

# How Can Universities Foster Educational Equity for Undocumented College Students:

Lessons from the University of California

January 2019

Dr. Laura E. Enriquez, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Chicano/Latino Studies, University of California, Irvine

Dr. Edeline M. Burciaga, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Colorado, Denver

Tadria Cardenas  
Undergraduate Student, University of California, Irvine

Biblia Cha, MPH  
PhD Student in Public Health, University of California, Irvine

Vanessa Delgado, MA  
PhD Student in Sociology, University of California, Irvine

Miroslava Guzman Perez  
Undergraduate Student, University of California, Irvine

Daniel Millán, MA  
PhD Candidate in Sociology, University of California, Irvine

Maria Mireles  
Undergraduate Student, University of California, Irvine

Martha Morales Hernandez  
PhD Student in Sociology, University of California, Irvine

Estela Ramirez Ramirez  
Undergraduate Student, University of California, Irvine

Dr. Annie Ro, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Public Health, University of California, Irvine

Daisy Vazquez Vera  
PhD Student in Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles

## Executive Summary

Undocumented students face a multitude of barriers when pursuing higher education. This report examines what universities can do to promote the educational equity of undocumented students. We focus on the University of California system, nine undergraduate educational institutions that have supportive institutional policies and are located in a state that offers access to in-state tuition and state-funded financial aid. Drawing on focus groups and interviews with 214 undocumented University of California undergraduate students and an original survey with 508 respondents, we outline how these educational institutions have successfully closed some resource gaps by creating undocumented student programs. We then explore four persisting barriers: financial need, academic distraction, mental health, and limited postgraduate preparation. We end by outlining policy recommendations.

We anticipate that the barriers we outline here are dramatically higher in institutional contexts where there are no undocumented student programs and states where there is no access to in-state tuition and/or financial aid. Furthermore, students who have employment authorization via the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programs will face increased exclusion as these discretionary programs are dismantled by President Trump's administration.

The UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment supports faculty and graduate student research on employment and labor topics in a variety of academic disciplines.

The institute also sponsors colloquia, conferences, and other public programming, houses the undergraduate minor in Labor and Workplace Studies, and carries out educational outreach on workplace issues to constituencies outside the university.

This paper represents the views of the authors only and not the views of The Regents of the University of California or any of its facilities, including UCLA, the UCLA College of Letters and Science, and the IRLE. University affiliations of the authors are for identification purposes only and should not be construed as university endorsement or approval.

**UCLA**

## Key Findings

*The Importance of Undocumented Student Services:* Undocumented students report discomfort when disclosing their immigration status and frequently encounter staff who are unaware of undocumented student resources. Students and staff alike depend on undocumented student services staff members to provide resources and social support to undocumented students. These demands can overburden programs if they are not fully staffed and resourced.

*Persisting Financial Need:* State and institutional need-based financial aid has narrowed the gap between the financial aid received by low-income citizen and undocumented students at the University of California, relieving much of the financial pressure associated with paying for tuition. Yet many students struggle to afford basic living and educational expenses, resulting in negative consequences for academic performance.

*Academic Distraction:* Undocumented students report being distracted from their academic work by a variety of issues related to their immigration status, including deportation threats to themselves and others, immigration-related appointments, and anticipated or actual changes to immigration policy. These worries disrupt academic engagement in and outside of the classroom and result in poorer academic performance.

*Need for Mental Health Services:* Undocumented students experience higher levels of perceived stress than national populations on average, as students struggle to balance their academic responsibilities with concerns about their future, deportation threats, and financial struggles. Though many report the need for mental health counseling, only half report seeking help, in part due to perceptions that counselors are not informed about undocumented student issues.

*Limited Postgraduate Preparation:* Undocumented students report having limited opportunities to acquire the necessary skills and opportunities to prepare for their desired careers. They do not feel prepared to pursue their career goals and are anxious about life after graduation.

## Introduction

Undocumented young adults face a multitude of barriers when pursuing their higher education. Most advocacy and policy work has focused on the need for state and federal policy changes, including tuition equity policies for undocumented students, access to financial aid, and a pathway to legalization for undocumented youth. Indeed, there have been substantial state, federal, and institutional policy advancements in these areas.

State laws are critical to fostering access to higher education, and California has become one of the most supportive.<sup>1</sup> Undocumented California youth have had access to in-state college tuition at public colleges and universities since 2002 via Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540). The California DREAM Act (AB 130 and AB 131) has provided access to privately funded financial aid since 2011 and need-based, state-funded financial aid since 2013. In 2014, Senate Bill 1210 created the DREAM Loan Program that allows undocumented students enrolled in participating four-year public universities to receive up to \$4,000 in loans per year and to borrow a total of \$20,000.

