



**Challenges and Opportunities:
Conversations about Leadership, Immigration and Higher Education
March 24, 2011**

Strategy and Context for Today's Discussion

A. A National Initiative: Goal, Model of Change and Key Assumptions

In 2007 the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (National Forum), in partnership with a wide range of partners across the country, launched a national initiative to focus attention on educational opportunities for immigrant and undocumented students. With input from Latino leaders in higher education, the decision was made to base the initiative at the University of Michigan. This decision recognized the University's visibility in the area of educational diversity and its location in the Midwest, and was meant to signal that this is an issue of national and public concern that is inherently connected to the principle of expanding access to college for all capable students. A meeting to launch the initiative was held in Ann Arbor in spring of 2007 with funding from five major philanthropic foundations.

Our efforts over the ensuing four years have led us to adopt a **goal** and a set of **tested assumptions** that we believe are important to our **"model of change."**

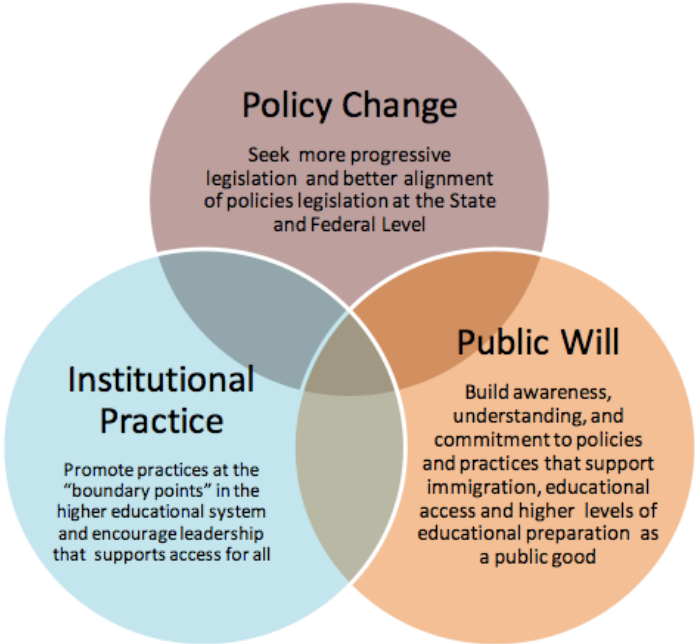
- Our goal is to ensure that Latino, immigrant and undocumented students have the opportunity to receive a college education.¹ This goal is consistent with the

¹ We recognize that Latinos, immigrants and undocumented populations are different from one another and that there is a tendency to conflate these groups in popular and political discourse. Our adoption of all three groups as the focus of this initiative and introducing them as subjects in the case studies is intentional and strategic. The most obvious legal and political issues surround access for undocumented students, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that all three groups are being denied opportunity through inherently related patterns reflected in institutional practices, public attitudes and legal positions. Tactically, we are combining overlapping constituencies when it allows us to draw on a powerful historical narrative as a bridge to a contemporary

belief shared across our initiative that all people should be given an opportunity to be educated to their full potential.

- In pursuing this goal, we are fully committed to the passage of the DREAM Act and comparable policies at state and federal levels that pave the way for access, success and full participation.
- For purposes of strategy, we assume that informed public policy will eventually create a framework for leaders to follow. However, we recognize that favorable legislation, isolated from other changes, will not completely address the challenge of educating Latino, immigrant, or undocumented students (just as court cases, civil rights laws, or affirmative action programs did not eliminate systematic barriers to opportunity in the past).

In light of our goal and assumptions, we contend that genuine access is dependent on the alignment of three factors: **appropriate policy, changes in institutional practice and cultivation of public support.**



manifestation of the same xenophobia and fear that has always surrounded "immigrants," "illegal aliens," "poachers," etc.

B. Strategic Commitments

As individuals committed to educational opportunity we continue to advocate for passage of appropriate legislation, but we do not think it is enough (absent other changes) to achieve our complete goal. Likewise, the failure of the political process does not excuse or prevent us from taking other steps consistent with our goals and assumptions, especially those that are directly related to our responsibilities as professional educators. Consistent with our understanding of history and given a logical consideration of all the factors that stand in the way of greater opportunity for all capable students, we believe we are required to:

- build understanding across higher education and society about the national importance of the issue of educating Latino, immigrant and undocumented students
- work to make inclusive institutional practices and outreach activities the norm across higher education
- make opportunities visible to aspiring students so that they can find the path through high school, college and beyond to full participation and the best forms of service
- create a bigger and more vigorous professional commitment to the underlying principle of access for immigrant and undocumented students who are willing and capable of “pursuing the dream” with or without the benefit of congressional action
- support educational leaders and institutions that take steps to make access meaningful
- be in a position to respond on behalf of students and educators to the negative characterizations and political pressures that have attempted to suppress public leadership and tried to push this issue behind a screen of fear and secrecy

