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## What's AHEAD Poll # 13: Undocumented Students and Sanctuary Campuses

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### Keywords

Undocumented students, student support, equity, sanctuary campuses, advocacy, college leader perceptions

### Comments

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*What's AHEAD* draws on the expertise of higher education trend-spotters to offer insights into important issues in higher education management. Administered in the month following the inauguration of President Donald Trump, this poll sheds light on higher education leaders' perceptions of issues pertaining to undocumented students, sanctuary campuses, and immigration policy.

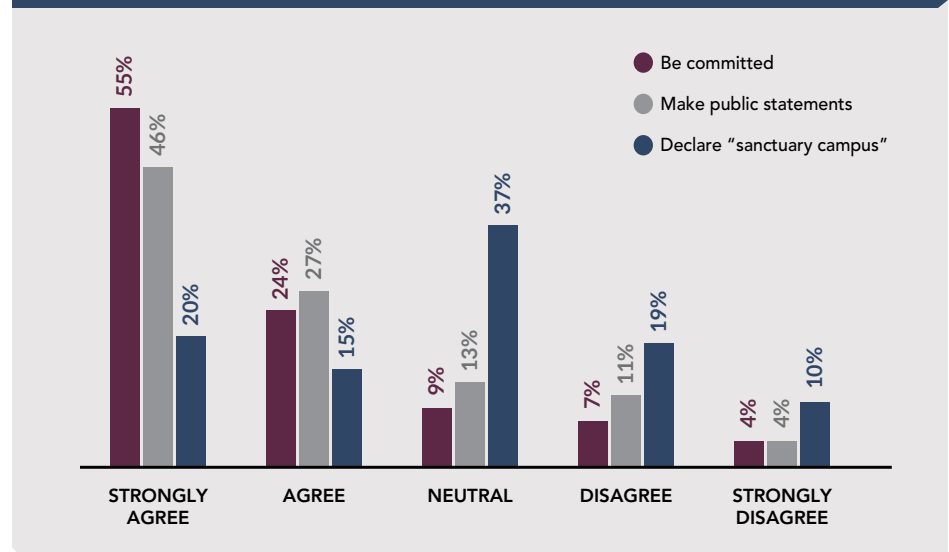
**Higher Education Leaders Hold Mixed Views About Whether Colleges and Universities Should Declare Themselves "Sanctuary Campuses"**

Most responding higher education leaders strongly agree (55%) or agree (24%) that colleges and universities should be committed to enrolling, supporting, and graduating students regardless of whether they are documented or undocumented. Most also strongly agree (46%) or agree (27%) that college and university leaders should make public statements about the need to support and educate undocumented students. But, on the issue of whether colleges and universities should declare themselves "sanctuary campuses," respondents hold mixed views. Only 20% strongly agree and 15% agree, while 19% disagree and 10% strongly disagree.

In a comment that reflects this pattern of responses, one respondent commented:

*While it is important to articulate and demonstrate support for undocumented students and absolutely do what we can to support (and protect) them, I don't think it prudent to risk federal funding for all of the programs it supports for other student populations on our campuses.*

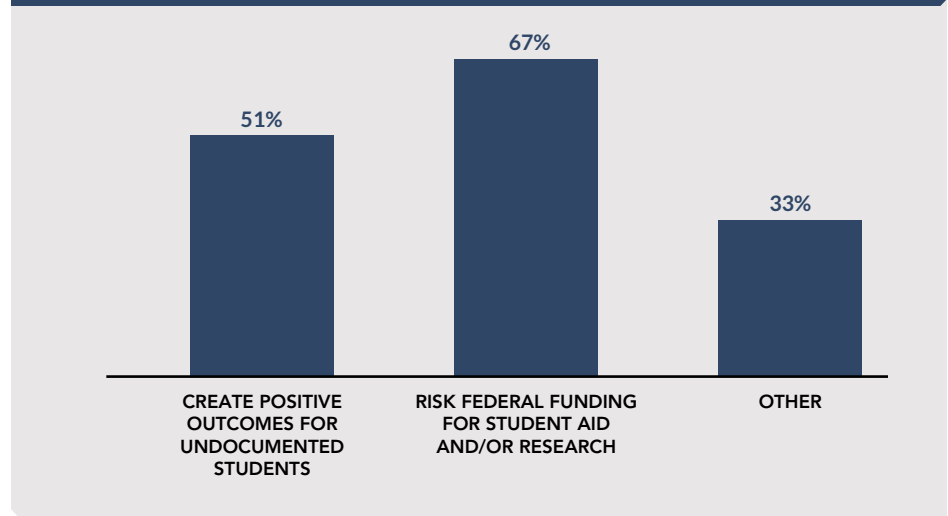
**FIG. 1 Agreement that college and university leaders should take various actions regarding undocumented students**



