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Further Demographic Information Relating to the DREAM Act

This document provides some further information to supplement previous Urban Institute analyses of demographic information relating to undocumented immigrants enrolled in high school and college. The update incorporates new information from Current Population Surveys (CPS) of March 2000–2002, Census 2000, and other outside analyses. Further, it attempts to clarify information relating to college students.

Numbers of Undocumented Aliens

Available estimates from the Urban Institute and the former INS place the current number of undocumented immigrants in the United States (as of 2002) in the range of 7.5–9.5 million, considerably higher than estimates previously used in analyses of undocumented high school students. *Nonetheless, the higher total number of undocumented immigrants has only a small impact on estimates of high school students because virtually all of the increase in the estimates is for adults aged roughly 20 to 45.*

Undocumented Aliens Graduating From High School

The new data available from the March 2000, 2001, and 2002 CPSs (consistent with Census 2000) and again supplemented with Urban Institute research on the immigration status of respondents places the number of undocumented alien children who have lived in the United States for 5 years or longer reaching age 18 each year at the top of the range previously estimated, or about 80,000. Still, about one-sixth to one-fifth of each cohort fails to complete high school, leaving *roughly 65,000 undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States five years or longer who graduate from high school each year*—again at the upper end of the range from previous estimates. Although not all high school graduates go on to college, this group makes up the on-going potential beneficiaries of the DREAM Act.

A Note on Methodology and Quality of the Estimates

The estimates cited above (and below) are based on methods developed by the Urban Institute to assign legal status to immigrants in the CPS. The methods combine information on individual characteristics with demographic estimates of the size of the undocumented population. For adults, undocumented status is inferred principally from the individual's occupation (and status of the spouse, if any). For children, undocumented status is assigned based on undocumented status of the parent(s). Estimates of numbers of undocumented alien high school students from these data have been widely used and have proved to be consistent with alternative estimates derived for several states (including New Jersey, Texas, and Florida).

The estimates have proved less successful for estimating undocumented college students and appear to give estimates that are substantially too large. As noted above and in previous material, the process for inferring undocumented status relies heavily on an individual's occupation, *but does not take into account school enrollment*. Because college students may work (either full-time or part-time) in the types of jobs often held by undocumented immigrants, the imputation process seems to erroneously assign legal immigrant college students as undocumented aliens. This potential misassignment has only a small impact on the overall undocumented population, as they represent only about one-third of one percent (0.3%) of the undocumented immigrants. However, the potential impact on estimates of undocumented college students is very great as the misassignments may account for one-third to one-half of the estimate.

Undocumented Aliens Enrolled in College

The new data source shows about the same number of undocumented immigrant students enrolled in college. But, *because of the problems noted above, our previous estimate of approximately 65,000 undocumented alien high school graduates under age 21 who have lived in the United States for 5 years or longer enrolled in college should be considered substantially too high*. (This higher figure has been used by CBO in their previous analysis of the DREAM Act.)

Some alternative information is, however available to assess the potential size of this group. An analysis by the state of California estimated that there were about 3,500 current college students enrolled in the California State University (CSU) and California Community Colleges (CCC) who were eligible for non-resident tuition waivers. These students are principally, but not entirely, undocumented immigrants (and exclude such students in the University of California). The CPS estimate for undocumented college students in California is much higher, about 20–25,000. Assuming that the state's data are more accurate, the best estimate for undocumented college students in California is probably about 15–20% of the CPS estimate.

Using relationships derived from the California data, we can provide an estimate of the current number of undocumented immigrants enrolled *in public colleges and universities*. California has about 40% of the estimated number of undocumented students (all grades and levels). It also has a relatively open and accessible college system. Using this information to convert the CPS data into a national estimate, estimated college enrollment probably amounts to about 7,000–13,000 undocumented immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 5 years or longer (and have graduated from U.S. high schools.)

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