Around the time the California DREAM Act was taking effect, President Barack Obama established the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Using executive authority, the program provides a select group of undocumented young adults with access to a two-year, renewable work permit and protection from deportation.<sup>2</sup> Receiving DACA protections increased high school completion and college enrollment rates, particularly in states where existing policies facilitated undocumented students' access to higher education.<sup>3</sup> Recipients also found higher paying jobs that better matched their education and training and had better working conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Institutional policies have also been key for improving undocumented students' experiences on campus. One of the largest university systems in the United States, the University of California (UC) system has led the way in implementing institutional policies aimed at addressing the needs of undocumented students. The UC system enrolled

approximately 4,000 undocumented students during the 2015–2016 academic year and has made multiple institutional commitments to support their success. In 2013, UC President Janet Napolitano announced a \$5 million, multiyear funding commitment to support the development of undocumented student resources.<sup>5</sup> A second wave of funding in the amount of \$8.4 million was announced in 2016 and included allocations for a DREAM loan program and the UC Immigrant Legal Services Center.<sup>6</sup>

These system-wide institutional resources facilitated the educational incorporation of undocumented students into the UC system. All UC campuses now have one or more designated undocumented student services staff members, and some campuses created dedicated centers to support undocumented students. Funding was allocated to close financial aid gaps through scholarships, grants, and loans. Programming supports the academic achievement, social incorporation, and psychological well-being of undocumented students. In this highly supportive environment, many undocumented students have flourished.

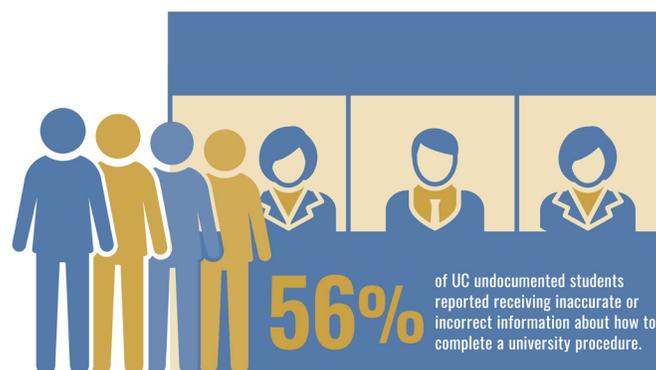
Given increasingly restrictive federal policies, this report focuses attention on what educational institutions can do to minimize the negative consequences of undocumented status for students. We take the case of the University of California system—nine undergraduate institutions that have supportive institutional policies and are located in a state that offer access to in-state tuition and state-funded financial aid—to identify ways to foster the educational equity of undocumented college students. We spoke to undocumented student services staff members, conducted interviews and focus groups with 214 undocumented UC undergraduate students, and fielded an online survey of UC undocumented students with 508 respondents. We find that the UC campuses have successfully facilitated undocumented students’ access to resources by creating undocumented student services, including hiring staff members and funding programming. However, four barriers persist: financial need, academic distraction, the need for mental health services, and limited postgraduate preparation. This report summarizes key findings and offers recommendations for improving undocumented student services.

## Accessing Resources: The Importance of Undocumented Student Services

Undocumented students struggle to navigate higher education institutions and access resources. They often must take the initiative to inquire if their immigration status makes them ineligible for an opportunity, ask if or how their application process might be different, or petition for additional support—forcing students to disclose their immigration status to staff and faculty. Frequently, students encounter staff and faculty members who are unaware of the resources available to undocumented students or who provide inaccurate information.

Most of our participants were hesitant to reveal their immigration status to others. Half of survey participants reported preferring to keep their immigration status private, with 39% revealing their status only when necessary and 13% not being open about it at all; only 18% reported being very open about their immigration status. This hesitancy can make it particularly difficult to access services and support tailored to the unique needs of undocumented students. Dolores, a focus group participant remembered, “I went in to talk to my [academic] counselor for the five-year plan. I’m not very open with my status. I didn’t know how she would react to me being undocumented.” Not revealing her status to a counselor could contribute to establishing an unrealistic graduation plan and leave questions and fears about life after graduation unaddressed.

**Undocumented students have difficulty accessing correct information about university procedures.**



When students revealed their immigration to staff and faculty, they often received incorrect information: 56% of survey participants reported receiving inaccurate or incorrect information about how to complete a university procedure as an undocumented student. Further, 58% reported having to educate a university staff person about their eligibility to receive a resource. Approximately a third reported being denied access to a campus resource or program because of their undocumented status.<sup>7</sup> For example, Beatrice recounted speaking with a financial aid representative: “I said ‘California DREAM Act,’ and they told me there’s no such thing.” Participants reported similar experiences at various offices across campus.

Dedicated and trained staff members who provide undocumented student services are key to preventing misinformation. Each UC campus has at least one full-time staff member charged with providing undocumented student services. These staff members assist students by answering questions, guiding them to resources, and providing holistic programming to support their academic, social, emotional, and professional development. These staff members are also charged with identifying remaining gaps in services and developing innovative ways to address remaining barriers.

