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Fear and Resistance Far from the Border: Human Rights and Student Engagement in Immigrant and Refugee Communities in Dayton, Ohio

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Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

Fear and Resistance Far from the Border: Human Rights and Student Engagement in Immigrant and Refugee Communities in Dayton, Ohio

Presented by:

Theophile J. Majka, *University of Dayton*

Miranda Cady Hallett, *University of Dayton*

Session: Community-Based Global Learning

Abstract:

Similar to articles 23-27 of the UDHR, articles 25-31 of the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families specify equal access by immigrants to educational, vocational & health/social services and equality of living and working conditions and employment contracts.

Beginning in 2007, Professor Majka has involved students in his immigration classes in research on the challenges and obstacles immigrants and refugees in the Dayton area experience relevant for those areas specified by the Convention. Joined by students in Professor Linda Majka classes, students arranged and conducted interviews with representatives of Dayton-area immigrant and refugee communities and with staff of human service agencies who work with these communities. Students also helped organize and observed focus groups of specific populations. Students in Professor Hallett's Anthropology of Human Rights class participated in the latest research beginning in 2017.

In this presentation, we will describe two outcomes of student engagement.

One is the impact on the students themselves. All described their participation as genuine learning experiences. Besides putting human faces on class materials, some described it as transformative. Interviewing prepared several for travel to the countries of origin of some interviewees, e.g. Mexico and El Salvador. Some found their experiences useful for post-graduate plans, e.g. volunteering, law school and MSW programs. Others made public presentations. The interviews have provided the basis of several senior research projects and honors theses. We will provide quotes from students' reflections.

The second is the impact on the larger community. The research findings have resulted in 4 conferences (2008, 2009, 2012 and 2019) that brought together Dayton-area residents, including many leaders and elected officials, with leaders of immigrant and refugee communities. The first two conferences helped provide the momentum that resulted in the 2011 Welcome Dayton initiative.

Presenter information:

Dr. Theo Majka (Professor of Sociology, University of Dayton) has taught Immigration and Immigrants (Soc/Ant 368) since 1999 and Sociology of Human Rights beginning spring 2019. Immigrant and refugee integration has been the focus of much of his recent research and community involvements. The three research projects on this topic that he coordinated resulted in four 1-day conferences held at UD. His and Jamie Longazel's 2017 article on Welcome Dayton, "Becoming Welcoming: Organizational Collaboration and Immigrant Integration in Dayton, Ohio," was published in the journal *Public Integrity*. Among other He is also the co-author of *Farm Workers, Agribusiness, and the State* with Linda Majka (1982) and *Farmers' and Farm Workers' Movements* with Patrick Mooney (1995). His and Linda Majka's chapter "Institutional Obstacles to Incorporation: Latino Immigrant Experiences in a Mid-Size Rustbelt City" [Dayton] appeared in *Latinos in the Midwest*, edited by Rubén Martínez (2011). He was also a participant in the "community conversations" and subsequent committees that resulted in the Welcome Dayton: Immigrant Friendly City initiative in 2011 and has been a member of the Welcome Dayton Committee.

Dr. Miranda Cady Hallett (Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology, University of Dayton) is a legal anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in El Salvador since 1998 and with Salvadoran immigrant communities in the US since 2004. Her interests, training and expertise lie at the intersection of Latin American studies (with a particular focus on El Salvador and the Central American region), migration studies and border theory, law and society, labor studies, research on Latinx identities, and the history and anthropology of state violence. Her dissertation (Cornell University, 2009) examined Salvadoran migrants' subjectivities and neoliberal ideologies in a small poultry industry town in central Arkansas. Her recent work focuses on mass detention and deportation as components of the regime of mass incarceration in the contemporary United States, exploring how these systems uphold broader mechanisms of labor exploitation and intersectional oppression. She has published on immigration and immigrants' rights in numerous peer-reviewed journals, including *Latino Studies* and *Law and Society Review*. Miranda is also an engaged public anthropologist with a commitment to human rights and social justice movements. Her Anthropology of Human Rights course includes a trip to El Salvador.