6-8-2017

Daring to Dream: Sustaining Support for Undocumented Students at The Evergreen State College

Grace Huerta
The Evergreen State College, huertag@evergreen.edu

Catalina Ocampo
The Evergreen State College, ocampoc@evergreen.edu

Daring to Dream: Sustaining Support for Undocumented Students at The Evergreen State College

Abstract

With the 1982 Supreme Court decision in the case of Plyler v. Doe, K-12 students, regardless of their immigration status, were able to access a free public school education without the threat of deportation. However, such clarity has not been the case for undocumented students pursuing higher education. As increasing numbers of undocumented students graduate from high school, some with undocumented parents and some who are unaccompanied youth seeking asylum, many dream of the opportunity to attend college (Perry, 2014). And yet, many "Dreamers" are unable to do so because of little access to financial aid, the lack of accurate information, the absence of institutional support, language and cultural barriers, and ultimately, the fear of deportation or the deportation of their loved ones. In response to these overwhelming challenges and increased fear and uncertainty raised since the 2016 elections, The Evergreen State College (TESC) is developing a framework to better support undocumented students as they seek their college degrees. In the following article, we describe the components of this framework and the steps taken thus far to ensure that the College is responsive to the needs of undocumented students. First, we consider the broader political conditions and policies, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the sanctuary movement, which together are impacting the responses of higher education institutions nationwide. From there, we discuss how other state higher education institutions are responding to the needs of undocumented students and how we hope to continue doing so at The Evergreen State College.

Shortly after Donald Trump's election to the Presidency in November 2016 elections, a college student sat with one of the authors of this article after a Know Your Rights workshop. Visibly upset, the student shared her heightened fear that she would be deported, and said she had cancelled her plans to study abroad and instead redirected the money towards a safety fund for her family. A month earlier, such concerns seemed much more remote: although the student was undocumented, she was covered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program enacted by the Obama administration. As of December 2016, more than 700,000 individuals who had entered the United States before the age of 16 had obtained DACA status, and with it a 2-year renewable permit that allowed students to work or study without fear of deportation and opened doors to opportunities like study abroad (Heim, 2017). Yet in the months leading up to the elections, Trump threatened to end DACA and deport the estimated 11 million undocumented migrants currently in the United States, generating widespread fear and uncertainty among undocumented students, both with and without DACA status. Although Trump stopped short of his campaign promises, the aggressive immigration policies that he implemented after inauguration made, in the words of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, "everyone that enters the country unlawfully… subject to being deported" (Alvarez, 2017). The detention of DACA students Daniel Ramírez Medina, Daniela Vargas, and Josué Romero, and the deportation of DACA student Juan Manuel Montes seemed to confirm fears that not even DACA status would protect undocumented students from being targeted by the new administration (Liebelson & Foley, 2017).

The climate of uncertainty generated by Trump immigration policies fueled efforts across college and university campuses to protect and expand support for undocumented students. While advocates had been seeking ways to better serve the needs of undocumented students much before the 2016 elections, the results gave new urgency and a sense of shared purpose to this work. As concerns for undocumented students rose in the weeks and months after the election, students, staff, and faculty organized to demand that campuses explicitly articulate their commitments to welcome, protect, and support undocumented students. Implicit in such efforts was the notion that guaranteeing college access for undocumented students cannot be the purview of a few passionate advocates, but is a collective responsibility that needs to be adopted at the institutional level and shared by all educators, including Learning Community practitioners. This latter point is particularly important because faculty and staff are often the first persons to whom undocumented students "come out" or reveal their immigration status, and thus need to have the competencies to assist undocumented students effectively. One of the outcomes of this heightened sense of educators' collective responsibility nationally was a wave of letters and petitions calling on administrators to declare colleges "sanctuaries" and to think proactively about the policies and practices

impacting students both in and out of the classroom. Since the elections and until April of 2017, more than 200 colleges had either circulated petitions or seen public statements by administrators. Pomona College student Xavier Maciel created a spreadsheet and an interactive map to track such petitions and responses, helping to coalesce and give visibility to what has come to be known as the campus sanctuary movement (Maciel; Najmabadi, 2016).

Although the term "sanctuary" has no defined legal status in the college and university setting, the term offers "the provision of a safe space in the face of a threat—most generally for migrants, the threat of detention, deportation, or incarceration. But sanctuary is also a symbol, a set of practices, an ethics, a form of resistance, and a mode of governance" (Carney, Gómez, Mitchell, & Vannini, 2017). The term "sanctuary" invokes a long tradition that goes back to the role that churches played as spaces of refuge in Medieval England, the underground railroad, the Civil Rights movement, and more recently the sanctuary movement in the 1980s, when churches helped refugees escape U.S.-sponsored wars in Central America (Allen, 2016; Chinchilla, Hamilton, & Loucky, 2009). Drawing on this history, the use of the term became a way of reinforcing the notion that educational institutions should be safe spaces where students can learn, question, and engage in dialogue without fear of being targeted because of their immigration or citizenship status. More immediately, however, the term was inspired by "sanctuary" cities which prohibit local law enforcement from asking about immigration status or collaborating with federal immigration authorities. Similarly, petitions calling for the creation of "sanctuary campuses" asked that colleges and universities publicly declare non-cooperation with federal immigration authorities and pledge increased support for undocumented students. Items on such petitions include requesting that colleges and universities affirm the privacy of information about students' citizenship or immigration status, refrain from collaborating with ICE agents or bar them from campus, and provide access to legal and financial resources that would allow students to finish their education.