Undocumented student services staff members are instrumental in improving students’ feelings of belonging on campus. Aurora, a third-year student, explained the benefits of having undocumented student coordinators on her campus: “They’ve been really supportive in not just asking about school or finances or home but just asking about myself and how I’m doing.” This attention resulted in her “feeling valued in a space.” Similarly, Lizabel, who had just graduated, explained that the undocumented student coordinator “knows what we’re going through, and she’s been incredibly helpful. . . . I always felt welcome, and I always felt like I belonged here; I felt wanted.” For most, the undocumented student coordinator was the first person they had encountered in their education whose job was explicitly to support them as undocumented students. As a result, students felt that the institution cared about their success and that they were valued members of the campus community. Although other faculty and staff also established positive connections with undocumented students, undocumented student services staff members stood out as the key members of the campus community who instilled feelings of belonging. Indeed, 47% of students agreed that having a coordinator has helped them academically, 60% agreed that the coordinator increased their sense of belonging on campus, and 79% agreed that even if they do not go to the coordinator often, they feel better knowing the coordinators are there.<sup>8</sup>

Other university staff also depend on the undocumented student services staff members for information. Kim explained how necessary these staff members are: “[The financial aid officers] tell you one thing one day but they tell you another thing if you go to a different person. So you don’t really know who to talk to. . . . When I went to the study abroad center for the first time, they were like ‘Ohhh, you’re undocumented?’ They referred me to [the undocumented student services staff member]. I was like, might as well have gone to [them] in the first place. . . . So it’s kind of like no one really knows how to handle you, type of thing.”

However, constantly redirecting students to the undocumented student services office can also teach students to rely solely on these staff members. Although coordinators are trained to understand and address the unique needs of this student population, this pressures them to develop expertise in all student services, including academic, financial, and psychological counseling. At the same time, undocumented student services staff are frequently responsible for a huge number of students. For instance, at the time of data collection, UC Irvine had one designated staff member for approximately 550 undocumented students. Interview participants at UC Irvine acknowledged the demands on their coordinator and the fact that “she’s taking on a lot for just one person.” This high demand means that some students fall through the cracks. Deborah explained, “I don’t want to speak to [the coordinator] because she’s always very busy. Sometimes I go there and she’s not even in the office because she has so many things to do.”

## Persisting Financial Need

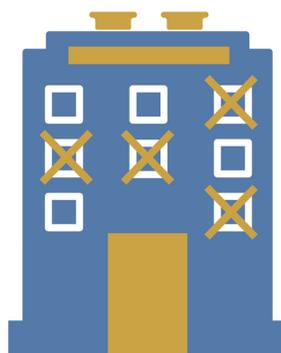
Previous research demonstrates that undocumented students face unique financial obstacles in pursuit of higher education. However, the California DREAM Act and UC institutional financial aid programs allowed undocumented students who qualify for in-state tuition via AB 540 to receive need-based financial aid packages, effectively narrowing the gap between undocumented and citizen students from low-income backgrounds. Despite this progress, UC undocumented students have persisting financial needs.

Almost all (96%) of survey respondents reported relying on grant and scholarship aid to cover their educational expenses.<sup>9</sup> Interviews indicate that most UC undocumented students receive enough aid to cover tuition and fees, which totaled \$13,400 for California residents during the 2015–2016 school year. This is a clear testament to the success of state and institutional aid programs. However, undocumented California students who do not attend the UC system often do not have access to as much institutional aid, meaning that their aid packages may not cover their full tuition costs. Undocumented students who live in states without tuition equity or state financial aid policies also continue to struggle to pay for their education.

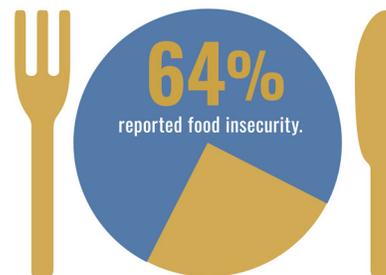
Despite receiving aid packages designed to meet their financial need, most students struggled to cover additional educational expenses. These include books and supplies, estimated at \$1,500 a year, and room and board, estimated at \$14,200 a year on campus or \$9,400 a year off campus. A quarter of respondents reported taking out loans to cover these costs.<sup>10</sup> Close to three in four used personal resources,<sup>11</sup> and approximately two in three used family resources.<sup>12</sup> However, respondents had limited personal resources. Sixty-seven percent came from households where the annual income was less than \$30,000 a year.<sup>13</sup> Sixty-four percent of participants reported earning their own income, with the majority making less than \$5,000 a year. As a result, students often tried to cut corners to lower these additional expenses, resulting in high levels of housing and food insecurity.

