

How the Current U.S. Federal Government Immigration Policies Affect Undergraduate
International Students Enrolled in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Although the United States has always been the forerunner for global collaboration in higher education, this identity has come under new scrutiny under President Donald Trump's Administration. On the topic regarding immigration laws and rights, the rhetoric used by the current United States Federal Government on these issues has begun to create a noticeable shift in the climate and culture on college campuses for international students enrolled in higher education institutions. This paper investigates how the polarizing views on immigration in the United States has affected the enrollment, inclusivity, administrative policies, and overall satisfaction of international students enrolled in higher education institutions. Using the data collected, this literature review will address: (1), the history of internationalization in United States higher education institutions, (2), how the United States' immigration policies intersect with international students, and (3), how students and administrators are responding to and balancing the climate created by the United States Federal Government's rhetoric. The analysis shows that higher education institutions need to be aware of the actions and policies made by the federal government, so that they can properly advocate and create resources for their international students. Higher education institutions should also assess what is needed to support their international students through targeted surveys to collect intentional data. There needs to be a conscious effort made by campus administrators to support the safety and retention of their international student populations.

Keywords: International Students, Government, Immigration, Higher Education, Internationalization

Introduction

Higher education institutions have a strong history of promoting and encouraging campus internationalization in the United States. Campus internationalization entails different things in the context of higher education. Internationalization is defined as “a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (Deardorff, Wit, & Heyl, 2012, p. 4). However, this definition could be different depending on the campus that the student is attending. But combined, these two words, campus and internationalization, delineate a place that students from different nations go to learn. The United States has repeatedly boasted to be the nation to which international students strive to come for study and is the top global host of international students leading the way at 23.5% (UNESCO, 2015), but as a result of the current federal administrative policies and rhetoric, there has had a significant effect on the culture and climate around international students enrolled in higher education institutions. For the purpose of this paper, an international student will be defined as "an individual who is enrolled for credit at an accredited higher education institution in the U.S. on a temporary visa, and who is not an immigrant (permanent resident with an I-51 or Green Card), or an undocumented immigrant, or a refugee" (UNESCO, n.d.). A higher education institution will be defined as any public or private not-for-profit, four-year college or university, for the purpose of this paper.

As technology expands and creates more pathways for people from different countries of origin to interact, it is important for higher education institutions to keep up with these trends of interaction and globalization. Higher education institutions need to pay close attention to the outside forces that have a direct influence on their student population, as it is integral to their

survival. Furthermore, in order for higher education institutions to maintain this contributor to their longevity, they need to be aware of the external influences that affect it.

The purpose of this review of literature is to examine the correlation between federal policies in the United States government and the culture and climate of actively enrolled international students in private and public colleges and universities.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on the types of influence the current United States Federal Government's Immigration Policies have on undergraduate international students enrolled in higher education institutions can be categorized into three major areas that address: (1) the history of internationalization in United States higher education institutions, (2) how the United States' immigration policies intersect with international students, and (3) how students and administration are responding to and balancing the climate created by the United States Federal Government. Each of these areas will show how international students are navigating the culture and climate created on their campuses by the federal government's actions and dialogue on immigration policies.

The History of Internationalization in U.S. Higher Education Institutions

Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) provide comprehensive data on how national developments can have lasting effects on the relationship between a campus and its internationalization efforts. Campus internationalization entails almost everything in regard to international studies. Originating from universities and colleges wanting to attract students from overseas, universities want to have new students from abroad because they recognized the importance of learning from other cultures and people. This method of collecting comparable data in education began to gain significance toward the end of the nineteenth century (Phillips &

Schweisfurth, 2014). Campus internationalization is important for an institution for several reasons. First, with so many different people, with different beliefs, and different educational backgrounds, campus internationalization is a breeding ground for new and fresh ideas. It also creates a space where students can learn to accept all of those differences that they might not understand at first. The second reason why internationalization is important is that it helps support the idea of global citizenship. Global citizenship simply means to be a citizen of this planet, but it unfortunately can teach students “blind patriotism and xenophobic attitudes [when it] is intended to encourage [...] empathy for people of other cultures; a sense of social justice; and [...] world-mindedness.” (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2014, p. 59).

