Professor Olivas is quoted in an article posted on the Chronicle of Higher Education’s website regarding the benefits of states allowing undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition.

The following article was posted on the Chronicle of Higher Education’s website on Wednesday, May 18, 2011:

In-State Tuition for Illegal Immigrants Can Be a Plus for Both States and Students
http://chronicle.com/article/In-State-Tuition-for-Illegal/127581/

By Katherine Mangan

States that allow illegal immigrants to pay cheaper, in-state tuition have seen a 31-percent jump in that population's college-going rate and a 14-percent decline in high-school dropouts among undocumented Latino students, according to a report released on Wednesday.

The report, by researchers at Roger Williams University's Latino Policy Institute, also concludes that the 11 states that offered in-state rates at the time the study was completed actually came out slightly ahead financially. Critics who view in-state tuition policies as financial drains on states don't consider the fact that most illegal immigrants would not go to college if required to pay significantly higher out-of-state rates, the authors argue.

In addition, "they don't consider the long-term benefits of educating someone and the economic contribution college graduates give back to the community" when they buy more goods and pay more taxes, Kimberly Mehlman-Orozco, director of the policy institute, said in an interview.

She said more study was needed to substantiate the economic benefits of providing in-state tuition policies, "but from the digging we've done, it appears that there is no cost to states, and there might even be a financial benefit."

The researchers planned to present the report, "The Effects of In-State Tuition for Non-Citizens: A Systematic Review of the Evidence," on Wednesday afternoon at a news conference at the Rhode Island State House, where a bill has been introduced that would add Rhode Island to the list of states allowing in-state tuition for such students.

The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that since 2001, 12 states, starting with Texas and California, have approved laws that allow illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at public colleges if they meet specific requirements—generally, that they live in the state and have attended high school for a specified period before graduating or receiving their high-school-equivalency degree. Students also usually have to sign an affidavit stating that they plan to file for legal immigration status.

'Significant Taxpayer Subsidy'

A spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group that advocates tougher immigration policies, disputed the study's conclusions. "In-state tuition represents a significant taxpayer subsidy, thus every illegal alien attending at in-state rates represents a cost," at a time when states are slashing higher-education support, the spokesman, Ira Mehlman, wrote by e-mail.
He added that every such student admitted displaces a legal citizen. "Since the illegal-alien student will not be eligible to work (legally) after receiving his/her degree," he wrote, "the taxpayers are less likely to see a return on their investment than they would if they had subsidized a citizen or legal immigrant."

The other states that allow the students to pay in-state rates include Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Maryland's governor signed a law this month allowing illegal immigrants to pay in-state rates at community colleges. The state was one of at least a dozen where such bills were introduced this year, while in at least a dozen other states, lawmakers have introduced bills to repeal or ban the policies.

The flip-flopping continues on what has become a highly charged political issue nationwide. Oklahoma ended its support for lower in-state tuition in 2008, leaving it up to the state's regents to decide whether to offer it. An effort to repeal Kansas' in-state policy was approved by the House in February, but died in the Senate.

Meanwhile, Arizona, Colorado, and Georgia specifically bar illegal immigrants from receiving in-state tuition rates. South Carolina goes even farther, prohibiting the students from enrolling in state colleges at all.

Michael A. Olivas, a professor of law at the University of Houston who has written extensively about policies affecting the students, said that despite the flurry of legislation at the state level, many such students have few affordable college options and risk deportation when they advocate for change. Those factors "point to why we need comprehensive immigration reform," he said.