Across the country, institutional responses varied, though common themes exist. Responses to letters and petitions ranged from articulating college policies regarding the contributions of undocumented students on campus and in the community, rejecting the presence of ICE agents on campus, identifying financial aid sources, ensuring that college records not include information about students' citizenship status, identifying student and academic support services (e.g. bilingual/bicultural advising and faculty development specific to culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy), and establishing webpage resource links and media communications. In addition, as of May 2017, 13 colleges were listed by Maciel as having officially declared themselves sanctuaries, with many others declaring support but stopping short at using the word sanctuary due to legal concerns specific to possible violation of federal law, the fear of losing federal funding, the lack of

state resources and the difficulties associated with maintaining a well-trained staff and faculty.

Much of the variation in institutional responses had to do with the nature of the institution, the makeup of the undocumented student population, and the particularities of state and local laws regarding undocumented students. In Washington state, for example, public 4-year institutions such as the University of Washington, Western Washington University, Eastern Washington University and Central Washington University have all confronted what is perceived as the "risky business" associated with challenging U.S. immigration policy. Nevertheless, Washington is one out of 19 states (including CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, IL, KS, KY, MD, MN, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OK, OR, TX, and UT) where undocumented students can pay in-state tuition. Out of these states, only CA, MN, NM, OK, TX, and WA offer in-state tuition and also some form of state financial aid to undocumented students (United We Dream, 2015). In addition, WA state has publicly declared support for immigrant communities. In February 2017, Govenor Jay Inslee signed an executive order limiting state agencies and staff from enforcing federal immigration laws. Inslee explained, "This executive order makes clear that Washington will not be a willing participant in promoting or carrying out mean-spirited policies that break up families and compromise our national security and, importantly, our community safety" (O'Sullivan, 2017). Although no college or university in WA state has officially declared "sanctuary," institutions like UW, WWU, EWU, CWU, and TESC have complemented state protections with efforts to raise awareness of undocumented student needs across campus, advertise financial aid opportunities, and identify and strengthen student support services and advising.

Even where colleges did not officially declare sanctuary, the process of calling for sanctuary served as an impetus for examining institutional practices more closely, implementing long-needed changes to better serve undocumented students, and identifying allies. At TESC, for example, the process of drafting the petition calling for sanctuary was led by a group of students, and helped bring together a broad coalition that included students, staff, and faculty from various areas and groups on campus, including First People's Multicultural Advising Services; the United Faculty of Evergreen (UFE); the Standing Committee for the Retention of Latinx Students, Staff, and Faculty; the Board of Trustees; and groups working in the broader community, such as Strengthening Sanctuary in Olympia and Elevate Mason County. Although the college was not officially declared a sanctuary, the petition gave new energy to a long-standing collaboration between students and staff from First Peoples who had been working to identify barriers and establish better ways of serving undocumented students on campus.

The more than 900 signatures on the TESC petition helped open dialogue with the administration while educating the campus community about the presence,

needs, and challenges faced by undocumented students. As a result, President George Bridges published a statement pledging support for undocumented students (Bridges, 2017), and the college implemented a number of changes that had been in process before the 2016 elections. These included establishing and announcing scholarships such as those offered by the United Faculty of Evergreen and the DREAMERship scholarship (see http://www.evergreen.edu/scholarships); removing barriers for undocumented students wanting to carry out internships; creating a resource link for undocumented students on the Evergreen webpage; developing and offering trainings that will allow students, faculty, and staff to better support undocumented students; revising application materials to increase access; creating a student group that will provide forms of mutual support and community; and developing an Undocumented Student Task Force that will provide continuity for current efforts. Most importantly, a group of students and staff designed and have begun partial implementation of a Student Retention Program (SRP), modeled after TRiO but made available to undocumented students who currently do not have access to the federally funded program.

Despite these improvements, challenges remain. These include continuing to refine points of access such as web page links and admissions materials. The most immediate challenge lies in securing sufficient and sustainable funding which will allow full implementation of the Student Retention Program. In the long run, our vision is that the SRP would be available to other underserved populations on campus while also offering consistent and comprehensive support and advising to undocumented students. The process of creating this program is helping identify staff with cultural competencies and knowledge about the needs and complexities of undocumented students' lives who can direct students to resources, help them identify other supportive staff and faculty, and continue to advocate for undocumented students. Both the administration and allies--including participants in the Undocumented Student Task Force and the student group--are seeking funding through formal budgetary processes and independent fundraising, because the long-term impact of these efforts depends on our ability to weave them into the infrastructure of the institution.

