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Supporting Students

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Welcome to the AAA BlogDecember 1, 2016December 2, 2016

Supporting Students Impacted by Proposed Immigration Policy Changes

This post was authored by Susan Bibler Coutin, with Anita Casavantes Bradford and Laura E. Enriquez.

As an anthropologist who writes about immigration issues, many of my conversations at the American Anthropological Association's recent Annual Meeting in Minneapolis focused on how we can support noncitizen students who are threatened with deportation and "unauthorization" – which anthropologist Deborah Boehm (<http://www.unr.edu/anthropology/people/faculty/deborah-a-boehm>) defines as being (re)defined as undocumented – in the wake of the 2016 presidential elections? (Deborah Boehm used the term "unauthorization" in a paper she presented in Minneapolis. We use it here with her permission.)

Meanwhile, on my own campus, an immediate challenge emerged – students who feared for their personal safety and educational futures were all turning to the small number of faculty allies who they perceived as sympathetic. Some of these students were unable to eat and sleep, let alone study, as they contemplated losing work permits, jobs, and even family members who could potentially be deported. It quickly became clear that my campus needed to immediately extend our existing support network in order to respond to impacted students.

Working with colleagues Anita Casavantes Bradford (<http://faculty.sites.uci.edu/casavantes/>) and Laura Enriquez (<http://faculty.sites.uci.edu/lauraenriquez/>), who have played leadership roles on the UC Irvine Committee for Equity and Inclusion of Undocumented Students, on which I also serve, we quickly drafted recommendations that we encourage others to adapt for their own campuses. These recommendations draw on research that Enriquez has spearheaded on the experiences and needs of undocumented students in the University of California system.

1. Be aware of who may be affected. It will likely be no surprise to anthropologists that undocumented students have various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Nationally, 23 percent (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/analysis-unauthorized-immigrants-united-states-country-and-region-birth>) of the undocumented student population is *not* of Latina/o origin, with 16.6 million (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/12/01/unauthorized-immigrants-length-of-residency-patterns-of-parenthood/>) individuals living in mixed-status families – that is, families in which individuals have different immigration statuses. Therefore, not only undocumented students, but also those who are citizens and lawful permanent residents may be deeply concerned about relatives, friends, community members, and coworkers.

2. Communicate to students that you are aware of the issues. Let students know that you care about them, that you are aware of what they may be going through, and that you are committed to their success. While making this clear, it is important to maintain students' confidentiality and privacy.

3. Consider the following issues in your classrooms: Use appropriate terminology if discussing immigration issues (the terms “illegal immigration” and “illegal immigrant” are hurtful to many; alternative terms include “undocumented,” “unauthorized,” “Dreamer,” or simply “student.”) Advise students before initiating classroom discussion of immigration issues, especially if that is not on the agenda from the syllabus; remind students that you will be discussing a topic that personally impacts many U.S. residents, and ask them to frame their participation in a way that is respectful of different experiences and opinions. In such discussions, avoid spotlighting individual students (e.g., “Kim, as an immigrant, can you share how you feel about Trump’s proposal to deport three million immigrants with criminal convictions?”)

4. Foster the educational success of impacted students. Refer students to appropriate resources and information. For example, UC Irvine has a staff member dedicated to providing services and programming for undocumented students and has access to the UC Undocumented Legal Services Center, which provides free immigration legal services to undocumented students and their immediate family members. (If your campus does not have such services, you might advocate for creating them.) Encourage students to seek out mental health services, a resource where there is high need but little use. Explain your policies for late work and extensions and indicate that students who are experiencing immigration-related personal or family emergencies should contact you as soon as possible to make any necessary alternative arrangements for completing coursework. Work directly with any student who confides about their personal or familial immigration crisis to find ways to support them in successfully completing required coursework. When appropriate, offer an incomplete grade. Offer snacks, such as granola bars, during meetings with students, as food insecurity is likely to increase with the financial hardship created by losing work eligibility.

5. Help create career and graduate preparation opportunities. Offer independent study courses, advise senior theses, sponsor research opportunities, create unpaid internships, or when possible provide stipends for internships and research experiences.

6. Support student initiatives such as fundraisers and events. Student organizations are likely to develop their own activities around these issues, and would benefit from the support of faculty. Also if/when students come to talk to you, ask them how you can support them.

7. Educate yourself. Participate in ally trainings, if offered on your campus, and review the recommendations provided by national organizations such as United We Dream (<http://unitedwedream.org/>) and the National Immigration Law Center (<https://www.nilc.org/>). Learn the details of your own immigrant-related state laws. For example, in California, AB-540 legislation allows certain undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public universities, and the California Dream Act makes state financial aid available to these students. Lastly, recognize your limitations. It is better to say, “I don’t know,” than to give out misinformation.

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1. **Stephanie L. Canizales**

December 1, 2016 at 7:12 pm

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