

How can your college or university protect & support undocumented students?

Support for undocumented students in higher education has drastically improved over the past decade, but there is still work to do. In particular, so much of the support available to undocumented students requires them to have DACA status, excluding non-DACA undocumented youth from accessing desperately-needed resources and placing them at a disadvantage in their higher education journey. This must change.

We believe that all undocumented students deserve to feel safe on campus, be food and lodging secure, and have support in their academic endeavors. Access to higher education must be equitable regardless of citizenship status or economic background.

Below are suggestions for policies, programs, and trainings that colleges and universities can implement to best support the needs of undocumented students on campus. Students can leverage the information in this toolkit to advocate for meaningful change.

THE BASICS

Undocumented Students Still Have Limited Access to Higher Education

Across the United States, undocumented students do not have equitable access to higher education. While some laws governing education equity must be legislated at the state and federal levels, including eligibility for in-state tuition or the ability of undocumented students to access financial aid, there are many actions individual institutions can take to improve undocumented students' ability to matriculate on their campuses.

1. Create a resource webpage dedicated to undocumented students

- Colleges and universities should clearly articulate that undocumented students are welcome on campus and outline campus resources available to undocumented students. Some resources may include:
 - Any existing student centers or groups focused on undocumented students or students from mixed-status families
 - Access to mental health support
 - Free legal support or access to immigration attorneys
 - Financial support in paying for DACA renewals or other immigration fees
- Institutions should also try to answer undocumented prospective students' frequently asked questions, such as:
 - What is the college or university's policy on admitting undocumented students?
 - Are undocumented students eligible for financial aid?
 - How does the college or university keep my information safe?
- For some examples check out the [Undocumented/DACA FAQs from Guilford College](#) and the [Undocumented Student Program at UCLA](#).

2. Make sure undocumented students are not classified as international students during the admissions process.

- This causes unnecessary logistical complications when it comes to processes like accessing in-state tuition or financial aid. Undocumented students also don't need the same orientation sessions typically organized for international students as they do not go through the same immigration processes. Furthermore, most undocumented students have grown up in the United States, and do not require the same introduction to U.S. culture that international students experience during orientation. Classifying undocumented students as international students could also put them at risk of being "outed" if they have to explain themselves over and over to people who think they are international students.

3. Open up institutional financial aid and scholarships to all students regardless of citizenship status.

- Because undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid and rarely qualify for state aid, institutional aid is one of the few financial support options available to them. Consider setting aside extra funds for undocumented students who are forced to compete with hundreds of thousands of their undocumented peers for the limited amount of scholarship funds for which they all qualify. Another option is to endow a scholarship specifically for undocumented students.
- At all institutions, deans, counselors, and staff at undocumented student/"Dream" centers should proactively disseminate vital scholarship information to undocumented students on campus.
- Private colleges should consider providing need-based aid to undocumented students derived from unrestricted funds and private donations.

Undocumented Students Have Unique Needs

Frequently, undocumented students on campuses are supported by college or university staff from multicultural or diversity centers who do not have any specified knowledge about the realities undocumented students face. While undocumented students may be first-generation, Black, AAPI, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, and/or low-income; their undocumented status presents unique challenges that require dedicated support.

1. Hire or designate a staff member to serve as an undocumented student coordinator.

- Staff hired to support undocumented students can help them navigate the resources available on campus and support their success in achieving their degrees. It's important for this role to be filled by someone who is knowledgeable about undocumented students' reality and can relate to the insecurities they or their families might experience, help them navigate legal support, and help them understand how the changing political environment will impact them.

2. Commit to providing free-of-charge legal services for undocumented students, their families, and undocumented family members of U.S. citizen students.

- Designate funds to pay for students' DACA applications, DACA renewals, or other immigration fees. Make sure students know what immigration fees their school will cover and create a simple process for them to access those funds.
- Provide free legal support to undocumented students, their families, and undocumented family members of U.S. citizen students by partnering with your institution's law school or legal clinics, or develop partnerships with local nonprofits and immigration attorneys.
- Students' success is tied to their families' well-being. Supporting the immigration legal needs of students' families increases students' ability to be academically successful.

CAMPUS SAFETY

Undocumented Students Deserve to Feel Safe on Campus

Due to their immigration status, undocumented students are at constant risk of detention or deportation. There are policies and procedures that colleges and universities can enact to protect their undocumented community.

1. Know staff, faculty, and students' rights and responsibilities when it comes to ICE raids or USCIS site visits on campus.

- All individuals, regardless of citizenship status, have rights when they come into contact with law enforcement, including immigration agents. It is important for college and university staff who might greet or encounter immigration agents to know that they are not necessarily required to do whatever immigration officers request. In particular, unannounced visits by law enforcement, regardless of the reason, are stressful. Employees may feel pressure to do whatever law enforcement officers ask of them, even if there is no legal obligation for them to do so. In fact, many faculty and staff might not even have the authority to consent to immigration enforcement's demands. In most cases, campus staff should contact the appropriate campus point of contact who is authorized to represent the institution to law enforcement. It's critical that faculty and staff are briefed on this process ahead of time to avoid any missteps that could threaten the safety of undocumented students, faculty, or staff.
- Learn more about where this guidance comes from in the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration's [FAQs on Immigration Enforcement](#) on campuses.

2. Develop and enforce a clear policy that campus police should not act as immigration agents or ask individuals on campus about their immigration status.