C. New Challenges to Institutional Leaders

There are significant challenges faced by presidents, boards, admissions and financial aid officers, government relations and communications staffs² in balancing the compelling need, the legal ambiguity and the negative public reactions that surround any steps they take to address the issue of access for immigrant and undocumented students. Based on discussions with educators and policy makers at all levels over the last four years, we can attest to the dilemmas claimed by those in positions to shape and represent federal, state and institutional polices in such a volatile environment. Furthermore, in working with students—individually and in the context of their associations—we know that the threats *they* face are direct and

² We refer to these groups in our research as university “boundary functions” and note that in many cases individuals serving in these roles have the latitude to enact policies and practices that can either support or constrain inclusiveness. This is why we are focusing some part of our influence on professional associations that create norms and standards for these groups, and working with the key “bridging organizations” that engage university executives. We have recently entered into research agreements with AACRAO and NAFSAA to conduct a confidential survey of institutional practices related to immigrant and undocumented students.

quite real. A study of previous civil rights and inclusion movements in which colleges and universities have played leading roles reminds us that this kind of pressure is not unique to this issue.

This is a challenge that is completely familiar to those of us working at the University of Michigan, in keeping with our institutional commitment to be in the vanguard of efforts to build public and institutional support for diversity, assure access and educational opportunity to all capable students, and provide an education that promotes a just society. But there is reason to believe that the context for educational leadership in this situation is different and more complicated than it might have been at other times in our institutional or social history:

- The **communications environment** in which college leaders operate may subject them to instant criticism which can originate from (virtually) anywhere in the country. The internet allows a small handful of people with no direct institutional affiliation to launch a firestorm against an institutional decision within a few hours, prompting local opposition to galvanize quickly to, in effect, “pile on.” The internet platform coupled with short-term focused media saturation amplifies negative voices.
- Students and educational leaders are caught in a **trap of secrecy**. Students face significant risks if they speak out openly about their circumstances. Institutions, including those with progressive policies, have become increasingly circumspect, fearing the repercussions of having their practices made public. This locks students and educators in a classic conspiracy of silence. Based on the experiences of other efforts to promote individual and civil rights it is easy to see where this can take us: making the marginal invisible is a step toward their outright dismissal.
- The numbers are admittedly daunting. To provide meaningful access to new populations during a period of limited public resources will require a **dramatic change in public attitudes**. Some college leaders fear that they do not have the capacity to serve more students when the public will to assure additional resources is not in place. The claims we have made for higher education as an individual and economic benefit have created an attitude about system expansion: “Make the system big enough to accommodate me (and mine). Everyone else is a luxury.”
- Colleges and universities have generally opened themselves to more constituency influence and political interest as one byproduct of situating themselves as “economic engines,” “research incubators” and “employment insurance” for their states. By defining higher education primarily in economic terms we may have overshadowed other important benefits we bring to society, including our role in opening doors to new groups, extending **meaningful democratic participation** or fostering social innovation. Unfortunately, many of our claims of contributing to the “public good” or to a “national

interest,” while still entirely germane, have been partially undermined by our own political posturing.

D. Current Research and Activities

Research conducted by the National Forum that was reported in spring 2010 at the national meeting of the American Association for Hispanics and Higher Education (AAHHE), makes clear that all major higher education associations, often referred to as the “*Big Six*,” have (since 2006) gone on record in supporting the DREAM Act,³ but not all institutions adopt practices consistent with that espoused set of principles. Recently, with funding from the Texas Guarantee Loan Agency, we have partnered with the major professional organizations that represent admissions, registrars and financial aid officers to better understand what is really going on at the “decision” level within colleges and universities. Information from this study will be collected and reported anonymously as we are well aware that college leaders are increasingly cautious about speaking out on an issue that one president described, simply and plainly, as “toxic.” This national study has been fully funded and commenced in September, 2010.

We also have underway a project, recently funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to support the development of student documentaries and the creation of an integrated communications strategy that will narrate this issue and offer a safe way for undocumented students to share their stories. Award winning filmmakers and journalists have pledged their time to work as mentors and offer technical assistance to this project. This is the third grant provided to us by Carnegie in support of this initiative.

On July 30, 2010 the Lumina Foundation for Education announced its sponsorship of a series of meetings that are being held across the country to focus on the role of colleges and universities in addressing the issues of Latino education, opportunities for immigrant students and access for the undocumented. The National Forum is organizing these meetings in cooperation with local institutions, incorporating unifying elements consistent with our analysis and “model of change” and with the aim of promoting national consensus on the importance of this issue among educators. We are also planning, in collaboration with Lumina staff, a jointly sponsored summit to take place at their headquarters later this year.

