



The Migrant

BY ELLEN ULLMAN

Ruby Salinas knows a thing or two about moving. Born in San Juan, Texas, she spent her childhood summers traveling the country with her family in search of farm work. Her mother and father harvested fields in California, Florida, and northern Texas. But they dreamt of a brighter future for their children.

“My parents wanted us to break the cycle and go to college,” says Ruby. “They didn’t want us, or our children, to be migrants.”

Ruby signed up for dual-enrollment classes at South Texas College in high school. Her early community college work earned her a full scholarship to the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, and she was recently granted early admission to dental school, where she will begin in 2012.

The Salinas family is not alone. According to the Geneseo Migrant Center, 1 million to 3 million migrant workers leave their homes each year to work in agricultural fields, many coming to the United States from homes in Mexico and Latin America.

The Pew Hispanic Center recently reported that one in four U.S. farm workers is an unauthorized immigrant, meaning they lack either a legal green card or U.S. citizenship. (For more, see: pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=126.)

The contributions of these workers to their local economies are indisputable. More than 85 percent of fruits and vegetables in this country require

Opening Doors

Efforts are under way across the country to open more doors to more students, particularly to children of unauthorized immigrants. In October, President Obama tapped Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón to chair the White House Initiative on Excellence for Hispanic Americans. Padrón will steer a commission of 30 academics, business leaders, and philanthropists tasked with helping the Obama administration improve educational prospects for Hispanic students. (For more, see: www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/hispanic-initiative/index.html.)

Congress also has had discussions on the topic. One effort supported by the Obama administration and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which aims to put unauthorized immigrant students on the path to U.S. citizenship and qualify them for federal financial aid.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed its version of the DREAM Act on Dec. 8, 2010. The Senate tabled its version of the bill in favor of acting on the House-passed legislation before the end of the year. In September, Senate

Democrats attempted to attach a bill to defense authorization legislation, but were blocked from bringing the defense bill up for consideration.

“The DREAM Act has always been a bipartisan bill with some Republican support, but the Republican takeover of the House is not promising,” says Jim Hermes, AACC’s director of government relations. “It will remain on our agenda and we will work with our partners to try and move it forward.”

Taking Action

As efforts continue on Capitol Hill, colleges are doing their part to provide opportunities for the migrant workforce.

“Migrant workers are such an important part of our country, and many of these folks are tax-paying citizens who deserve equal access to success,” says Luzelma Canales, interim associate dean of community engagement and workforce development at South Texas College (STC) in McAllen, Texas.

The college, situated on the border between Texas and Mexico, serves two counties—one with a migrant population of 35 percent, the other with a migrant population of 15 percent. Ninety-five percent of STC’s students are Hispanic.

“If we don’t educate this population and get them the skills they need to stay here in this robust region, it could be devastating to our economy,” Canales says.

Texas—the country’s second-leading state in agricultural production—has approximately 132,034 migrant workers, according to the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Agricultural products add an estimated \$16 billion annually to the state’s economy, making agriculture the second-largest industry in Texas.

It’s a similar story in Arizona, where Mexican migrant workers have historically been an important part of Arizona’s economy as miners, ranchers, and agricultural workers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture lists agriculture as a \$9.2 billion industry in Arizona, and the state leads the country in cantaloupe production.

STC aims to help by offering classes that better match migrant work patterns. “Migrant students would come to us in October and be ready to start college and

Workforce

hand planting, hand cultivation, and hand harvesting—jobs largely held by migrant workers. For many of these workers, however, opportunity often ends at the crop line.

The road to a higher education—to the dreams realized by Ruby Salinas and her family—is pocked with uncertainty.

COLLEGES AIM TO IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

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we'd have to say, 'Wait until January.' Then they'd be leaving in March. They could never accumulate college credits. We saw it as *our* responsibility to change," Canales explains.

To ensure high school students don't miss out on dual enrollment and other opportunities, STC opens new courses throughout the year. Since the college needs only 12 to 15 students to form a dual-enrollment course, classes can start anytime—so long as there are enough hours to teach the curriculum. "It's about being responsive and understanding the community," says Canales. The more than 9,000 students who currently participate in STC's dual-enrollment program are a testament to that sentiment.

Through a partnership with Motivation, Education & Training (MET), Inc., a federally funded organization that facilitates skills development and training for migrant and seasonal farm workers, STC co-developed a curriculum to prepare migrant workers for careers in green construction. "It's hard to find farm work because so much has been automated," says Canales. In addition to green construction, MET provides short-term training in such high-need fields as phlebotomy and nursing.

STC is also working with the non-profit Jobs for the Future to help migrant adults earn their GEDs. "We take folks at an eighth-grade level and put them into a simultaneous certified nursing and GED program," says Canales.

For migrant workers with a sixth-grade education or less, STC offers a contextualized English as a Second Language class, as well as the chance to enroll in an allied health postsecondary program.

"Employers have been telling us that so many doctors and nurses don't know Spanish; we're hoping that once we prepare these dual-language learners, they'll become a hot commodity," says Canales. "With the economic downturn, we expect more of our migrant families will stay here, so we will leverage our programs to put them into successful pathways." STC so far is headed in the right direction: In the past five years, the number of graduates has increased by 32 percent.

Providing Social Services

Santiago Canyon College (SCC) in Orange, Calif., is one of three community colleges in the state participating in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP). According to Anna Catalan, SCC's CAMP director, the school serves 40 students each year. To qualify, students must be U.S. residents in their first year of college who have worked in the fields for at least 75 days in the last two years.

