Leslie Maria Rivera Munguia

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Advocating Towards Inclusive Opportunities for Diverse Students

Dear Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Scholarship Committee:

 I did not know where to begin after my high school graduation and the summer that followed it. There are no specific guidelines for immigrant youth on how to advocate for themselves or commence a future on “college orientation day”. I spent many days crying, misunderstood, and never had an accurate response from the admissions office or society in general towards my questions about being an undocumented student. With the desire to be admitted into the University of Arizona there was a gap for me to find proper guidance. For a moment I believed that I was not allowed to go to college and pursue my dreams due to my migratory status. This confusion was due to a common misconception that undocumented individuals cannot continue higher education. I sought for professionals that could understand my situation, therefore, I decided to seek clarity for myself. Once I was admitted, my priority was to be in communication with any immigrant resource center I could find on campus.

A moment of joy arose when I realized there is a possibility of finding resources and organizations that can assist me in my college journey. One of the programs I participated in during my first semester as a freshman was: Scholarships A-Z. An organization promoting an online zoom program called ISH (Immigrant Student Hustle), where I would receive weekly zoom meetings and community support to guide my hand as I walked through the intimidating process of college and adulthood. I received a proper orientation, and met many wonderful students that were curious to find clarity like me. I no longer felt alone and misunderstood in the path I was walking on. I found inspiration with the workshops on self-advocacy, education on proper immigration facts, along with stories by the leaders and students that empowered me. It was necessary for me to seek out this type of support in order to believe in myself and bring me closer to my dreams of becoming a healthcare professional. This engagement experience made me realize how vital it is for inclusive centers in educational institutions to exist, along with academic programs for all kinds of diverse students.

Therefore, I became familiar with the Immigrant Student Resource Center (ISRC) on campus. I was able to connect with mentors that guided and provided me with the proper assistance I needed for college. A year later, the ISRC got incorporated within the Thrive Center on campus; this change made me nervous since I still required much support and feared falling into the spiral of feeling left out of the system again. Eventually, I shifted myself to adapt to this new center, which I am currently involved with, and found a safe space where I could be myself and communicate any needs. The advice and kindness I’ve received from the Thrive Center mentorship program and from the coordinators that work there, have been vital to the support I require for my success here. As a result, I have been involved in mentorship programs since the beginning of my college career. Personally, mentoring has been a significant form of support to my upbringing as a first generation college student along with providing me a small stipend after its completion; this was very important to me in regards to supporting my immigrant parents who fund my education. However, this stipend is not enough to support my financial aid needs. Due to my ineligibility to apply for FAFSA or low-income based programs at the University like TRIO, I am limited from equal opportunities. Even if I could not experience these programs during my undergraduate education, my greatest wish is for my story to create awareness for a future change in the collegiate system to express inclusiveness for all students regardless of their background.

As the years went on, I continued to explore centers and resources I can utilize to support my academic journey throughout my college experience. For example, the Guerrero Center on campus has provided me with free printing which is important for my rigorous classes since I cannot afford my own printer, and it also shares other socio-cultural resources and events. If the University of Arizona can advocate towards the voices of those who cannot receive equal funding opportunities and give them the support they need in every aspect, the campus will grow to become a thriving center of inclusivity and diverse cultures. Usually, first generation students struggle with connecting with professionals who understand the policies of the government and stay current with the daily situations of their background. Receiving support like this throughout higher education is important, and I know that I am not the only student in this situation.

In conclusion, an urgent focus for the U of A is to begin the creation of cultural and scholarship programs that are more inclusive to students who are not eligible to work. A possible idea is to let students earn their own grants to fund their education or study materials by participating in a form of collaborating work that helps out the community or school. Participating in programs outside of the U of A has been a huge help towards my education, but it has required a lot of self-discipline and extra time commitment. Consequently, I hope more similar programs are integrated within the university’s system instead of having to look externally for a way to fund my career and dreams. I plan to graduate and serve as a professional who will be representing the University of Arizona, a forever wildcat, thus I aspire to see more positive reinforcement and support towards the Hispanic community. Thank you for the opportunity to apply for this scholarship, your generosity will be represented in my focus to my studies and extended to the rest of the immigrant community.

Sincerely, 