

Seeking Sanctuary: How Schools Can Protect and Advocate for Undocumented Students

By Christian Smith, Hannah Finnie, and Charlotte Hancock

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Introduction

Across the United States, over 100,000 undocumented students [graduate from high school each year](#), but only 30,000 are likely to enroll in higher education programs. And of those, just 2,000 graduate from college each year. The [unique barriers undocumented students face](#) threaten to keep the ivory tower of higher education—and the doors that tower unlocks—just a dream for many undocumented students. Institutions of higher education must do everything they can to ensure undocumented students not only have access to a safe campus where they can learn without fear of being deported, but where they have access to the resources, such as peer mentorship and support networks, that will allow them to thrive.

Notably, these resources and policies cannot simply be implemented—one of the largest barriers facing undocumented students applying to and enrolled in college is a lack of information about the different resources and policies each school has concerning undocumented students. Therefore, these policies must be implemented and then advertised to undocumented students, empowering them with the information needed to attend a school that will welcome them. To identify best practices and policies, Generation Progress surveyed 24 schools representing over 250,000 students during the spring and summer of 2016 to determine what schools were already doing to support their undocumented student populations, and what practices have been most helpful. After surveying these colleges, both public and private, two-year and four-year, Generation Progress has identified key policies—based on practices already in place at many schools—all colleges and universities must enact to fully open the gates of higher education to undocumented students.

A Safe Learning Environment: Ensuring the Well-Being of Undocumented Students

Safeguard Students From Immigration Enforcement

Ensure students feel safe and protected from immigration enforcement on campus.

- Prohibit police and immigration forces from entering campus buildings (including dormitories) or spaces or to stop and question undocumented students without a warrant or subpoena. If your school has a campus police force, it should be instructed not to enforce federal immigration law, or enter agreements with federal, state, or local law enforcement when trying to conduct immigration enforcement.

Maintain Confidentiality

Protect the privacy of undocumented students' documentation status.

- Refrain from requesting students' documentation status unless necessary
- When knowing a student's documentation status is necessary—as it may be in the cases of determining eligibility for financial aid, for institutional support and resources catered to the needs of undocumented students, for college assistance in securing visas, for campus employment, for admissions, or for campus housing—ensure that the information is FERPA-compliant and students' documentation status remain confidential.


Creating Comprehensive Support: Empowering Undocumented Students

Provide In-Depth Services

Offer services that go beyond simple protection from immigration enforcement and ensure undocumented students will be able to thrive.

- Provide counseling specific to undocumented students' needs in offices and programs including but not limited to: health services, academic advising, career counseling, financial aid, and off-campus housing. Undocumented students often face very specific barriers and require specialized information and guidance.
- Offer and advertise a point of contact for undocumented students who will be knowledgeable about all the resources your school has to offer undocumented students, and can connect undocumented students to

The College of William and Mary, a public 4-year institution in Virginia:



Our counseling center has a counselor on staff who offers special outreach and sessions for students with DACA. Staff from the international center have given training to colleagues in Student Affairs on DACA and the challenges and considerations students with DACA face.

the aforementioned specialized counselors. This point of contact should also ensure staff and faculty receive training on the unique needs and considerations of undocumented students.

- Provide confidential, pro-bono legal services and/or consultation on concerns related to immigration for undocumented students, their family members, and community members. If this is not possible, schools can also consider: inviting immigration-centered non-profit organizations to campus to talk to students, providing a dedicated space on campus for community agencies to fulfill this need, welcoming community members (such as law school faculty) to volunteer their time and expertise in providing pro-bono legal services, and vetting external resources and organizations to offer undocumented students who ask for legal assistance.
- Facilitate peer mentoring programs and peer support networks for undocumented students to connect with one another, and create safe spaces for undocumented students to support each other.
- Encourage interested staff and faculty members to self-identify as undocumented student allies in a public way so that undocumented students know and can approach faculty and staff allies for mentorship and support.

Guarantee Housing

Ensure undocumented students always have access to safe and affordable housing.

- Provide housing accommodations specifically for undocumented students during school breaks including summer vacation, as travelling home for breaks is often more arduous for undocumented students.
- Prohibit the use of a student's documentation status as a basis for denying student housing both on-campus and in off-campus but school-affiliated housing. If this is not possible, permit undocumented students to apply for housing as international students.

Offer Financial Aid

Guarantee equitable financial aid, regardless of documentation status.

- Open school-provided grants, scholarships, and aid to ensure undocumented students receive financial aid packages that are equal to

College of Marin, a public 2-year institution in California:



[We] provid[e] space on campus for community agencies to perform these tasks.

Pomona College, a private 4-year institution in California:



[We offer] peer mentoring groups and peer support networks for undocumented/ DACAmented students; emergency grant funds, including funding for DACA fees and other immigration/ legal fees/petition costs.

"Currently, I am working on my doctorate in physical therapy at one of the best programs in the country," Maria, an undocumented student from Illinois, told Generation Progress. "I worked throughout my schooling to get to this point."

their documented peers, making up for any merit- and need-based aid the state or federal government will not provide because of documentation status. Because laws and practices change, avoid tying your school's financial aid policies to one specific immigration program or definition and instead to broad requirements, or just undocumented students generally.

- Commit to offering undocumented students on-campus jobs if the need is displayed. As undocumented students are often the breadwinners of their families but are also barred from receiving work study jobs and may have a harder time securing off-campus employment, if the need is demonstrated a school should attempt to ensure undocumented students receive on-campus employment.
- Provide and maintain a resource network of private scholarships for undocumented students that is circulated and easily available to undocumented students.
- Offer an advertised grant of money to cover legal fees, petition costs, and emergencies concerning immigration.

Advocate for Change

Agitate for reform for undocumented students in higher education on the local, federal, and state level.

- Offer legal testimony and information at hearings and meetings concerning undocumented students and higher education on the local, state, and federal level.
- Proactively meet with local community, business, and government leaders to advocate for increased protections and services for undocumented students.

A 4-year public university in Connecticut:



We make sure that every DACA student wanting an on-campus job gets one.

"He has paid triple the tuition just to be able to take some classes at a community college," Laura, a natural-born citizen, told Generation Progress about her husband, Edgar, who is undocumented and was brought to the U.S. as a child. In Georgia, undocumented students are treated—and charged—as international students, even though Edgar pays Georgia taxes and has lived in Georgia since he was 12.