"We provide support services, including a part-time counselor, a \$200 book voucher, a computer lab, two mentors, and English and math tutoring," says Catalan. CAMP also provides laptops for students to borrow on a weekly basis and bus passes, since many of the students ride the bus to school.



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Reaching Out to Undocumented Asian-American Students

When addressing the challenges of undocumented students, much of the national conversation focuses on students from south of the border—in places such as Mexico and Latin America. But there are a number of undocumented students from other countries as well, including those of Asian descent.

"Generally, people in higher education are surprised to learn there are undocumented Asian-American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) students," says Mark Mitsui, president of North Seattle Community College (NSCC) in Washington. "The DREAM Act would open a lot of doors."

Mitsui, who became president of the college in July, was previously vice president of student services at South Seattle Community College (SSCC), where he helped secure a \$2.4 million U.S. Department of Education grant and special designation for SSCC as one of six institutions serving AAPI students.

"It took a long time for that designation to occur," says Mitsui. "We had black colleges, tribal colleges, and Hispanic colleges, but it wasn't until two years ago that this designation was approved" for AAPI students.

SSCC currently is using the grant money to improve retention, transfer, and graduation rates for low-income and underserved AAPI students. It's a capacity-building grant that focuses on sustainable initiatives and replicable programs.

When applying for the designation, Mitsui's team created a series of videos to address some of the misperceptions about college, such as applying for financial aid and time management. Because many AAPI students struggle with English acquisition, Mitsui formed a learning community. "It was very successful," he says, "and served as a link between English and student-success classes."

As an added incentive, at semester's end, students who adhere to the program's rules receive a \$600 stipend toward the next semester.

Catalan and her staff use their own experiences as former migrants to better relate to students and families.

"We do a lot of parent meetings to discuss college requirements and what college entails," she says. Parents will ask, 'Is the library open on Saturdays?' They don't understand how much studying is required, especially if they need their children to help out at home."

During the summer, incoming migrant students are invited to take a six-week course that prepares them for college life. They learn such necessities as study skills and time management, and how to navigate the financial-aid department. In recent years, Catalan has invited Planned Parenthood to do workshops for the girls, since an unwanted pregnancy can derail education plans. She says the students who attend the summer program are more confident and trusting.

Diplomas and More

Larry Chaney, who runs the Bringing Education and Achievement to Migrants (BEAM) project at Somerset Community College (SCC) in Kentucky, says BEAM provides a year of instruction, tutoring, stipends, and other services to migrant farm workers. BEAM is funded through a High School Equivalency Program grant that allows the college to serve 110 participants each year; the goal is for at least 85 percent of those students to obtain a GED. "We work with them to transition into higher education, a higher-paying job, or the military," says Chaney. "Quite a few go into higher education, so we help them with enrollment and financial aid."

The 12-person staff (five are full time) spends a lot of its time on recruitment. Two of the full-time instructors work with local adult-education programs and social agencies that come into contact with potential students.

Two years ago, 90 participants earned their GED. Last year, 66 did so, and about

one-third went on to higher education. Chaney says the number decreased because of stricter enrollment requirements.

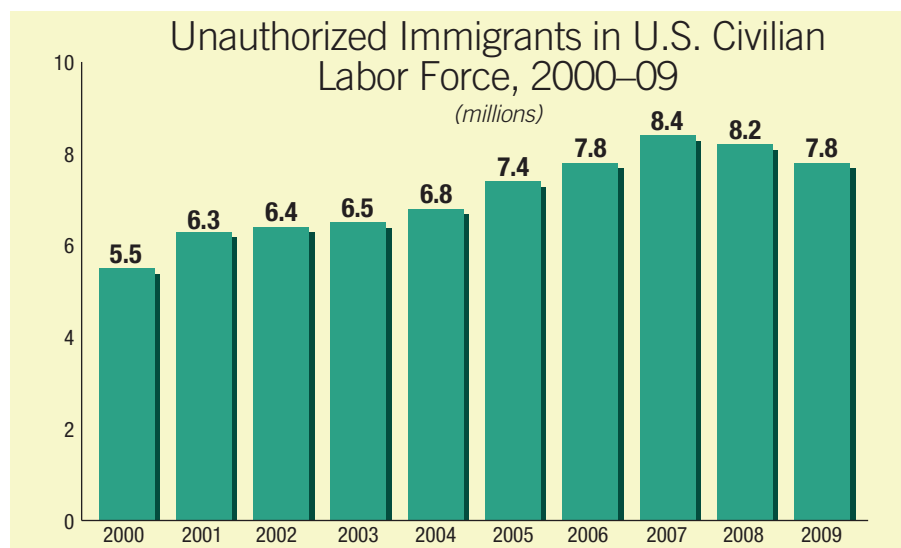
Blazing a Path

Educators know that helping one or two migrant workers tackle the rigors of college blazes a path for hundreds of others.

For STC's Canales, helping migrant workers earn a postsecondary degree or credential is more than a job—it's a calling. "Half of our population over the age of 25 has less than a ninth-grade education," she says. Without the help of these people, the economy in and around McAllen would suffer.

Ruby Salinas is doing her part, tutoring freshmen through the CAMP affiliate at her college. She's even been working on her family members. "I keep telling my little sister that since I'm going to get a doctorate, she'd better go for her Ph.D.," she says.

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Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates.