



Dr. Michael Rao, President  
Virginia Commonwealth University

December 5, 2016

Dear President Rao,

Your affirmation of Virginia Commonwealth University's commitments to inclusion, mutual respect, and service in your letter of November 9 was appropriate, and much appreciated. We also appreciate you signing the recent letter from college and university presidents across the country which calls for national leaders to uphold and expand the DACA program. As you mentioned in your November letter, the last election cycle was very emotional and difficult for many. In view of the acts of prejudice that followed the election in the Commonwealth and in other parts of the country as well as immigration policies that the government-elect has promised to implement, we urge you to adopt a public, written sanctuary policy in protection of the most vulnerable groups within our community. These include documented and undocumented immigrants; members of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; and members of the LGTBQ community. We are also concerned about the civil liberties and safety of our Muslim and LGBTQ students. Additionally, we request that you convene one or more forums to discuss the concerns of the VCU- and VCU Health System communities regarding the situation of the most vulnerable groups within our communities.

At this point, petitions for sanctuary policies have been presented to the authorities of several universities such as Virginia Tech, UVA, Rutgers, Georgetown, Harvard, and Yale among others. Currently, Columbia University and the California State University system have publicly embraced a sanctuary policy for undocumented students, and Swarthmore College is considering implementing one as well. In adopting a policy of sanctuary for vulnerable groups, VCU would set an example for other institutions of higher education. We have attached a list of recommended action steps for your consideration.

Thank you for your commitment to inclusion,

Sincerely,

Members of the VCU College of Humanities and Sciences Diversity and Equity Committee

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and Sciences

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## Recommendations/Action Steps

- Increase efforts to free our campus and classrooms from hostility, bullying, and other forms of aggression. Specific actions could include: providing resources for reporting harassment and seeking emotional and professional support; ensuring all staff, faculty, and resident assistants receive training in de-escalation intervention techniques; holding individuals or groups found to be directly responsible for harassment and hate speech accountable.
- Make a public statement supporting the continuation of the DACA program.
- Developing a page on the VCU website dedicated to providing resources for undocumented and DACA students.
- Assign an administrative office responsibility for advising undocumented and DACA students on their educational situation. This advising should be provided on a strictly confidential basis.
- Refuse to share information with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) across VCU and the VCU Health System, to the fullest extent possible under the law.
- Refuse ICE physical access to all property owned or controlled by VCU and the VCU Health System.
- Confirm that campus security is forbidden from inquiring about or recording an individual's immigration status or enforcing immigration laws or participating in ICE actions.
- Ban on-campus housing discrimination based on immigration status.
- Support undocumented and DACA students' equal access to in-state tuition, financial aid, and scholarships.
- Support the ability of qualified immigrant students to enroll and sustain their attendance by creating an Emergency Fund, as to fill any gaps created by discriminatory laws that exclude immigrant students from paying in-state tuition or accessing ordinary financial aid and scholarships on equal footing with other students.
- Provide legal services to undocumented students and their families, educating them in their rights and the types of immigration relief for which they may be eligible.
- Require all university staff, contractors, subcontractors and their employees working on property owned or controlled by the university, to be responsible for enforcing this sanctuary policy.
- Commit the university to an ongoing dialogue with faculty, staff, and students about additions to this sanctuary policy and support for community efforts that protect vulnerable groups who study, live, and work at the university and their families and the community.