Students reported high levels of housing insecurity. Almost half of survey participants described housing insecurity in the past year, with 46% reporting difficulty paying rent, and 41% reporting concerns that they might not have a place to live.<sup>14</sup> The focus group data suggests that housing insecurity was due to a combination of limited financial resources and steep rental costs. Omar explained, “Every semester, I’m worried about where the hell I’m gonna live and how the hell I’m going to be able to afford paying that. . . . It stresses me out.” This stressor was particularly an issue at schools that were situated in expensive housing markets. Some respondents also indicated that their immigration status created barriers to securing housing. Ester recalled the stressful moment she realized that she needed to use a social security number to apply for off-campus housing: “I actually had to have my uncle be my [lease cosigner] because they need someone with a social security, and he’s a citizen.” Not all students had citizen family members willing or able to help them in this way.

### Undocumented students face high financial insecurity.



**46%**  
of UC undocumented students  
reported difficulty paying rent.



Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents experienced food insecurity in the past academic year, compared to 42% of the general UC student population.<sup>15</sup> Amelia explained, “I did have times where I had to limit what I ate because I didn’t have enough money to buy more food. I did have some days where I didn’t eat. I did need a little bit more help, and I didn’t want to ask my parents because at the time, I knew they were struggling a lot. And I didn’t want them to get worried or anything like that.” Many others mentioned that their limited financial resources forced them to practice cost-saving strategies such as skipping meals and limiting what they ate.

Persisting financial need can have negative repercussions for academic performance. Half of survey participants agreed that their limited financial aid hurt their academic performance,<sup>16</sup> and 29% reported that their living situation hurt their academic performance. Rebecca shared, “I’ve had to choose between buying books and buying food. . . . I feel like if I don’t own a book, that impacts my grades, and I feel like I do worse.”

It is important to note that the employment authorization provided by DACA allowed undocumented students to find jobs to make ends meet. Finding employment was much more difficult for students who did not have DACA, which limited their ability to meet their basic needs. If DACA recipients’ employment authorizations expire, their incomes will undoubtedly decrease and/or become inconsistent, creating greater challenges as students try to cover the gaps in their financial aid packages.

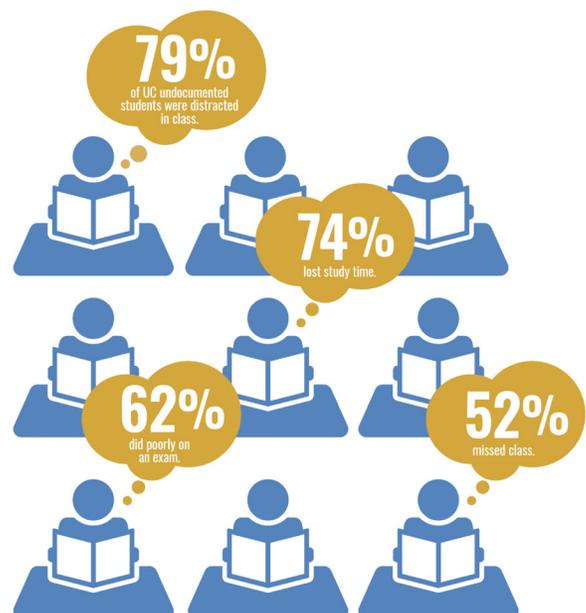
## Academic Distractions

Undocumented students are distracted in academic settings by a variety of issues related to their immigration status, including deportation threats to themselves and others, immigration-related appointments, and anticipated or actual changes to immigration policy. These feelings increased after the 2016 election of President Trump, who had vowed to end the DACA program, and have likely worsened with the rescission of the program. These distractions have cumulative consequences for academic engagement and performance.

Most survey respondents reported experiencing academic disruptions due to issues related to their immigration status: 79% reported being distracted in class, 74% lost needed study hours, 62% did poorly on an exam, and 52% missed class.<sup>17</sup>

In most cases, the changing sociopolitical context led students to be distracted in class and while studying, which contributed to losing needed study hours and doing poorly on exams. Given the timing of our interviews, the candidacy, election, and inauguration of President Trump often emerged as a salient source of distraction. Amy explained, “For the first two weeks after [the election], I was really, really distracted because I was like, Shit, what’s going to happen? And even just like the night of, I stayed up late to watch it. And then I stayed up even later because I was crying. And then the next day, I was dead. So it took a few days to like, level off. But even after that, I was still distracted. It took a while for me to get back on track.” For many students, the 2016 presidential election disrupted their academic performance that term. Other students explained how distressing

### Undocumented students experience immigration-related distractions that hurt their academic performance.



immigration announcements or events, such as those about the future of DACA or coordinated deportation raids, resulted in losing focus on school. These triggering events have proliferated in the past year as immigration policy rumors and announcements abound.

Concerns about the general safety and well-being of undocumented family members can also lead to academic distraction. Alyssa explained the energy she invested in ensuring her family's safety, such as not paying attention in class after seeing friends' posts on Facebook about "a lot of raids and, oh, there's a checkpoint here and there. So I would be like checking and screenshot it and send it to my mom and my dad and be like, 'Pay attention!' . . . So then I'd try to go back to class and I'd be like, Shoot, I just missed ten minutes. What's going on?" Students reported similar distractions when studying.

