

NVCC Allowing Illegal Immigrants to Enroll; College Defends Policy After State Attorney General Urges Admissions Ban

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Body

Northern Virginia Community **College** has continued to **enroll illegal immigrants** in classes despite a strong recommendation from the **state attorney general**'s office that undocumented applicants be rejected and that such students be reported to immigration authorities.

College administrators noted that at least some of those students arrived in the United **States** as children and did not willfully break the immigration rules.

"We're not trying to open our doors to terrorists or people who were trying to sneak across our borders," said Max L. Bassett, vice president of academic and student services at **NVCC**. "We are trying to serve residents who have been here for many years."

Bassett said, however, that administrators are continuing to review the **policy** and that the **college** is bowing to one key recommendation in the September memo from **Attorney General** Jerry W. Kilgore's office: Students who are in this country illegally must now pay out-of-**state** tuition.

Already 66 undocumented students who either were previously **enrolled** or recently **enrolled** in classes at the **college** and were paying in-**state** tuition have been informed that they must pay the higher rate, which is roughly four times the subsidized rate for **state** residents. Full-time in-**state** tuition is \$ 678 a semester; full-time out-of-**state** tuition is \$ 2,429.

NVCC is the largest community **college** in the **state** and has campuses in Alexandria, Annandale, Loudoun County, Manassas and Woodbridge. Of the roughly 38,000 students **enrolled** this semester, about 60 are undocumented, Bassett said.

A spokesman for Kilgore (R) said they were "disappointed" by the approach taken at **NVCC**.

"This is about the difference between those who observe the law and those who will break it," said spokesman Tim Murtaugh. "I don't think it's too much to ask that you observe the rules of our society before you take advantage of what this society has to offer."

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Higher education administrators across the state have been reconsidering their enrollment policies in the wake of the Sept. 5 memo from the attorney general's office to state colleges and universities.

"As our national response to the attacks of September 11 [2001] continues, it has become increasingly clear that the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the higher education community must pay closer attention to the presence of foreign students and exchange visitors on their campuses," the memo said.

It recommended that school officials deny admission and in-state tuition status to undocumented students and that admissions personnel report "factual information indicating that a student is unlawfully present in the United States."

The memo from the attorney general's office reopens an issue that was reviewed in depth by college administrators more than 10 years ago.

In 1989, according to Bassett, the college denied admission to undocumented students. But then a valedictorian from a Northern Virginia high school, a longtime resident who was undocumented, applied. She was denied admission and a debate ensued.

After consulting with the attorney general's office then, the college soon after abandoned its prohibition on undocumented students. The undocumented high school valedictorian was admitted.

"We were advised that it was more defensible from a legal perspective to admit this person rather than deny this person," Bassett said. He noted that times have changed.

NVCC's enrollment policy is viewed by some as an extension of that of Fairfax County public schools and other schools, which do not distinguish between documented and undocumented students.

County school officials don't even ask about students' immigration status when they are enrolled.

"Due to a U.S. Supreme Court decision, we can't deny an education to students because of their immigration status," Fairfax County schools spokesman Paul Regnier said. And "a state attorney general opinion in 1999 said that we are not allowed to ask for the immigration status of students enrolling."

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