November 17, 2016 New York Times

Could Colleges Become Sanctuaries for Undocumented Immigrants?

By Shannon Najmabadi  NOVEMBER 17, 2016  PREMIUM

Students and faculty members at Rutgers U. at New Brunswick rallied in a nationwide series of protests on Wednesday to oppose President-elect Donald Trump’s threat to deport undocumented immigrants.
Xavier Maciel, a first-year transfer student at Pomona College, was in a crowded room as the results of the presidential election came in. He was born in the United States, but his parents and sister were not, and he stared at the television screen in disbelief as Hillary Clinton conceded to Donald J. Trump. While campaigning, Mr. Trump was particularly combative in his rhetoric about undocumented immigrants, pledging to deport millions and to eliminate the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which gives some undocumented young people two years to work and live in the United States without fear of deportation.

The day after the election, faculty members at Pomona circulated a letter proposing that the California college become a sanctuary campus — an idea similar to a sanctuary city, where officials limit cooperation with immigration authorities’ deportation efforts.

In the week following the election, people at more than 50 other colleges have devised similar petitions, according to a spreadsheet Mr. Maciel created to track them. On the list are, among others, Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and Brown University, where Naoko Shibusawa, an associate professor of history and American studies, thought of the idea after a student came to her office crying inconsolably the day after the election.

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On Wednesday, just a week after the election’s result became known, students at dozens of colleges across the country participated in coordinated walkouts in support of establishing sanctuary campuses at their institutions. The movement, emerging from broader worries about the precarious state of undocumented students in higher education, is notable for the speed at which it has spread.
But is the demand practical? And with many colleges already leading efforts to help undocumented students succeed, how much will it add?

The notion of a sanctuary campus may mean different things to different people. María Blanco, executive director of the Undocumented Legal Services Center in the University of California system, says it could encourage students to ask that records not be turned over to immigration-enforcement officials, and that such officials not be allowed to conduct raids on the campus. Colleges already abide by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which protects students’ personal information, she notes.

Supporters of the sanctuary-campus idea could also seek affirmation that the college police would not enforce immigration law, Ms. Blanco says. Police chiefs in many sanctuary cities, like New York and Los Angeles, already observe such a policy, she adds, and so does the University of California’s campus police. "They don’t do it now," she says, "so I think it would just be a matter of confirming that they don’t do that."

Timothy P. White, chancellor of the California State University system, said on Wednesday that the system would not help deport undocumented students, reported the Los Angeles Times.

‘Very Vulnerable’

But many colleges haven’t yet responded to sanctuary-campus petitions. The ones that have often reaffirm their commitment to diversity and inclusion without making promises about policy.

Mr. Trump has threatened to withhold federal funds from sanctuary cities, and some observers speculate that colleges could be similarly penalized.

"The election has already had a chilling effect on open discourse," says Miguel Tinker Salas, an author of the Pomona petition for a sanctuary campus and a professor of Latin American history and Chicana/o-Latina/o studies there.

Undocumented students are "very vulnerable," he says. "That’s why it’s very important for campuses and universities to take these positions and make these statements because these students stood up, they made themselves be counted, and now to turn our backs on them, I think, would be outrageous."
When Mr. Maciel, the Pomona student, heard of the sanctuary-campus idea, he thought of his sister, an undocumented student at another college. This could be a way to keep her safe, he thought.

Pomona and other colleges offer many resources, including financial aid, to undocumented students. Colleges might now consider adding citizenship counseling or other support services specifically for immigrants or undocumented students, the authors of several petitions say.

In that way, supporters say, the call for sanctuary campuses becomes the starting point of a broader conversation about how best to help vulnerable populations on the campus.

"It doesn’t mean symbolic gestures. It means actually in practice saying we will not cooperate with federal authorities if it comes to that," Mr. Salas says. "Saying that we will continue to fund creatively, and whichever way we can, students that need funding and support and help."

Thais Marques, a fourth-year student at Rutgers University at Newark, helped coordinate the walkouts that took place nationwide on Wednesday. Under the Obama administration’s DACA policy, she became able to drive and get a job in 2012, and she received her first-ever identification card.

Ms. Marques’s postelection fears derive not just from the threat of deportation but also from knowing that the government has the biometrics and other information she supplied for her DACA application four years ago, she says.

She was devastated by the election’s result, but the sanctuary-campus movement that coalesced so suddenly has given her a sense of solidarity, she says. And now that students are rising up, she says, it can’t just be against Mr. Trump, but rather for the advancement of immigrants and undocumented students.

"DACA really changed my life," she says. "Now there is a real fear that I am going to lose my DACA."
U.S. Probing Whether Post-Election Incidents Are Hate Crimes

By REUTERS

NOV. 18, 2016, 11:27 A.M. E.S.T.

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK — The U.S. Justice Department is investigating whether recent reports of intimidation and harassment, including in schools and at churches, violate federal hate crime and other civil rights laws, following a divisive presidential election campaign.

"Many Americans are concerned by a spate of recent news reports about alleged hate crimes and harassment," U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said on Friday in a videotaped statement. "The FBI is assessing, in conjunction with federal prosecutors, whether particular incidents constitute violations of federal law."

Civil rights groups have signaled alarm over attacks they say have targeted minorities, including Muslim, black and Hispanic Americans, since Republican Donald Trump won the presidential election on Nov. 8. There have also been reports of harassment toward Trump supporters.

Federal hate crime laws increase the penalties for criminal behavior that is motivated by bias against the victim based on race, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other protected classifications.

Earlier this week, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released annual crime statistics for 2015 showing a 67 percent increase from the previous year in hate crimes against Muslims, a report that Lynch called "deeply sobering" on Friday.

During the campaign, Trump proposed temporarily keeping Muslims from entering the country to protect national security, though he has since backed away from a total ban.

The wealthy businessman and former reality television star has called for unity since the election. In a televised interview, Trump told people to stop engaging in attacks and intimidation.

Lynch, who became attorney general in the spring of 2015, is expected to be replaced by U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama, who was named as Trump's choice for the country's top law enforcement post on Friday.
Sessions, a former U.S. Attorney and state attorney general in Alabama, needs to be confirmed by the Senate in order to take Lynch's place, a process that could prove challenging despite his qualifications.

Sessions was denied confirmation as a federal judge in 1986 after allegations that he had made racist remarks. He denied that he was a racist but said at his hearing that groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union could be considered "un-American."

In a statement, the ACLU expressed concern over Sessions' record and whether he would protect the rights of "all Americans."

(Reporting by Susan Heavey in Washington and Joseph Ax in New York; Editing by Franklin Paul and Alistair Bell)