Interview participants also reported missing class to attend meetings and appointments related to their immigration status—biometric appointments with immigration officials, meeting with lawyers, or attending immigration court hearings. Dolores remembered, "I did miss school because after Trump became president, my family and I went to see a lawyer just to see what our options were." These encounters with immigration institutions were usually infrequent but represented large investments of time and energy.

Undocumented students believed these distractions impacted their academic performance, indirectly resulting in poor test scores, low grades, and GPAs that do not reflect their academic ability. For example, Stephanie explained that she had been talking to an attorney on campus and had to make several appointments to explore legalization options: "Yeah, it's been kind of taking up a lot of my mental space. And I think also, when I get stressed, I tend to not care much about the classes. I don't study as much as I normally would." The mental space that Stephanie refers to is reflective of a preoccupation with short-term and long-term immigration issues that take students' time and attention away from their education and negatively impact academic outcomes.

## Need for Mental Health Services

Undocumented students report high levels of perceived stress. We administered the Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale, ten statements about how often certain feelings emerged in the past week such as having "been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly," "felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life," and "found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do." Students rated the frequency of each feeling on a scale of 0 (never) to 4 (almost always). The responses are added up, resulting in a stress score that ranged from 0 to 40.

The average score of respondents was 21.5, or the approximate equivalent of "sometimes" (2) on all items. This score is substantially higher than those reported by nationally representative studies of other populations including white Americans (mean 15.70), Latino adults (mean 17.00) and all young adults of comparable age (18–25 years; mean 16.78).<sup>18</sup>

Interviews suggest that these high stress levels are driven by several concerns, including fears about the future, their own or their family's deportation, academic performance, and financial need. Dan described the sources of his stress: "It comes from school. Sometimes it comes from uncertainty and just thinking about the future." These worries often coalesced with his undocumented immigration status and his ineligibility for DACA: "I mean, one big thing is my immigration status. I can't control how far I will go in life. I can't control that I get the opportunity I want and need in life. And no matter how much I try, I always feel like I'm going to have less than other people because I don't have DACA, and that just closes so many doors." Most participants felt that their undocumented status, regardless of whether or not they had DACA, disrupted their academic performance, financial stability, familial safety, and future opportunities. All of these concerns joined together to create substantial amounts of stress that negatively impacted their overall mental health and well-being.

Calvin, another participant, noted that debilitating stress was often triggered by feelings of helplessness and uncertainty that emerged after thinking about immigration policy or related issues: “I think there’s a little sense of helplessness. . . . It comes in waves. It definitely comes in waves. . . . Here, I’m like . . . on the go, studying, doing homework. I think [about it] in the back of my mind; it’s not as up front. But when I’m at home, all we talk about is politics and what’s gonna happen at home . . . . The fear and just the worries are a little bit more aware.” His comments suggest that stress related to immigration status shifts over time, emerging strongly in response to conversations or thoughts about immigration policy and barriers resulting from immigration status.

Often participants reported that stress related to immigration issues left them feeling unable to carry out daily activities until they were able to push these thoughts aside. Dan shared how this affected his academic performance: “Sometimes I just don’t go to class, I don’t do my work, I just stay up, and sometimes I just indulge, and I don’t wake up. I don’t even want to wake up. And that just affects school.”

Notably, almost two thirds of survey respondents reported feeling that they needed mental health counseling in the past year. However, only half actually sought help, with 68% of these seeing an on-campus mental health professional, 25% a nontherapist (e.g., professor, staff, friend, or family member) and 7% an off-campus mental health professional. Our respondents are probably more likely to seek help than students at other institutions because the UC system requires students to enroll in a comprehensive student health insurance program (or provide proof of other insurance), and all campuses provide on-campus mental health services.

Many interview participants downplayed their stress and explained that they did not seek out mental health services. Tyler noted, “We’ve come to internalize it or normalize it—not normalize in a good way but normalize in a sense that this is just something that everyone experiences so it’s okay for me to experience it. . . . We forget it shouldn’t be a thing we’re experiencing.”

Participants also perceived counselors as having a lack of awareness about immigration issues and felt uncertain about how counselors would respond to their undocumented status. This perception prevented many students from seeking support or deterred their continued use of services. Only 17% of survey respondents believed that the mental health counselors on their campuses are knowledgeable about undocumented students and their issues. In his interview, Mauricio shared his experience with a counselor who was not sufficiently aware of undocumented students’ issues: “Something that I did not like about it is that the therapist was not really informed on undocumented status issues. So a lot of it was me explaining what issues undocumented individuals face and then her just pitying me.”

