

What Resources Do UCLA Students Have that Can Help Workers' Campaigns for Justice?

By Alejandro Lopez

Student solidarity is important for various reasons in regards to the everyday struggles of immigrant workers. First and foremost, the economy would suffer greatly if it were not for the contributions of immigrants in the workforce. Additionally, immigrants are contributing members of society who need to be recognized for their efforts as the backbone of our society. We as UCLA students are in a privileged position where our voice speaks loudly and we have a significant amount of potential power, and we therefore have an obligation to use this power in order to assist these marginalized members of society in any way that we can. This entails challenging systems of power that promote inequality and value capital over anything else while persistently exploiting a (sometimes) vulnerable sector of society: immigrants. These ideologies, in turn, transmit to the “unconscious” mind that it is acceptable to scapegoat immigrants, who are subsequently viewed as a burden to the nation. Once united, I believe that our communities are able to gain respect and attain social justice.

The resources that students can provide are valuable and beneficial to immigrant worker struggles. There are a number of student organizations on campus that provide support for immigrant worker issues such as an organization that I was involved in named *Conciencia Libre*. This organization meets at a worker center in Los Angeles where many day laborers (that are primarily immigrants) meet to find out about employment and other

community services. UCLA students volunteered once a week to meet with the day laborers in order to teach them literacy.

Through the campus organizations events, meetings and activities are coordinated and publicized, and this helps inform the general public about immigrant worker issues and how one can help. With all the networking that takes place, student activism reaches its peak when marches, boycotts, rallies, and other forms of protest successfully take place.

For the past couple of quarters I have been a part of the university media; that is to say, I contribute to a progressive student newspaper at UCLA entitled *La Gente*. Many people do not realize that this is a medium in which underserved communities are able to have a voice not just on campus but also in surrounding neighborhoods because the newspaper is distributed in many areas. Writing can be a powerful tool because it can be a form of resistance and/or taking an opposing stance to something. If campus newspapers such as *La Gente* covered immigrant worker issues such as the recent struggle for UCLA food service workers to have a union, then more people would be aware of the issues and it would be easier to mobilize students on and off campus.

I think that there needs to be a mass social movement, a revolution if you will, in order for students to take an active role in transforming the ideals of the “ivory tower.”

Students should be required to take courses in ethnic studies departments or enroll in classes such as this one that inspires one to seek social change in order to empower and

transform our communities. We need to be critical of our surroundings and deconstruct what we have been programmed to believe. If students at UCLA took part in spiritual retreats, cultural/academic conferences, got involved in activist groups (on/off campus), and learned the realities of the hardships that immigrants face, I think they will no longer take for granted their privileged lives and a new consciousness would take effect in which being humble and militant will override the common traits of arrogance, coldness, and superficiality.

The founding principles of the university are based on elitist white mens' "enlightenment" fantasies (or should I say scientific racism) that excluded women, non-white people and white workers' perspectives. After being historically underrepresented I affirm that the more cross-cultural and interethnic struggles we work towards, the closer we will be to true solidarity.