Deardorff, Wit, & Heyl, (2012) found that although the 21st century is recognized for its rise in campus globalization, the United States has a history of isolating itself from the world as a result of their neglect for diplomacy and the lasting, aggressive repercussions of the Iraq and Afghanistan War. As a result, the leading factors to support creating a campus that is internationalized would be to have more money budgeted to a campus’ international affairs offices and departments, more student involvement, support from the deans of the university, and to have international activities better integrated into the campus core (Deardorff et al., 2012). This could be as simple as offering a language class that is not Eurocentric, for example offering more courses that teach Mandarin, Hindi or Arabic as opposed to French, Spanish, or German. Languages outside of Western Europe that are taught in higher education institutions help students engage with different cultures, and helps to change the perception of a country and its citizens (Soler, Björkman, & Kuteeva, 2017).

How U.S. immigration Policies Intersect with International Students

While the United States Government may be telling one story of how immigration and immigrants should be treated in the nation, it is up to college and university administrators and students to construct a different narrative on their campuses that help encourage a more inclusive environment. Capizzi (2012) highlighted Rutgers University's efforts to make transformations for their international students by having debate on the institution's Constitution Day. The debate was free to the public and featured was on the topic of immigration and access to higher education. The debate topic questioned if immigrants who qualified for deferred action for deportation relief under executive order should also have a corresponding right to "establish legal residency under state law in order to apply for financial aid and to pay in-state tuition" (Capizzi, 2012, p. 6). The debate was open to the entire campus and community so that they could respond to the discourse over The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). While international students are not always immigrants, campus constituents often subconsciously place them into that category.

According to research done by Gildersleeve (2017), students are being reduced to, and accepting, undocumented and illegal identities given to them by the public, state, and federal policies in their higher education institutions. Gildersleeve (2017) highlighted how discursive the language in federal and state policies for these students are stated by studying how in-state resident tuition policies create intra-secting policy texts that reified students into illegal identities. Smith (2016) also discussed how there was a direct intersection between identity and access to power for international students and how it was up to the higher education institutions to see these historic patterns and create positive transformations on their campuses for these students. The positive transformations that Smith (2016) found that were necessary for

institutions to take were changes in the curriculum, faculty capacity, and knowledge development to create a diverse and engaging environment for their international students.

How Students and Higher Education Administration are Responding to and Balancing the Climate Created by the U.S Federal Government

The PEW Research Center (2015) discussed results from a survey it conducted in May 2015. Results indicated that 72% of American citizens supported a process for undocumented immigrants to become either legal citizens or permanent residents in the United States. However, there is a distinct split within the country as the public debates over what the best approach is for legal immigration policies and procedures. Within Congress, 42% of Republicans and 27% of Democrats think that legal immigration should be decreased, and 35% of Americans who have completed college and those from lower socio-economic statuses are more likely to say that legal immigration should also be decreased (PEW Research Center, 2015). On the issue about whether providing legal status for illegal immigrants is a reward for wrongful actions, 58% of Republicans and 23% of Democrats agree, and four-in-ten (43%) American citizens over 50 and 37% of American citizens under 30 also agree. There is a distinct divide and polarization of opinions happening within United States' government and its citizens over immigration policies and as a result, the culture and climate concerning international students on higher education campuses has started to be affected.

Data collected in the Institute of International Education's (2017) *Open Doors* report of the International Education Exchange showed that there has been a 3.3% decrease in the new enrollment of international students. More specifically, there has been 1.3% decrease in new graduate, a 2.9% decrease in new undergraduate, and an 8.8% decrease in new-non-degree international student admissions. With international students contributing over \$39.4 billion to

the United States economy in 2015 (Institute of International Education, 2017), colleges and universities are responding to the new enrollment decline through increased outreach, recruitment, and advocacy for their institutions.

The *Open Doors 2017* report highlighted that higher education institutions are more concerned about increasing their new enrollment numbers of students from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia for the fall of 2018. In order to keep and recruit new international students from the desired countries, the top seven actions that institutions are taking to make their campuses more inviting are to: (1) alert students to any changes in United States Policies, (2) issue statements supporting international students, (3) create opportunities for international students to discuss the United States' social and political climates, (4) provide counseling to international students concerned with the United States' social and political climate, (5) create social media that lets international students know that they are welcome on campus, (6) provide a legal clinic or connect students to immigration lawyers regarding United States Politics, and (7) engage with policy makers to educate and urge support for international students. (Institute for International Education, 2017).