Elevated stress also takes a toll on undocumented students’ physical health. A substantially greater proportion of respondents reported poor or fair health (34%) rather than very good or excellent health (23%), whereas a 2007 national survey found only 10% of young adults aged 18–24 reported poor or fair health.<sup>19</sup> Additional statistical analysis of our data shows that stress, specifically stemming from academic and future concerns, is associated with poorer health.<sup>20</sup>

### Undocumented students report high levels of stress and need inclusive mental health services.



## Limited Postgraduate Preparation

On a practical level, a college education should prepare students to pursue their desired careers and situate them for upward mobility. However, our data suggest that undocumented students have limited opportunities for professional development and face uncertainty about their future ability to be legally employed. Less than half (44%) of survey respondents had been able to access one or more professional development opportunities. Of these, 26% reported that they had participated in unpaid internships, 23% had worked in paid internships, and 20% had held career-relevant jobs.<sup>21</sup>

Numerous respondents, like Eddie, had tried to seek out these opportunities but reported being denied access: “I wasn’t able to do [the paid internship] because of my status. I feel like stuff like that’s really crucial for developing those skills to go into the industry. [My immigration status] definitely backfired on me.” Berlyn, an aspiring physician, recounted how her immigration status even prevented her from volunteering: “I was trying to volunteer at [a medical center]. But then when I applied, they were like, ‘Are you a citizen or resident?’ And they rejected me because they didn’t know about DACA.” Even when students had DACA protections, lacking permanent immigration status could bar students from opportunities. It comes as no surprise that only 30% of survey respondents felt prepared to achieve their career goals.<sup>22</sup>

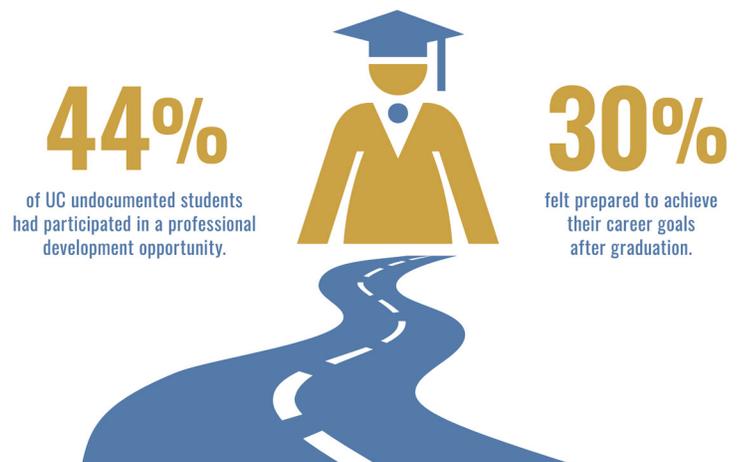
Eighty three percent of survey respondents indicated that they were considering pursuing some type of graduate education. However, substantially fewer reported having the experience needed to be competitive applicants: only 22% reported research experience, and only 8% had participated in a graduate school preparation program.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, only 28% reported strong relationships with faculty, suggesting they would not have strong letters of recommendation to accompany their applications.

In the focus groups, many prospective graduate students mentioned how undocumented students are often denied access to preparation opportunities. Yvette explained, “We do have a lot more resources now in comparison with the past, but I still think that we still lack . . . graduate school and postundergrad [preparation]. So like, the McNair program and things like that that are federally funded for fellowships, there’s not a lot of opportunities for [undocumented] students in that way.” Many students cited a lack of access to preparation programs, like the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, as well as limited information about how to meet their unique needs when pursuing graduate school as an undocumented student.

In addition to struggling to access opportunities, undocumented students face uncertainty about their future ability to be legally employed. Eighty-four percent of survey participants agreed that thinking about life after graduation gives them anxiety. Those who did not have DACA worried about not having employment eligibility, and those who had DACA worried about losing their eligibility.

Maité, a DACA recipient, shared that she had stopped planning for her future due to the uncertainty of the current political climate: “I feel like I can’t really make any future plans because I am a DACA recipient, but the program isn’t permanent. And elections are coming up.” She made these comments in spring 2016, prior to President Trump’s

### Undocumented students have limited access to post-graduate preparation.



election and the rescission of DACA. At that time, 90% of surveyed DACA recipients were worried about being able to use their degree if DACA were rescinded, and 78% believed that they would have to alter their career plans if DACA were rescinded.<sup>24</sup> Given that the fear of DACA's rescission has become a complicated legal reality, we suspect that anxiety about life after graduation is now even higher.

## Policy Recommendations

Educational institutions can implement a variety of programs and policies to ensure that undocumented students receive equal opportunities and support.