To date we have held meetings in cooperation with the University of New Mexico, University of California at Los Angeles, California State University—Fullerton, and the University of Houston. The most recent meeting, attracting over 250 educators and policy makers, was held at Rutgers University in late February.

³ Ortega, N. (2011). The Role of Higher Education Associations in Shaping Policy That Connects Immigration to Educational Opportunity: A Social Capital Framework. *The Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*.

E. About Today's Meeting

The subtext for today's meeting might be "Leadership at All Levels" and it will explore the roles of various "actors" in the educational and policy making communities in responding to the issue of access within a context of legal ambiguity, limited resources, and uncertain public support. This meeting, the last in the national series funded by the Lumina Foundation, has been structured in a way that allows a more focused and engaged discussion of the contentious issues at work, and the constraints that operate on institutional decision makers.

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Goals:

1. Increase awareness of the issues as they affect Michigan and the Midwestern states and build understanding of the variety of institutional responses available under current law
2. Foster an open discussion about the implications of current policies as they affect students, their families, educational practice, institutional values and commitments
3. Give guidance to ongoing efforts being made to address the *challenges and opportunities* of immigrant and undocumented students by offering insights to national funders and professional associations and informing future aspects of the work of the National Forum.



Outline of Agenda

Morning Session:

- A. Introduction and Framing Presentation
- B. Panel Presentation that examines the issue of immigration and undocumented student access through four lenses:
 - Demographic changes as reported in 2010 Census and other Sources
 - Economic and strategic Implications, with a special focus on Michigan
 - Political and legal context of the DREAM Act and Policies within the Various States
 - Implications for Diversity, Democracy and Society
- C. Discussion
- D. Introduction of First Case Study

Lunch

Brief Presentation

Afternoon Session

- E. Presentation of Related Case Studies and Moderated Discussion
- F. Plenary Discussion, Wrap-Up and Adjournment

Today's meeting in Ann Arbor is, by design, smaller with a more structured format than those held at UCLA, Rutgers or the University of New Mexico and it responds to what we learned in those venues by drilling down into a specific tension point in building public support for educational access for affected groups. Rather than inviting expert speakers to present information in a series of panels (as has been done elsewhere) we are constructing one panel and inviting discussion among participants. We will also use a case study/discussion structure which is further described below. This design has been adopted because at this point in the initiative we have identified institutional leadership as being particularly crucial and particularly difficult. We are using the meeting today to learn from participants more about what their information needs on this issue might be, and what constraints and opportunities for action they see.

Synopsis of the Case Studies

The first case study is based on an incident at California State University-Fresno in 2010. It involves a story reported in the college student newspaper that exposes the student body president as an undocumented student. The university issues a statement suggesting that the student had not attempted to hide this fact from the administration and had voluntarily foregone any income from his elected position. The local television station interviews the student and other students offer their opinions on his status as well—some in quite forceful terms. The case examines the security and status of undocumented students even when they are legally enrolled; student development and identity issues associated with immigration status; campus attitudes; and institutional responsibility to protect students from attacks based on issues of identity or status.

The second case study is also generally based in California although it took on a national character because of the student involved and the media attention it generated. This event also occurred in 2010. The case involves a private scholarship offered by a community college to support attendance by undocumented students. Soon after the scholarship is announced, it is attacked by a U.S. Member of Congress as “an insult” to legal immigrants and hard working citizens. The institution is threatened with loss of funding and the president must make a decision as to whether the scholarship should be withdrawn or continued. Issues raised in this case include the private vs. public nature of scholarships; the role of national media in framing and defining issues; the use of language in referring to undocumented, illegal or alien status; and presidential leadership in a crisis.

The third case study begins with an arrest on a state university campus and expands to a change in state policy regarding the status of immigrant and undocumented students. A graduate student enrolled at Kennesaw State University (Georgia) was arrested for a traffic violation and threatened with deportation. Her institution defended her right to remain at the

university and pointed out her distinguished academic record and potential contributions to the state. The Georgia legislature took up the matter and passed legislation severely restricting enrollment by undocumented students anywhere in the state system. Issues in this case include the importance of public opinion and leadership; the nature of influence and governance in state systems; the role of campus police in enforcing immigration laws; presidential communication and leadership; and state policy.

At nearly the same time as these three case studies took place at opposite ends of the country, a Harvard University student was detained on semester break and asked to leave the country. The Harvard president came to the defense of the student and argued the importance of bright young people to the nation's future. Harvard came under attack for their policy but rode out the storm. Issues in this case include the importance of public opinion and leadership; the nature of influence and governance in state systems; and presidential communication and leadership. Other institutions have faced similar pressures and many have withstood negative attacks, successfully defending their institutional positions. A growing number of colleges and universities have formally and publicly endorsed the passage of the federal DREAM Act and made known their inclusive policies toward immigrant and undocumented students.

