



June 30, 2014



## California Dreamers: Education for All

Posted: 01/08/2014 1:10 pm

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Recently, I had lunch with the past president of the Bakersfield College student body, Danitza Romo. She was first in her family to go to college, as well as an undocumented immigrant in California who has tapped into the benefits of the DREAM Act in California. As we enjoyed an incredible meal at my local favorite Mexican restaurant, Don Perico, we talked about her courses, her work and her future. Her goal is to one day be the president of Bakersfield College. It was good for me to be listening to her enthusiastic hopes of giving back to the community that has given so much to her.

This conversation took place just a few days after the California Supreme Court granted Sergio Garcia the license to practice law in California. Jennifer Medina in her *New York Times* piece on September 20, 2013 cites UCLA professor Hiroshi Moromura:

It's a recognition that how people are living and working in their community might trump their formal legal status," said Hiroshi Motomura, an immigration law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. "There is an argument that in parts of California a jury without a legal permanent resident is not really a jury of peers. Some view citizenship as the final consecration of complete integration, but this says, 'Let's take who we have and get them to participate in our civil institutions. I am myself a naturalized citizen of the U.S. I started as the 10th president of Bakersfield College 12 months ago, in January 2013. My very first job was as a community college math instructor, and from my first exposure to the community college system I have been in awe of its role in American society. BC is one of 112 such community colleges in California, founded in 1913 as a local expression of the shared belief in the individual, economic and social value of higher education for all. It is also interesting to note Bakersfield's role in the mid-century renewal of this vision, as it was a Bakersfield legislator Dorothy Donahoe who triggered, in 1959 the work on the California Education Master Plan that resulted in the three-tiered system -- CC, CSU and UC. Again with the goal of having higher education available to all Californians.

When I think of immigrants in California, broadly speaking they can be clustered into three categories: naturalized, documented non-citizens and the undocumented immigrants. The 2009-2011 Data Profile for California shows that out of the 37.6 million total population, 73 percent (27.2 million) are U.S.-born and 27 percent (10.3 million) are immigrants. Of the Immigrant population 12 percent (4.7M) are naturalized; eight percent (3.0 million) documented but non-citizen; seven percent (2.7 million) are undocumented.

In many industries, particularly in technology areas, naturalized immigrants have high paying jobs and contribute greatly to society through their skilled labor, the taxes they pay, the ways that they give back to the community through private philanthropy and civic engagement.

Documented non-citizens, the second of my categories of immigrants, are usually those who have a green card but have not applied for citizenship. I was surprised to see in the May 2013 report, by Manuel Pastor and Enrico Marcelli titled *What's at Stake for the State*, that the median number of years these immigrants have been in the country is 19 years. And I wanted to see if they just chose not to apply to citizenship and be naturalized or if there was some other reason.

The study shows that the citizen immigrant fairs better than even the U.S.-born, judging by the economic indicators of percentage at least 150 percent above the poverty level (80 percent compared to 77 percent) or percentage with home ownership (64 percent compared to 59 percent).

With this picture in mind, broadly speaking the impact of these immigrant populations our society can be characterized in two sharply contrasting ways:

- Citizen immigrants and documented non-citizens provide a disproportionate number of high performers in the workplace, particularly in the science, technology and math areas. They excel in areas like the academic decathlon in high schools; science Olympics etc. in high schools. (For example, have you tuned in to the national spelling bee contest?)
- However, undocumented immigrants have families who have not gone to college. They do not understand the college going culture and what it takes to succeed. Their study skills are low. And often, they are English Language Learners (ELL).

We must continue to extend the unquestioned economic and social success of both the original community college vision of a century ago as well as that of the California Education Master Plan, by completing the promise of "education for all."

Within California, the DREAM Act, or AB 540 (2000), allows all qualifying students, including US citizens, lawful permanent residents, as well as undocumented students the ability to pay in-state tuition (effective 2001). They must meet certain

requirements, like having attended a high school in California for three or more years, that would establish their role as *bona fide* members of our society.

This legislation has had a tremendous impact on students like Danitza. For example in 2012-2013, in-state community college tuition for 60 units for a student to transfer was \$2,760 as opposed to \$15,240 which they would have had to pay if the DREAM Act was not in existence. That is a hefty \$12,480 difference for a community college student that makes the difference between opportunity and lack of it by removing barriers for a segment of our society that can and should contribute to our community through their successes. The financial impact is even more pronounced for the CSU and the UC systems.

This is a social justice issue because every child deserves to be educated. And every parent of every child needs to be educated. It is also a public welfare issue, because children in school are actively learning and not as prone to delinquent behavior. Children who are better educated are smarter about figuring out consequences to poor behavior.

Although immigration has been continuous throughout American history, there was an age of mass migration between 1880 and 1924, primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe, and we are still in the midst of a post-1965 wave of immigration, primarily from Latin America and Asia (Min 2002, Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Each of these eras added more than 25 million immigrants, and helped to build our society.

America is a nation largely built by immigrants, and has a proud legacy of making success through hard work available to all by removing barriers rooted in social and economic class exclusions. We must honor that legacy and continue that work. What this means to me is what the Bakersfield community wanted 100 years ago in 1913; and what our Bakersfield legislator Dorothy Dohanoe wanted in 1959, nothing less than education for all.

All Californians whether they are U.S.-born, naturalized citizens, documented non-citizens, or undocumented non-citizens must have the right to education, to real opportunities for success, to the chance to excel and be contributing members of our society.

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