### Ensure undocumented students have access to necessary information, resources, and support.

- Develop undocumented student support services, including hiring a dedicated staff member to serve undocumented students. Students benefit from having a single person serve as a clearinghouse for all their unique resource and information needs. For campuses that have large undocumented student populations, additional staff members are necessary. Bring on undergraduate students to assist the coordinator with programming; structure these as professional development internships, and provide scholarship or fellowship funding if possible.
- To decrease some of the burden on undocumented student services, provide up-to-date professional development training to offices across campus so that each department can provide undocumented students with accurate information. This is different from ally training in that it should include information tailored to the specific office's area of expertise. Training should be provided at all staff levels, including frontline student staff.
- Outline and distribute information about campus resources and best practices to staff, faculty, and teaching assistants, so they are prepared to answer undocumented students' questions and refer them to trained student affairs professionals.
- Develop a website of undocumented student resources that includes basic information about available resources as well as contact information for designated and trained staff members in relevant offices. If security is a concern, sensitive information could be put on a secure site that would require a university login. However, basic information should be publically available so that prospective students have access.
- Create relationships with local and national nonprofits that serve immigrants and refer students to these organizations for services or information that the university may not be equipped to deliver. This strategy can be particularly effective for addressing legal needs.

### Develop resources to close persisting financial gaps.

- Create (additional) resources that address the food insecurity of all students, regardless of immigration status. These resources could include food pantries, meal vouchers for on-campus dining establishments, programs to "rescue" food from events across campus to help stock food pantries, or local nonprofit organizations that provide hot meals on a set schedule.
- Create (additional) resources that address the housing insecurity of all students, regardless of immigration status. These resources could include fee waivers for housing applications, emergency funds for housing needs, or priority access to cheaper on-campus housing options. Consider informal options, such as creating a list of individuals who live near campus and are willing to provide temporary lodging.
- Ensure that there are no unintended barriers or phrasing that would lead undocumented students to voluntarily opt out of using campus housing and food resources. Potential barriers could include requiring documentation of financial need, a social security number, or state-issued form of identification. Encourage undocumented students to use existing resources.

- Develop institutional scholarships or partner with nonprofit organizations to develop scholarship or emergency funds.
- Conduct an inventory of all available financial assistance programs, grants, scholarships, and funds throughout the campus, and determine their immigration-status requirements. Publish a list of all programs that are open to undocumented individuals on the undocumented student resource webpage. Advocate for removing immigration status requirements on those programs that are not open to undocumented students.

### **Recognize that immigration-related distractions can be detrimental to students' academic experiences and help undocumented students manage distractions.**

- Encourage faculty to recognize immigration-related emergencies and appointments as legitimate reasons to ask for extensions or to excuse absences. Faculty could incorporate this policy into their existing course policies and list it on their syllabi. A sample statement is: "If you experience a medical emergency, family crisis, immigration-related issue, or other serious event, please notify me know as soon as possible. I may excuse your absence(s) and, if needed, we can develop a plan for extending assignment deadlines and/or receiving an incomplete in the course so you can make up work at a later date."
- Provide workshops and trainings on stress management and mindfulness techniques to help limit the negative effects of these distractions.
- Develop programming that teaches students and their families proactive responses to immigration-related issues, including know-your-rights trainings and guidelines for how to respond if a family member is detained or deported.
- Partner with nonprofit organizations, law school clinics, and/or lawyers willing to do pro bono work to assist students and their family members with immigration issues.
- Provide professional development training to academic counseling staff to ensure that they have a basic background in immigration policy and understand undocumented students' chronic uncertainty, barriers, and limited access to resources.

### **Develop mental health services and programming.**

- Provide professional development training to mental health counseling staff to ensure that they have a basic background in immigration policy and understand undocumented students' chronic uncertainty, barriers, and limited access to resources.
- Establish drop-in counseling hours or other avenues through which undocumented students can quickly access mental health services when immigration-related stress may be higher, such as after announced immigration policy changes or during periods of high immigration enforcement.
- Encourage the use of mental health services by developing educational campaigns that promote recognition of mental health strain and destigmatize the use of mental health services.
- Encourage undocumented students to use existing resources, and make students aware that counselors have received training on immigration policies.

### **Create professional development opportunities for undocumented students, regardless of their employment authorization.**

- Develop fellowship and scholarship funds that can be used to compensate students for participating in career preparation opportunities, like internships or research positions. If funding is not available, offer course credit.
- Create graduate school preparation programs that address the unique needs of undocumented students, such as, but not limited to: available funding opportunities, how to choose a program considering state laws and policies, planning for a career with a graduate degree, and navigating immigration status while in graduate school.

## Advocate for federal, state, and local policy changes that will support the educational pursuits of undocumented students.

- Federal immigration policy needs to provide a realistic and secure pathway to legalization for undocumented students so they can feel secure in planning for and pursuing their educational and career goals. The reinstatement of DACA or a similar temporary policy would provide some relief but would not fully address feelings of uncertainty.
- State policymakers can support undocumented students' pursuit of higher education by passing educational access policies, like in-state tuition and access to financial aid. Additional policies, such as providing undocumented immigrants with access to driver licenses, can support students by facilitating their ability to get to school and to jobs that finance their education.
- Local government policy can also ease undocumented students' everyday lives. These policies include, but are not limited to, ensuring the availability and accessibility of affordable housing and ensuring local police are not cooperating with immigration enforcement officials.