Zhou and Cole (2017) conducted research using longitudinal survey data comparing the campus involvement of 191 international students and 409 American students, and how it influenced their overall satisfaction. The results of this study found that while both international and American students had similar, positive student-faculty interactions, international students had more frequent negative cross-racial interactions, which decreased their overall satisfaction. They also felt lonely more frequently than their American student counterparts. While there needs to be more research conducted on what makes an international students cross-racial interactions positive or negative and how it affects their satisfaction, the policy reformations that

Zhou and Cole (2017) proposed for higher education intuitions have merit. They suggested offering special interventions targeting international students and discussing the context of how services for the international student populations are being structured. While this article provided data on traditional international students and their attitudes towards their institution of study, there was no data for non-traditional international students, international students who are over the age of 25, enrolled in higher education institutions.

Knight's (2015) article provides higher education administrators insight on how to expose the implicit assumptions placed on international students. The first assumption explained by Knight (2015) is the belief that having more international students on a campus increases curriculum inclusivity. In reality, international students are socially and academically marginalized by their domestic student colleagues. This tension comes from the lack of specific programming on increasing positive student and staff intercultural experiences from the institution. The next three assumptions explained by Knight (2015) are on how international students give their institutions a perception of prestige and high quality. International students are incorrectly viewed as a proxy for an institution's global networks and quality of curriculum. In reality there is often no method of measure for the internationality of a higher education institution and international students are viewed as a quantifying resource for status, than as students who are to be properly educated (Knight, 2015). The last assumption explained by Knight (2015) is how international student recruitment is handled like a top-down marketing campaign. The marketing campaigns conducted by institutions to increase their international student admissions fail to create strategies that "integrate an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the goals and teaching, research, and service functions" (Knight, 2015, p. 4) of a higher education institution. These common misinterpretations of international students

need to be addressed to ensure that internationalization efforts do not reflect misleading assumptions and higher education professionals can move in the right direction to better serve their international students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Coertjens, Brahm, Trautwein, and Lindblom-Ylänne (2016) provided a different view of international students in higher education. Putting emphasis on the lack of research found on the transition into higher education, their research was a collaborative publication from an international student's perspective. Coertjens, et al. (2016) aimed to expand the understanding of a student's transition into higher education by applying an international perspective and multiple research methods. Most research on this subject mainly stems from Western countries and applies to either a quantitative or a qualitative approach. Engaged in four distinct studies, Coertjens, et al. (2016) noted the different research methods for student transition from higher education institutions in Germany, Scotland, South Africa, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, and Japan, providing United States higher education administrators with programming data on strategies used. By looking at the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research conducted in those nine different countries, a more international view was provided for a balanced perspective of international student development. For more international student targeted data, Coertjens, et al. (2016) encouraged higher education institutions to move beyond collecting data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) because it only investigates how students' transition into higher education from a socio-cultural lens. While the data collected by Coertjens, et al. (2016) is on a perspective lacking in research, there is still little research done on international students outside of traditional European countries like the UK, Germany, and Asian countries other than China and Japan.

Conclusion

Policies and practices that higher education institutions could implement to combat the rhetoric on the polarizing views on immigration used by President Donald Trump's administration in the current United States federal government would have to begin from the way institutions collect their data. More targeted surveys designed for international students are necessary for assessing what policy and departmental changes are needed to better support these students. The safety and retention of international students is an all-campus effort, and the continued trend of keeping international student issues siloed to global education offices and departments will not create the positive transformations needed.

As immigration politics continue to intersect and influence education, it is important for higher education administrators to be aware of the actions that the United States government is taking, so that they can be prepared for the repercussions it may have on their international students. Because of how the current federal government is discussing and managing the policies and people around immigration, in combination with how polarized the American public is on this debate, a culture of non-inclusivity has been created. Higher education institutions are now at a crossroads to finding methods that both support and increase their international student populations while also managing the rhetoric surrounding their own policies and procedures to ensure that all of their students retain and have a positive experience on their campuses. By both opening dialogue on the issue and working with their local governments to advocate for their international students, higher education institutions can create the change their international students need to succeed at their institution.

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