September 25, 2017

We, the faculty and staff in the Asian American Studies department, condemn the Trump administration’s decision to revoke the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and pledge to support all students, faculty, and staff, including undocumented members of our student and campus community. According to AAPI Data, there are an estimated 1.6 million Asian Americans who are undocumented and who must often live in fear and silence.

Trump’s decision follows on the heels of previous anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric and policies, including the anti-Muslim/Arab/African travel bans and plans to further fortify the U.S.-Mexico border, which we opposed in a previous statement. We note that the heightened fear and insecurity experienced by undocumented students and members of our communities is not new, but extends an ongoing crisis under the Obama administration which deported masses of brown people. DACA offers only minimal protection to undocumented youth but for many it is the only option available, and so the rescinding of even this very limited legal protection is outrageous.

As scholars in ethnic studies who study and teach the history of migration, racist exclusion, enslavement, and settler colonization in the United States, we are deeply aware that the U.S. is not, in fact, the safe haven for “huddled masses” that it purports to be. Many who cross borders to enter the U.S. do not actually see it as a benevolent savior but seek survival, as they flee countries that are, in many cases, impoverished and devastated by decades of U.S. policies of predatory capitalism and military intervention in other nations.

We support the right to freedom of movement, freedom to stay, and freedom to live without persecution for all people, regardless of their race, religion, nationality, class, ability, gender, sexuality, and political beliefs. Undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander lives and families are threatened by the xenophobic policies of a state that wants their labor but is not willing to support their lives. As Asian American studies scholars, we know that these policies build on a history of immigration exclusion and worker exploitation that can be traced to earlier moments, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which targeted a specific (Asian) racial group, as well as post-9/11 policies of deportation, detention, and surveillance of Muslim, South Asian, and Arab immigrants.

Racialized policies of deportation and criminalization of immigrants occur in a larger geopolitical context of U.S. imperial interventions and military expansionism around the globe. The Trump regime has escalated tensions and military threats on the Korean peninsula, aided in the destruction and starvation of Yemen and havoc wreaked on Syria, and dropped a massive bomb on Afghanistan. From West to East Asia, it has continued U.S. policies of imperial expansion, intervention, and warfare and undermined the movement for climate justice.

We are also deeply concerned about the escalating violence by white nationalist activists and the condoning of white supremacist and hate groups by the U.S. President that has emboldened white vigilantes, on and off campus. Our goal in Asian American studies is to
continue to teach our students about the struggles for racial and social justice, to work with other communities to create true “security” for all, and to engage with others beyond the university in meaningful acts of solidarity and partnership.

The Asian American Studies department will continue to support DACA students by having Know Your Rights cards available for all, serving as UndocuAllies, working in solidarity and partnership with the AB540 Center on campus and our colleagues in other departments focused on racial justice, supporting programming to help raise awareness about and create forums for the discussion of issues faced by DACA students, and connecting our students to community resources and sources of support.