Continuing to support undocumented students through concrete policies and programs will require ongoing commitment on the part of the administration and of the students, staff, and faculty who have been involved in this work. While the financial resources and institutional backing of administrators is key, so is the grassroots organizing that has helped identify needed changes and given urgency to implementing them. Equally important for this work to move forward, will be the involvement of the broader campus community, which must collectively take on the daily, persistent work of welcoming undocumented students; directing them to resources; and listening to, guiding, advising, and protecting them.

For campuses and educators seeking resources on how to do this, participants in the campus sanctuary movement have created excellent resources. These include "Understanding the Sanctuary School and Safe Zone Movement: A Quick Guide for Educators," created by Educators for Fair Consideration (Jodaitis, 2017), the "Sanctuary Campus Toolkit" created through a collaboration between the Immigration Response Initiative at Harvard Law School and the Cosecha Movement (Arnold et al., 2017), the "Here To Stay Institutional Toolkit" created by United We Dream (United We Dream, 2016), and the "Model Campus Safe Zones Resolution Language" created by the National Immigration Law Center (National Immigration Law Center, 2016). Such resources provide key starting points to continue educating ourselves about the needs of undocumented students in a changing political and legal landscape, and making sure that the networks of support that were created since the 2016 elections continue to function on behalf of undocumented students.

References

Arnold, P., A. Gokhale, S. Motel, H. Klein Murillo, S. W. Paik, C. Poirot, M. Ryan, A. Santana, M. Shah, A. Volz (2017). Sanctuary Campus Toolkit. *Harvard Law Today*. Retrieved from: https://today.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Sanctuary-Campus-Toolkit.pdf

Allen, E. (2016, November 23). What is the History Sanctuary Spaces and Why Do They Matter? *The Conversation.* Retrieved from: http://theconversation.com/whats-the-history-of-sanctuary-spaces-and-why-do-they-matter-69100.

Alvarez, P. (2017, April 27). Trump's Quiet Reversal on Deporting Young Undocumented Immigrants. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/04/trumps-quiet-reversal-on-deporting-young-undocumented-immigrants/524367/

Bridges, G. (2017, February 21). Statement by President George Bridges of The Evergreen State College: Actions in Defense of Our Undocumented Students. Retrieved from: https://evergreen.edu/news/post/statement-president-george-bridges-evergreen-state-college-actions-defense-our.

Carney, M., R. Gómez, K. Mitchell, S. Vannini (2017). Sanctuary Planet: A Global Sanctuary Movement for the Time of Trump. *Sanctuary Collective*. Retrieved from http://www.sanctuarycollective.net/manifesto.

Chinchilla, N.S., N. Hamilton, and J. Loucky (2009). The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles. *Latin American Perspectives* 169 (36.6), 101-126. .

Heim, J. (2017, February 6). Calls for 'sanctuary' campuses multiply as fears grow over Trump immigration policy. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/02/06/calls-for-sanctuary-campuses-multiply-as-fears-grow-over-trump-immigration-policy/?utm_term=.799cb659e70d.

Jodaitis, N. (2017). "Understanding the Sanctuary School and Safe Zone Movement: A Quick Guide for Educators." *Educators for Fair Consideration*. Retrieved from: http://www.e4fc.org/images/E4FC_SanctuarySchoolandSafeZoneMov.pdf

Liebelson, D. and Foley, E. (2017, March 1). Authorities Arrest 22-Year-Old Dreamer After She Speaks To Media. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com.mx/entry/authorities-detain-daniela-vargas-dreamer_us_58b724e8e4b023018c6c7abc

Maciel, X. *Sanctuary Campuses* [Google Maps]. Retrieved from: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?ll=48.12779650323026%2C-123.1425193401854&hl=en&z=11&authuser=0&mid=1LcIME474-lYWbTf_xQChIhSSN30.

Maciel, X. *Sanctuary Campus Petitions* [GoogleDocs Spreadsheet]. Retrieved from: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fHOHRFxzo_Pp85rR_58ug4rMv9WODPDmRLK0dP2FT-k/htmlview.

Najmabadi, S. (2016, December 2). "How Colleges Are Responding to Demands that They Become 'Sanctuary Campuses'." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from: http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Colleges-Are-Responding-to/238553

National Immigration Law Center (2016). Model Campus Safe Zones Resolution Language (Colleges & Universities). Retrieved from: https://www.nilc.org/issues/immigration-enforcement/campus-safe-zones-language-college/.

O'Sullivan, J. (2017, Feb. 23). Inslee Signs Order Limiting Washington State's Help in Enforcing Trump's Immigration Policies. *The Seattle Times*. Retrieved from http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/inslee-signs-order-limiting-states-involvement-in-immigration-enforcement/

United We Dream (2015). *National Institutions Coming Out Day—Institutional Policies and Programs With and for Undocumented Students*. Retrieved from: http://www.UnitedWeDream.org/DEEP.

United We Dream (2016). Here To Stay Toolkit: K-12 and Higher Education Educators and Schools. Retrieved from: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1o-zD9Yy-oJboGOtWkBD3E8bz3DhEPPikOBBzYOOXSdU/edit.