- When campus police or security act as immigration agents, detaining or questioning individuals for suspected immigration violations and sharing information with federal immigration authorities, they put the entire campus community at risk. Immigration enforcement actions carried out by campus police could lead to the deportation of students or other individuals, as happened in the case of [Raul Zamora](#) at the University of Texas. In addition, if undocumented students don't feel safe on campus, their academic performance will suffer and many students may seek to continue their education elsewhere or drop out of school completely.
- Make sure undocumented students [know their rights](#) and are aware that campus police or campus security will not in any way act as immigration agents.

3. Commit to not collecting or sharing information on the immigration or citizenship status of students, faculty, or staff.

- Because being undocumented leaves individuals at risk of deportation, it's unsafe for campuses to keep lists of students, faculty, or staff without status. Lists may include spreadsheets, listservs, or other files that note specific individuals as undocumented. Even if these lists are managed for well-intended reasons such as sharing resources or tracking data, keeping this information together could potentially expose some or all of your undocumented community to detention or deportation. The danger is that any existing lists could be accidentally or purposefully shared with law enforcement, journalists, or others who could put community members at risk. If you don't have that list, it's harder for information that could jeopardize undocumented community members to get out. Institutions should know that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) extends to undocumented students, but it does not cover the records of DACA recipients employed at the institution or other undocumented employees.

4. Host "Know Your Rights" trainings on campus for undocumented students and community members.

- "Know Your Rights" (KYR) trainings provide critical tools for community members, including undocumented folks, to keep themselves and their neighbors as safe as possible. Everyone, regardless of citizenship status, has rights when interacting with law enforcement. Being aware of those rights can empower individuals to protect themselves and avoid the risk of deportation. By hosting KYR trainings and providing KYR resources such as ["red cards"](#) to individuals on campus and in the surrounding community, institutions can help foster an environment where undocumented students can thrive.
- Get more information from Informed Immigrant's [Know Your Rights Guide](#).

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Colleges and Universities Should Serve ALL Students—Including Undocumented Students

Undocumented students are an integral part of campus communities and deserve to have peers, professors, and staff who support them.

1. Ensure that your college or university offers adequate mental health services for undocumented students, faculty, and staff, as well as individuals with undocumented family members.

- Particularly during the current coronavirus crisis, undocumented individuals and those from mixed-status families are under a tremendous amount of stress and likely experiencing anxiety. Because undocumented individuals and families don't qualify for much of the coronavirus aid, including the federal stimulus checks, many undocumented folks, including students, have been struggling to find ways to make ends met for themselves and their families. Managing stress while also tending to school, work, and home responsibilities can be especially challenging for students who are providing for and concerned with the well-being of family members. Learn more in [Informed Immigrant's Guide To Providing Mental Health Services to Immigrants Impacted by Changes to DACA and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

2. Educate career centers to make sure they are equipped to advise undocumented students about career opportunities.

- Although undocumented individuals face many restrictions when it comes to the jobs they can hold, there are still lots of opportunities available to them. It's essential that career centers are aware of the restrictions undocumented students may face as well as the tools available to them to start their careers and experience success after graduation.
- In particular, career centers should know that [in some states](#), undocumented folks may not be eligible to obtain the "professional occupational licenses" required in order to practice certain professions like teaching, nursing, cosmetology, plumbing, and many more.
- Some paths that are available to undocumented students embarking on their careers include entrepreneurship, freelancing, and becoming an independent contractor.
- Learn more:
 - Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration's [Higher Ed Guide to Tuition, Financial Aid & Other Funding for Undocumented Students: FAQs for Public and Private Colleges and Universities](#)
 - Immigrants Rising's [5 Tips To Get Started As An Independent Contractor/Freelance](#)
 - Immigrants Rising's [UndocuHustle](#)

Use the worksheet on the following page to help build your advocacy plan to make change on campus. Identify your advocacy goal (or goals) and determine which tactics will best help you achieve them.

Create Your Advocacy Plan

Identify Your On-Campus Advocacy Goals

- Designate or hire a staff member to be an undocumented student coordinator
- Provide tuition support and scholarships for students regardless of their immigration status
- Make faculty and staff allies visible
- Offer confidential legal support to students with immigration questions and challenges
- Provide financial support for DACA applications and other immigration fees for students and their families
- Develop and enforce a clear policy that campus police should not act as immigration agents, or ask individuals on campus about their immigration status
- Educate faculty and staff about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to ICE raids or USCIS site visits on campus to keep all community members safe
- Commit to not collecting or sharing information on the immigration or citizenship status of students, faculty, and staff
- Advertise and make available mental health services for undocumented students, immigrant students, and students from mixed-status families
- Designate space on campus where undocumented students feel safe such as an undocumented student center or “Dream” center
- Create an atmosphere that allows for productive and supportive conversations on immigration issues that impact students, faculty, and staff
- Ensure that resources and FAQs pertaining to undocumented students are clearly posted on your school’s website for current students and prospective students

Choose Your Advocacy Tactics

- Meet with your university leadership
- Organize events open to campus
- Host meetings for undocumented students and allies
- Encourage your college president or administrators to host town halls open to the campus
- Put together a rally
- Form a group of faculty and staff allies
- Collect stories of immigrant students, faculty, and staff on campus
- Start a petition
- Write op-eds in your or local school newspaper
- Recruit individuals close to on-campus decision-makers as allies