

## **Calling Higher Education Leaders: Which Departments on Your Campus Serve Displaced Learners?**

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Particularly in the last eight years, many calls have been issued for postsecondary education stakeholders to imagine new pathways for displaced learners seeking access to degree programs. Here, “displaced learners” encompasses refugees, asylees, and individuals holding other legal statuses indicating temporary protection; these nationally-specific categories are constructs that may overlap with international student status (Oliveira & Kentor, 2020; Vigil & Abidi, 2019). While progress has been made – according to UNHCR (2022), only 5% of refugees access higher education worldwide at present, up from 3% in 2020 – it is clear that much more focused attention is required. In this piece, I am speaking specifically to college and university presidents as I ask: how is your campus serving displaced learners? Which departments are engaged, and what resources would you need to expand your offerings? What follows below is a list of questions posed to senior leaders in the United States and internationally, where diverse public and private institutions host initiatives that could be tailored to serve lifelong learners with histories of displacement, and with many campuses making significant investments in relevant areas including support for marginalized students and global engagement. This checklist is intended to underscore good practices and the role of institutional silos.

### **Internationalization**

Whether your campus is currently highlighting student mobility, COIL, intercultural competence, or other aspects of internationalization, a focus on displacement belongs underneath the internationalization umbrella. Here, I speak of an intentional approach to the integration of displacement across college/university functions. How does your institution enact an expansive understanding of internationality and migration via student

support services, for instance (a useful example: Rhode Island College's Office of International, Immigrant, Undocumented, Dacamented, and Refugee Student Services)? Further, how is displacement articulated across institutional commitments to internationalization and budget allocations; how is displacement addressed in curricula (for example teacher training curricula with graduates serving as instructors of migrant children); and how do college/university job descriptions highlight an interest in applicants with histories of migration and displacement?

### **Equity Initiatives**

Does your equity, diversity, inclusion, or social justice office reflect in its web-based materials, physical collateral, and programming that displaced learners, staff, and faculty may be served? The DePaul University Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity includes a webpage titled Immigration and Refugee Resources at DePaul University that outlines relevant statements from senior leadership, resources for legal services and free translation services provided by DePaul constituents, scholarships, events, and support services. This type of visibility and collation of relevant resources is a vital step.

### **Admissions & Financial Aid**

Is information about admissions and financial aid made available in languages other than English? Does your admissions team identify pathways to admission and FAQs for displaced students with various legal statuses (approved and pending asylee and refugee, parolee, Temporary Protected Status, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holder)? How is your admissions team offered training on these and other pertinent issues?

### **Development & Advancement**

As your development/advancement team plans a capital campaign or interim fundraising initiative, how do they prioritize financial aid for refugee and other displaced learners? Is this included in the menu of giving opportunities made available to potential donors as they visit the institutional website? In the suite of giving opportunities pitched to leadership-level donors? Salt Lake City Community College is doing this work as is Northeastern Illinois University.

### **Community Engagement**

As institutional giving to community organizations is planned, are groups serving displaced people in the region considered? Are they asked what sorts of engagement would be most useful (long-term funding, human resources, etc.)? As student volunteer, internship, and practicum

opportunities are assembled each year, how are those same organizations considered?

### **Student & Faculty Research Development**

Could your institution fund student and faculty summer research fellowships focused on displacement? Further, which academic departments currently address displacement in their curricula, and how might that expertise be harnessed for campus-wide action research on displacement, with that work centering displaced learners themselves? Finally, what senior level positions focus on migration and displacement? Does this fall under the role of the Senior International Officer, Chief Diversity Officer, Vice President for Intercultural Affairs, or another role? In other national settings there are senior level titles including Vice Rector for Diversity and Internationalization (University of Stuttgart); Executive Vice-President for Gender Equality, International Affairs, and External Affairs (Kyoto University); and the University of Sydney employs both a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Strategy and Services and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global Engagement.

### **Advocacy**

Institutions regularly advocate at state and national levels for initiatives including increased public funding of education, also offering information to alumni and other constituents interested in advocating on the university's behalf. The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and the Refugee Advocacy Lab offer useful resources in this area, as does Every Campus a Refuge. How can your institutional advocacy page be updated to reflect that displacement is a key concern?

### **Prior Learning Assessment**

Many campuses award credit for prior learning experiences, whether for veterans or other groups. My own institution, SUNY Empire State College, has been a leader in this area since the 1970s, and many other institutions offer similar pathways for adult learners with significant training and/or professional experience outside of a traditional classroom. These systems already in place might well be adapted to suit the particular needs of refugees and other displaced learners; this has been discussed in depth across national contexts in the recent open access publication *Refugees' access to higher education in their host countries: Overcoming the 'super-disadvantage.'*

## **Institutional Research**

How many students, staff, and faculty does your campus welcome who identify histories of displacement? That data will inform policy and programmatic iteration moving forward. Higher education institutions and alliances are nothing if not innovative. Indeed, departments for innovation abound. Contemporary displacement represents yet another area for institutional innovation, and the education of displacement people has been justified by at least four arguments (Unangst et al., 2022): student equity, humanitarian, internationalization at home, and economic. Just as higher education institutions in the US and elsewhere have considered education as a public good in light of their regional context, mission, capacity, and other factors, so too must they consider this new reality as permanent and pressing.

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