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FIG. 2 Potential consequences of “sanctuary campus” declarations



### Respondents perceive positive and negative consequences of “sanctuary campus” declarations

Half (51%) of responding higher education leaders believe that colleges and universities that declare themselves a sanctuary campus will create positive outcomes for undocumented students. At the same time, 67% of respondents also believe that sanctuary campus declarations will risk an institution’s federal funding for student aid and/or research.

While a few respondents are uncertain about potential consequences, most comments reflect clear opinions. Several respondents are opposed to this declaration, with some arguing that it “undermines respect for the law,” “makes a false promise to our students and others since we cannot defy the law,” “promises protection they cannot give,” and “eliminates dissent and free exchange of ideas around this issue.” Others noted the risk to alumni donations, “federal funding AND a big loss of reputation with the general public,” “backlash for those students within and outside the university,” and “the livelihood of those whom sanctuary campuses will protect.”

At the same time, other respondents are in favor of such declarations, noting that college and university leaders who do so “live their values in actionable ways,” “make a statement to welcome students,” “draw attention to the needs of these students,” and “stay committed to its ultimate social mission.”

Some noted that the implications of sanctuary campus declarations may be different for public and private institutions, given differences in governing structures and funding. Another respondent described the ways that these issues play out within her/his own institutional context, stating:

*5-10% of our student population is undocumented, so this has been a critical issue for the campus and highly emotional time for our students. We have declared Sanctuary Campus status, with the leadership of the president and support from our Board of Trustees. It has been difficult for us to*

*support undocumented students with the financial aid we need. Because of the high profile our president has taken on this issue, our campus has seen a significant increase in applications from undocumented. We use the same merit criteria for scholarships for all students, but we provide additional grant support for undocumented students. Given the large numbers, and the impact on the financial aid budget, there has been a difference of opinion on the capacity to support the financial need to ensure we can retain and graduate undocumented students.*

Some respondents commented on the label “sanctuary campus,” with one writing that, “The term is both ambiguous and has become a partisan lightning rod” and others preferring such alternatives as “safe campus” and “safe haven.”

A few leaders questioned whether these declarations are more than symbolic gestures. One respondent commented, “Our president has taken a public stand (after some encouragement by members of the community) but policy and practice doesn’t seem to have publicly shifted.” Another wrote:

*It seems that campuses that have declared themselves sanctuary are not, in fact, providing protection beyond what other campuses are in terms not allowing immigration enforcement activities or voluntarily providing information regarding citizenship unless compelled to do so by law.*

### Higher Education Leaders Should Share Concerns and Assess Implications of President Trump’s Executive Order

Most (77%) respondents agree that college and university leaders should share concerns with federal officials about the implications of President Trump’s Executive Order banning entry to the U.S. for students from seven predominantly Muslim nations. Nearly half (46%) of respondents agree that college and university leaders should publicly oppose the Executive Order, while 1% agree that they should publicly support the order and 11% believe that they should stay away from public announcements.

Most (75%) respondents agree that college and university leaders should assess the impact of the order on university operations, but only 11% agree that they should revise university policies.

**FIG. 3** Actions college and university leaders should take in response to the Executive Order Banning Entry to the U.S. for Nationals from Seven Predominantly Muslim Nations

ACTION	PERCENT AGREE
Share concerns about implications of EO with officials	77%
Assess the impact of the order on university operations	75%
Publicly oppose the order	46%
Revise university policies	11%
Stay away from public pronouncements	11%
Publicly support the order	1%
Other	12%

“Other” mentioned actions include providing support for students, faculty, and staff who are affected by the Executive Order, including pro bono and other legal support to affected students. Others suggested that institutions proactively promote the successes of undocumented students and contributions of immigrant students, faculty, and community leaders. A few respondents expressed caution in “speaking your mind,” with one noting that “not all college and university presidents may be in a position to make a statement without risk to themselves or their institution.”

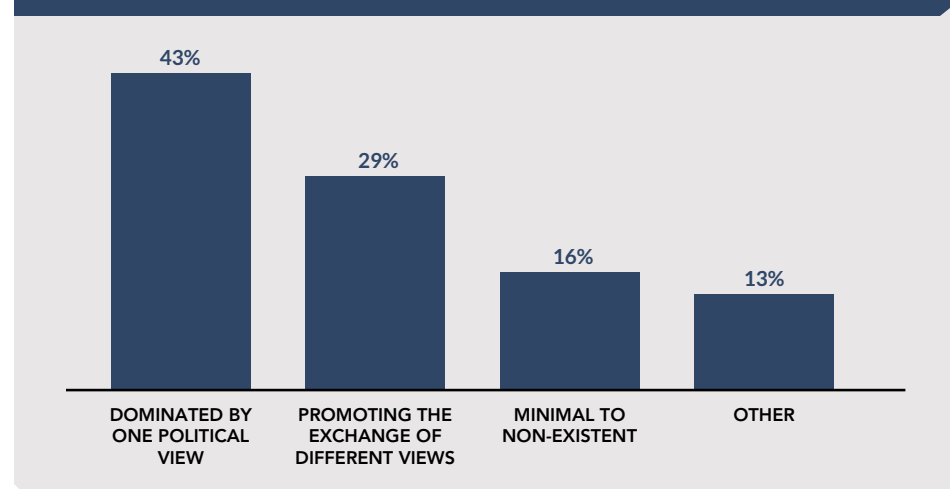
### Characterizations of the Discussion on Campus Vary

Among respondents who work at a higher education institution, nearly half (43%) report that discussion about undocumented students, immigration policy, and other post-election issues has been dominated by one political view. More than a quarter (29%) report that discussions promote the exchange of different views, while 16% report minimal to non-existent discussion.

Comments also reflect variation in the nature of discussion on campus. One respondent wrote, “We support undocumented students and have had no need to discuss the matter. For us, it is simply the right thing to do.” Suggesting the challenges of constructing discussions that include multiple perspectives, another respondent commented:

*Like other institutions, as a campus that values free speech and the open exchange of ideas, we're struggling to truly communicate with the conservative (and in the minority) voices on campus.*

FIG. 4 Nature of discussion about undocumented students, immigration policy, and other post-election issues, among leaders working at a higher education institution



### About This Poll

Members of the *What's AHEAD* trend-spotter panel were invited to participate in the poll (n = 373). The panel is made up of higher education leaders, including alumni of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania, and members of NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. We received 123 responses during the 10 days in which the poll was open (February 3-12, 2017): 107 of 257 Executive Doctorate alumni, 14 members of NASPA, and 2 other higher education leaders. About half (50%) of respondents work at private not-for-profit four-year institutions, 18% work at public four-year institutions, 10% at public two-year institutions, 2% at for-profit institutions, 3% at non-US based universities, and 2% in administrative units (e.g., system offices). The remaining respondents (14%) work in organizations other than colleges and universities. More than a third (37%) of respondents hold positions that focus on administration, 26% on academic matters, 19% in student affairs, 5% in finance, and 13% in other areas.

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### About AHEAD

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