staff members with whom they feel they can safely share their immigration status or ask for help. They may, for example, perceive that "coming out" to faculty members who identify as Latina/o, or as immigrants, presents less of a risk than disclosing their status to white or native-born citizen faculty members. In reality, of course, allies are found among people from all ethnic and racial backgrounds, but some of us may need to do a little more to provide students with verbal and/or visible cues that demonstrate that we are supportive of the undocumented student community. Many colleges and universities offer ally training and provide those that complete it with a sticker to exhibit in their office; do this if the opportunity is available to you. If not, you can signal that you are supportive by displaying flyers about immigration-related events or hanging immigration-related artwork. In your course syllabi, explain how you will accommodate immigration-related emergencies in terms of attendance, late work, extensions and incompletes. Although you may feel that is already described in your institution's existing policies for medical or familial emergencies, making it explicit sends a powerful signal of both symbolic and concrete support for students confronting immigration crises.

**(Re)consider how you discuss immigration-related issues and the current political climate in your classroom.**

Advise students in advance before initiating classroom discussions of immigration issues, especially if that is not on the agenda from the syllabus. Remind your students that you will be bring up topics that personally impact many people living in the United States and ask those students to frame their participation in ways that are respectful of different experiences and opinions. Avoid spotlighting individual students according to their citizenship status or immigrant background during class discussion. (For example: "Kim, as an immigrant, can you share how you feel about Trump's proposal to deport three million criminal aliens?")

**Maintain student confidentiality and privacy.** Do not refer to students' citizenship or immigration status in public conversations or written communication. Only do so when necessary and with the students' permission, such as when helping them identify resources or explaining their personal background in letters of recommendation.

**Use appropriate terminology when discussing immigration issues.** Many people find the terms "illegal immigration" and "illegal immigrant" offensive; they often prefer "undocumented" and "unauthorized." Some students may also use the term "DREAMer," originally a reference to the proposed federal DREAM Act, which would have provided undocumented students with a path to legalization but that now alludes to various state laws that provide educational access. But other students may reject that nomenclature because it suggests that undocumented students are more deserving of support than other undocumented people.

**Provide resources that will help mediate the financial instability that many students will also be facing.** A recent systemwide survey at the University of California conducted by one of us, Laura E. Enriquez, found that 63 percent of the undocumented students at the UC have experienced food insecurity during the past academic year. Thus, even a small measure can be helpful, such as offering healthy snacks like granola bars during office hours or meetings with students. You can also try to put course readings on library reserve so that students can devote their financial resources toward living expenses. It's also good to find out and counsel students on whether they can access waivers for course materials fees or tutoring services. It is possible that undocumented students, many of whom are first-generation college students, do not know about these resources or that they may be inadvertently denied access to them.

You can also lobby for additional resources as needed. Encourage your institution to establish alternative legal forms of employment, internships or research opportunities to undocumented students lacking work authorization by providing payment via stipends or as independent contractors. Consider donating to scholarship and/or emergency funds for impacted students. If your campus doesn't have one, help start one.

**Offer career and graduate preparation opportunities.** Undocumented students struggle to develop career-relevant work experience or access research opportunities to prepare for graduate school -- in some cases, because they are DACA ineligible and therefore lack the work authorization that allows them to accept paid internships or research assistantships; in other cases, it is because they are ineligible, as noncitizens, to apply for certain programs; and finally, it may be because, like other first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students, they lack the understanding or social capital that facilitates securing these kinds of positions. To that end, Enriquez's survey of undocumented students in the UC system found that only 31 percent feel prepared to achieve their career goals, and only 49 percent have had a career-relevant experience like an internship or research opportunity. As faculty members and administrators, consider offering independent study courses, sponsoring research opportunities and identifying internships that are open regardless of immigration status. Work with your institution to figure out a method for paying immigrant students for their labor in these areas.

**Identify, improve and refer students to campus and community resources.** Immigrant students will probably need special guidance and encouragement to access academic resources, financial aid, legal services and mental-health counseling. Familiarize yourself with the resources available at your college or university and in your surrounding community. Identify knowledgeable staff members in relevant campus offices to whom you can refer students directly. Lobby your institution to identify, train and raise awareness of point people in various offices so that students can easily find them and access correct information. Enriquez's survey also found that 56 percent of the undocumented students at the University of California report being given inaccurate or incorrect information from a staff member about how to complete a university procedure. If your institution does not have a staff member dedicated to supporting undocumented students, advocate for one.

**Identify and raise awareness about your campus's policies regarding undocumented students.** Currently, U.S. immigration officials consider educational institutions, including colleges and universities, to be “sensitive locations [9]” where enforcement actions “generally should be avoided.” You should try to identify under what circumstances you and others are your institution are legally required to share student information and provide access to immigration enforcement officers. Your institution should work with legal counsel to clearly lay out under what circumstances cooperation is required and designate a senior administrator to promptly respond to any staff or faculty members who receive information requests or visits from immigration enforcement officials. It should ensure that faculty members know whom to contact if they receive such requests or visits and publicize procedures for reporting and documenting hate speech and threatening incidents [10] on the campus. It is important for campuses to assess their own situations in order to respond appropriately.

The actions that we've outlined are just a few ways that faculty members and administrators can provide support for students facing immigration-related crises. Although they are small steps, our research and work with students suggest that they can and do make a difference. We firmly believe that collaboration among students, faculty members and administrators is essential to supporting undocumented students and students from mixed-status families as we move forward.

Finally, despite the multiple -- often invisible -- ways undocumented people contribute to the U.S. economy and society, we think it is important to recognize that only a tiny percentage of undocumented people in the United States ever benefit from the opportunity to pursue a higher education. With this in mind, we encourage educators to also consider how they can support the broader undocumented immigrant population in their communities and nationwide.

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Protest at Miami airport against Muslim immigration ban

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#### **Links:**

[1] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/30/students-and-scholars-are-stranded-after-trump-bars-travel-nationals-7-countries>

[2] <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/25/presidential-executive-order-enhancing-public-safety-interior-united>

[3] [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2016/01/20/u-s-illegal-immigrant-population-falls-below-11-million-continuing-nearly-decade-long-decline-report-says/?utm\\_term=.0c52115df3b1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2016/01/20/u-s-illegal-immigrant-population-falls-below-11-million-continuing-nearly-decade-long-decline-report-says/?utm_term=.0c52115df3b1)

[4] [https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/DrebyImmigrationFamilies\\_execsumm.pdf](https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/DrebyImmigrationFamilies_execsumm.pdf)

[5] <https://www.nilc.org/issues/education/eduaccesstoolkit2a/#tables>

[6] <https://dream.csac.ca.gov/>

[7] <http://unitedwedream.org/>

[8] <https://www.nilc.org/>

[9] <https://www.ice.gov/ero/enforcement/sensitive-loc>

[10] <http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/heres-a-rundown-of-the-latest-campus-climate-incidents-since-trumps-election/115553>

[11] <https://www.insidehighered.com/editorial-tags/diversity-matters>

[12] <https://www.insidehighered.com/taxonomy/term/291>

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