**Faculty Respond to Executive Order on Immigration**

**KATHRYN GANFIELD**

[**ul5097yl@metrostate.edu**](mailto:ul5097yl@metrostate.edu)

Metropolitan State faculty members have issued robust responses to President Donald Trump’s executive order on immigration. The overarching message is one of concern and support for students impacted by the order.

Professor Nantawan Lewis of the Ethnic and Religious Studies department is organizing a panel discussion on the executive order. “Since it was issued on January 27, there’s been a lot of concern, a lot of anxiety, a lot of uncertainty in the community,” said Lewis.

The executive order barred citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries: Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen. As of February 9, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has blocked the order. It is unknown when or if the Trump administration will issue a revised or new order.

Lewis noted that Metro State has a sizable population of students originating from Somalia, one of the affected countries. “We must examine how this ban impacts them, their classes, their families, their community,” she said.

She urges students to attend the forum, “to get a better understanding and to have an informed perspective— not just what they hear from social media.”

The forum will provide information on the seven affected countries, and historical context for the immigration and travel ban. “This didn’t drop from the sky, there’s a long history of executive power to determine who can come in and who cannot come in, who can be a citizen and who cannot,” Lewis said.

The event will be held March 1 in the Great Hall, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Panelists include Tamara Gray, Muslim scholar and faculty in the Ethnic and Religious Studies department; Jaylani Hussein, executive director of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) Minnesota; and representatives from the offices of Senator Al Franken and Congressman Keith Ellison.

“Don’t forget, this country is a country of immigrants. It’s incumbent on us all to learn, to know, to be aware, and to be informed so we don’t panic,” Lewis said.

**“We Stand with Our Students”**

Associate Professor Jose Santos of the Social Science department is one of sixteen Metro State professors who registered as faculty allies on the website westandwithourstudents.org. “I want [students] first of all to realize if they are an immigrant student – of which we have many – that absolutely the support is there for you,” said Santos. “…the faculty is behind you.”

Faculty who sign up indicate their willingness to stand with their students, wherever they are from and whatever their status and offer their guidance. The website is searchable by state and campus.

Santos called Metro State President Ginny Arthur’s statements on the executive order an important “first step,” but hopes “a hell of a lot more” happens.

“There’s an actual crisis going on in this country. Can [Metro State] be a model for change in this really problematic time? We need to reach out beyond these walls,” he said.

**“We Strongly Denounce this Ban”**

Assistant Professor Mark Asplen of the Natural Sciences department was an early endorser of an open letter of academics opposing the executive order. After receiving the link to notoimmigrationban.com from colleagues at the University of Minnesota, Asplen became signer number 2,150. At time of press, the letter now has over 43,000 signatories. The letter denounces the executive order as discriminatory and inhumane.

“Somalia is one of the countries affected by the ban and we have a lot of immigrant students from Somalia,” said Asplen. “That struck home very, very strongly for me. This deeply affects our university community and the Twin Cities.”

Asplen is also concerned about the potential harm to the academic system in the United States. “A lot of people come here to study, to bring knowledge back to their cultures and countries. They conduct absolutely pivotal research, especially in science, and certainly in other fields. To have a blanket ban for people from certain countries – it is unconstitutional in my interpretation,” he said.

He would like to see the university do even more for immigrant, refugee, and undocumented students, including through designating Metro State as a sanctuary campus.

“I think that would be very consistent with our mission as a campus community,” said Asplen. “I don’t think there would be much of a justification not to do it,” He supports the Metro State Inter Faculty Organization (IFO) proposal to do so.

**“All Are Welcome”**

Sign posted all over the Library and Learning Center read “All Are Welcome”— in English, Arabic, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. It’s an effort to “make sure there aren’t any kind of barriers of any type—visible or invisible— that are keeping people from the library,” said professor and librarian, Jennifer DeJonghe.

She noted that libraries have a long history as safe and welcoming spaces, particularly for newcomers and immigrants. But in tense and stressful times, “it’s good to check: are we really open to everybody? It isn’t enough—especially now—to just say, ‘ok here’s the information’ and our doors are unlocked,” she said.

Metro State librarians are assisting students seeking more information on the executive order and their immigration status. “Students are asking if we have recommendations for them about their visa,” said DeJonghe. “Asking us: do you think I can travel? Is it safe to go visit my family? So if they’re coming up to library help desks, there obviously is a need.” She put her name on both the “Academics Against Immigration Executive Order” open letter and the online list of faculty allies.

**“Everybody is respected, welcomed for who they are”**

In conversations with colleagues and on the faculty listserv, DeJonghe finds everyone eager to find ways to do more to help students affected by the executive order.

“We in higher education need to find ways to respond more quickly and more succinctly in situations such as this,” she said. Our response time can feel slow in this age of Twitter, and those who need to hear from us the most might miss our message.”

Religious Studies professor Lewis sees the faculty response in the context of Metro State’s continuing work to build an anti-racist learning community.

“Faculty, staff, and students are committed to see social justice being done,” she said. “To see that everybody is respected, welcomed for who they are— their race, religion, sexual identity, religion, class— that’s what this is all about.”