What are the case studies and the ensuing discussions supposed to teach us?

Perhaps we should begin with what the cases are *not* intended to do: The purpose of the case studies is not to build consensus or result in action by the group. They are structured to uncover complexity in the handling of student and institutional issues related to undocumented students. If anything, they should lead educators to a better appreciation of the pressures faced by students in these circumstances, pressures that are often exacerbated by institutional practices and public pressures. They also suggest, as will be elaborated below, that institutions have opportunities to act in accordance with their espoused principles and their missions, but that there are risks in taking a public position which must be weighed against the impact on students (and the integrity of the institution) when action is not taken.

The underlying pedagogy at work in these case study discussions is generally drawn on basic *adult learning theory* which suggests that adults seek active participation in learning experiences and that generally they learn by making connections between new information and their previous knowledge of experiences. While learning in a general sense is always an objective, this exercise invites participants to identify inconsistencies (conflicts or dissonance) between their personal values, professional values, institutional decisions and behaviors they take directly or represent in some way. While we don't seek to facilitate full resolution of the many personal and professional dilemmas introduced by these cases, our goal is to create an atmosphere of collective discovery and investigation. This reflects a standard model of work adopted by the National Forum:



Dialogic Change Model⁴

The cases can promote awareness of institutional options available under current law which, when considered in light of the legitimate goals of colleges and universities to attract and educate all capable students, illustrate the principle of “institutional isomorphism” (the ability of complex organizations to optimize the realization of their interests within dynamic environments). Critical to this concept is the role of leadership, especially as exercised by individuals posted at “boundary functions” (admissions, financial aids, communications, general counsels, and presidents) within institutions. The cases illustrate how these professional roles operate to set institutional policies within broad legal parameters often out of public view. It also shows how quickly they are affected by pressures from political and media sources.

In terms of our posited *model of change* (page 2) the cases inter-relate the influences of *policy, practice and public will*. Even when the law has not been violated, institutional practices can become controversial. Public opinion can take a straightforward circumstance and spin it toward very unfavorable resolution. Given the interaction of forces, changing the law will not assure access nor will depending on changes in public opinion to simplify institutional practice. There is risk in action and risk in avoidance.

The cases also do a good job of exposing the power of language and surfacing the different ways that “framing” operates to direct attention towards or away from central issues in a given set of circumstances. While the television reporting in these cases might be seen as exaggerated, in fact it fairly represents the way in which local and national media are covering

⁴ The mission statement of the National Forum is “ to significantly increase the awareness, understanding, commitment and action relative to the public service role of higher education in a changing democratic society” This mission statement, as it imbeds a specific process of change, guides much of our work. For more information on the dialogic model and how it used by the National Forum, see our web page at www.thenationalforum.com

the issue. While colleges and universities may prefer to consider these issues in a manner that is “balanced and fair,” they are operating in an environment in which rational decision are often difficult to make; more specifically, an environment that may condition students to respond forcefully and with passion.

The cases were not constructed to emphasize issues of diversity or to illustrate forms of racism and xenophobia in our society. Nonetheless they do. An immigrant from Germany is identified as Vietnamese because of her name and parent’s background. A young man who came to this country at three years old is described as harboring a lifelong secret along the lines of a genetic disease. Mexican immigrants are pictured with oversized cigars. Language is parodied. It is all there.

F. Next Steps in the Initiative

- Meeting at Lumina Foundation (May, 2011) to discuss the status of the issue and its implications for national goals to increase educational attainment
- Implementation of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to establish a communications strategy, providing research on policy within states and at the federal level, and its impact on institutions and on students
- Creation of a national “Storm Center” with grant support from the Ford Foundation. This is a mechanism to provide support and communications assistance to presidents, governing boards or associations that adopt inclusive policies for enrolling undocumented students.

The National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good

- Mission to “increase awareness, understanding, commitment and action relative to the public service role of higher education”
- Founded in 2000 with a substantial grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Draws on and is affiliated with the research capacities of the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan
- Employs about 20 graduate and undergraduate students in research and advocacy projects

Major Funders

W.K. Kellogg Foundation	Lumina Foundation	Community Foundations
Ford Foundation	Marguerite Casey Foundation	Kettering Foundation
The Lumina Foundation for Education	Atlantic Philanthropies	C.S. Mott Foundation
Carnegie Corporation	College Board	McGregor Fund

Partners in This and Related Initiatives

- National Association for Equal Opportunity in Education (HBCU institutions)
- Hispanic Association for Colleges and Universities (HACU)
- American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE)
- President’s Council State Universities of Michigan (PCSUM)
- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)
- Colleges and universities across the United States