



Protecting Undocumented Students Post-Election

December 7, 2016

From meeting to action. Working together to support our students.

In the wake of the recent presidential election, we find ourselves reflecting deeply on our roles as teachers, researchers, and scholars. As anthropologists, we grapple with a historical moment that challenges our values of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion, values to which we have dedicated our careers. For those working with immigrant and refugee communities, either in our research or teaching, we are called to console [students](#), research participants and family members who face the real fear and stark possibility of imminent deportation.

President-elect Trump campaigned on an anti-immigrant platform that includes the building of a “wall” at the Southern US border, barring all Muslims from entering the US, and ending two Executive Actions—[DACA](#) (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans)—that grant temporary reprieve to hundreds of thousands of immigrant youth and their parents. For years, educators like us have worked on our respective campuses to ensure that undocumented students, DACA students, and students from mixed status families have the necessary support for academic success. However, following the election, the fate of our students now falls into profound limbo.

Some immigration [advocates and attorneys](#) are urging already-DACAmented students to renew their applications, while others caution against renewal, [citing the imminent repeal of benefits](#) when Trump assumes office in January. Advocates unanimously advise that young people withhold new applications for DACA in an effort to protect their identities from the incoming administration. A recent piece in [Inside Higher Ed](#) quoted a University of Houston law professor, who said that DACA

students have been able to hold jobs and have “somewhat normal types of student lives... Should they do away with DACA... what do we do with these kids that we made a bargain with? What’s going to happen to them?”

These questions capture the uncertainty facing our students. Some are nearing graduation and wonder whether they’ll have a social security number and the necessary legal documents to secure permanent employment. Others wonder if they will be able to graduate at all, fearing loss of funding, status, and deportation. Still more struggle to complete their current classes as they confront fears of the forced removal of and possible separation from their families. As the days and weeks since the election pass, the Federal political landscape is constantly shifting, increasing the uncertainty about what lies ahead after Inauguration Day for undocumented and DACA students in our schools and universities and for all immigrants in this country.

In response to this uncertainty, in the days immediately following the election, we sought out colleagues across the country, inquiring how others were responding to the election in their classrooms and on their campuses. From these initial conversations, we created a “secret” Facebook group—Protecting Undocumented Students—as a venue to share resources, ideas, and strategies. We began on the Saturday after the election as eight anthropologists; a few weeks later, the Facebook group had grown to over 1,800 interdisciplinary faculty, teachers, students, and allies from schools, colleges, and universities across the nation.



Por el futuro de mis hijos, 2006. Linoleum print. [Salvador Jiménez-Flores](#)

The group has been a vehicle for information sharing of dozens of petitions and letters sent to university administrators, presidents, and chancellors, which include requests for affirmations of support and demands for concrete steps to protect undocumented students, immigrant students, as well as all students of color and students feeling threatened by recent political events. Group members have shared resources for supporting students and their allies—safe spaces, speak outs, rallies, trainings and informational forums—to counter uncertainty and anxiety. Contributors are tracking [sanctuary campus](#) petitions circulating nationwide, a list that has exploded from dozens to over 140 colleges and universities in a matter of weeks. Other Facebook pages have spawned, including groups dedicated specifically to the sanctuary campus movement, community colleges, and K-12 educators and administrators.

This momentum carried us into the AAA annual meeting, where we organized a late-breaking session on Friday, November 18. Thirty-five faculty and students from public universities, community colleges, and small, private colleges from across the US came together to reflect on the challenges we collectively face and to discuss strategies for moving forward. We identified the following concrete actions:

1. **Provide immediate support to undocumented and DACA-mented students**, including expanding mental health services, building upon resources such as [United We Dream](#) and the [UndocAlly Program for Educators](#), and partnering with local immigration attorneys to host on-campus Know Your Rights presentations and trainings for differently documented students, staff and faculty.
2. **Foster inclusive campus and system-wide initiatives**, such as forming campus-based task-forces and regional coalitions to plan actions, share resources, and network, and continue to hold universities accountable for responding swiftly and decisively to incidents of bias, hate, and discrimination on campuses.
3. **Share teaching resources**, including establishing a repository of syllabi for classes related to (im)migration and refugees, examples of experiential and service-learning activities and collaborations, and resources to facilitate difficult discussions in these politically charged times.
4. **Enlist our anthropological expertise to communicate to diverse publics**. Be it participation in local public hearings, writing letters to editors of local newspapers, or publishing in more publicly-accessible venues, the imperative to harness our relative positions of power and expertise to inform public discussions is all the more urgent.

5. **Build a thriving coalition of faculty, staff and administration** through national call-ins and webinars about relevant policy changes to immigration and higher education and by establishing regional networks that consider the particular, regional political climates in which universities are embedded as resources and challenges to organizing.

Some students in attendance at the late-breaking session shared their experiences as DACA students, expressing the importance of faculty recognizing that not all undocumented or DACAmented students are processing the election similarly. Some are ready to speak out or engage in political action, while others need safe spaces and mental health support to process their fears and uncertainties. One student shared, "As students, we need *you* to be *our* teachers and assume your roles as educators and leaders; we don't need you to make *us* be *your* teachers."

Moving forward, as the newly formed Anthropologist Action Network for Immigrants and Refugees, we embrace this call to action and *we invite you to join our efforts*.

To join the Facebook group and listserv for the Anthropologist Action Network, please email lauren.heidbrink@csulb.edu.

Kristin Elizabeth Yarris is assistant professor in the Department of International Studies at the University of Oregon.

Lauren Heidbrink is assistant professor in the Department of Human Development at California State University, Long Beach.

Whitney L. Duncan is assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Northern Colorado.

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