Project Description

ASUA and the Immigrant Student Resource Center (ISRC) are seeking three years of funding for a .50 FTE Immigration Attorney to provide legal services and educational materials to students with immigrant, refugee, and international backgrounds. The Immigration Attorney would report to the ASUA Legal Services Counsel. In order to be as accessible as possible, the Immigration Attorney will hold office hours in locations such as the ISRC, Guerrero Center, and other cultural centers.

Although immigration is an extremely complicated and specialized area of law and the pool of immigration attorneys in Tucson is small, the hope is that a .50 FTE benefits-eligible position will be attractive to a local solo practitioner. With the support of SSF funding, this project will provide much needed legal services to support the success and wellbeing of students from immigrant refugee, and international backgrounds.

How does this project support the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management mission?

This project aligns with the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management mission by supporting the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students from immigrant, refugee, and international backgrounds. This population of students faces unique barriers given the current political climate and state/local laws that present barriers to accessing higher education. In response to the 2019 Student Services Fee Survey, 74% of undergraduate respondents indicated support for offering free legal advice to students and ranked among the top 10 initiatives.

What is the reason for creating/maintaining this program?

Students with immigrant, refugee and international backgrounds frequently experience legal challenges that can prevent them from being able to attend school or work, or that can be time-consuming or stressful to resolve. Although the most serious cases involve the threat of deportation, students also have questions about whether they can study abroad, what to do if they do not renew their permits by the required deadlines, or how their immigration status will be impacted if they are arrested or convicted of a crime. In particular, there is a great deal of stress and uncertainty about how students with DACA status will be impacted when the U.S. Supreme Court issues its ruling this summer. When staff recently asked students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds what the University could do to better support them, they identified scholarships and legal services as their top needs.

Immigration law is considered one of the most complex areas of law. Attorneys who do not specialize in immigration law generally refer clients with immigration questions to attorneys who only practice immigration law. In the past, attorneys working for ASUA services have not been able to provide legal advice on immigration beyond very basic information and have referred students to outside attorneys who charge for their services. The typical initial
consultation fee is $250-500. Because some students with immigrant, refugee, and international backgrounds are not eligible for certain types of financial aid or have other financial challenges, this can be a significant barrier. Currently, the College of Law’s immigration clinic is focused on asylum seekers who have recently arrived and is unable to provide legal services to students.

A number of other Universities have recently hired immigration attorneys to provide legal services to students, such as the UC System, the University of Michigan, Texas State University, and the University of Minnesota.

**How many students will be directly impacted?**

Although it is difficult to estimate the number of UA students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, the ISRC has served about 250-550 students a year in recent years. Based on anecdotal evidence from ISRC staff, these students frequently have legal questions or concerns for which they need advice. During fall semester 2017, a law student fellow assisted 14 students with immigration-related matters and noted, “The UA student body faces a remarkably broad range of immigration situations and it has been really helpful to be there in particular to advise students what ‘not’ to do.”

**How will the success of this initiative be assessed?**

Similar to the ASUA Legal Services Counsel, the Immigration Attorney will track the number of students served, the types of issues for which they needed advice, and the ultimate resolution. Students who receive legal advice will be sent a survey to provide feedback on their experience. Although data may be limited, to the extent possible, the project will try to determine whether access to legal services increases overall student well-being and the likelihood of recruitment, retention, or graduation. For example, in 2016-2017, ASUA Student Legal Services hosted 1,196 legal consultations for students who were seeking legal assistance for various reasons. Students who used Student Legal Services reported increased well-being with an average score of six before use and an eight afterwards based on a ten-point scale (Sources: Student Legal Services Intake and Exit Questionnaire 2015-2016 and 2016-2017). ASUA Legal Services will ensure that all relevant regulations and best practices are followed to maintain the confidentiality of student information.

**How are you ensuring the longevity of this program?**

In developing this project, other avenues of funding and partnerships were explored, such as with the College of Law and Global Affairs, but unfortunately, these options are not available at this time. Once the Immigration Attorney has a greater sense of the need and demand, they will explore the possibility of using volunteer attorneys from the community and/or law students to help meet this need.