## Methodological Appendix

The Undocumented Student Equity Project began as a collaborative effort between undocumented and allied undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty at the University of California, Irvine. The first phase of the study consisted of qualitative interviews and focus groups and survey data collection between 2014 and 2016. Both data sources in this phase focused on students' experiences with and use of campus resources.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted in two waves. In all, 154 UC undergraduate students participated in 32 focus groups and 29 one-on-one interviews. The first wave involved focus groups with students at UC Davis, UC Merced, UC San Diego, and UC Santa Barbara during the 2014–2015 academic year; these were conducted by Dr. Tanya Golash-Boza (UC Merced) and Dr. Zulema Valdez (UC Merced). Dr. Laura E. Enriquez (UC Irvine) supervised the undergraduate and graduate student team members who conducted the second wave of interviews during the 2015–2016 academic year with focus groups and interviews at all nine UC undergraduate campuses.

We interviewed a median of 14 students per campus, with a minimum of 6 students on one and a maximum of 36 on another. Participants were recruited via personal networks and snowball sampling and the second wave via wide-reaching undocumented student email lists controlled by each campus's undocumented student services staff. Finally, we selectively recruited participants from non-Latina/o backgrounds who did not have DACA, via volunteers from our online survey. Focus groups lasted 2–3 hours, and interviews averaged an hour using a semistructured interview guide. All participants received \$15 to compensate them for their time.

The online survey was administered in spring 2016. We collected responses from 508 undocumented undergraduate students across all nine University of California undergraduate campuses. The survey was administered via SurveyMonkey, with an estimated completion time of 20–30 minutes. A median of 55 students participated per campus, with a minimum of 22 students on one campus and a maximum of 95 on another. We surveyed approximately 15% of each campus's estimated undocumented student population. Respondents were recruited via wide-reaching undocumented student email lists controlled by each campus's undocumented student services staff. Additionally, we asked undocumented student leaders to distribute the survey to student organization contacts via email and Facebook groups. Survey respondents were also sent a survey link that they could forward to others. All respondents received \$10 to compensate them for their time.

Upon completion of the first phase, we identified the need for a second phase that followed up on two barriers: academic achievement and mental health needs. We conducted 60 more interviews between March and July 2017, 30 dedicated to each topic, with undocumented students at one University of California campus. Academic achievement interviews focused on academic experiences, including overall academic performance and the use of academic

support services. Mental health interviews focused on stress and formal and informal coping strategies. In both sets of interviews, we asked participants to reflect on relevant descriptive data from the UC-wide survey. Undergraduate students Yareli Castro, Boonyarit Daraphant, and Erica Solis provided additional research assistance at this stage.

Demographic info for all data sources is provided in Table 1.

Funding was provided by grants from the John Randolph and Dora Haynes Foundation, UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California Consortium on Social Science and Law, University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States, University of California Office of the President, and grant programs at UC Irvine (CORCL, Office of Inclusive Excellence, School of Social Sciences, and Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

	UC-wide Qualitative Sample (n=154)	Quantitative Sample (n=508)	Academic Qualitative Sample (n=30)	Mental Health Qualitative Sample (n=30)
<b>AREA OF ORIGIN</b>				
Mexico	72%	73%	70%	43%
Central America	7%	6%	7%	3%
South America	5%	4%	3%	7%
East Asia	4%	10%	13%	27%
Southeast Asia and Pacific Islands	6%	4%	3%	17%
South Asia	1%	1%	0%	0%
Middle East	2%	<1%	0%	0%
Africa	1%	<1%	3%	0%
Europe, Canada, and Australia	1%	<1%	0%	0%
Not reported	1%	0%	0%	0%
<b>GENDER</b>				
Women	74%	71%	63%	53%
Men	26%	29%	33%	47%
Alternative gender identities	0%	<1%	3%	0%
<b>IMMIGRATION STATUS</b>				
DACA	81%	85%	63%	77%
Undocumented	18%	11%	33%	20%
Other temporary immigration status	1%	3%	3%	3%
Not reported	0%	<1%	0%	0%
<b>YEAR IN SCHOOL</b>				
First-year	26%	28%	37%	7%
Sophomore	27%	20%	17%	17%
Junior	22%	27%	26%	43%
Senior	25%	25%	20%	30%
Graduate/professional student	-	-	-	3%
Not reported	0%	1%	0%	0%
<b>TRANSFER STATUS</b>				
Transferred from 2-year college	32%	24%	27%	27%
Enrolled in UC after high school	68%	76%	73%	77%
Not reported	1%	0%	0%	0%

## NOTES

- 1 For details on other states, see “Table: Laws & Policies Improving Access to Higher Education for Immigrants,” National Immigration Law Center, updated June 2018, <https://www.nilc.org/issues/education/eduaccesstoolkit2a/#tables>.
- 2 “Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, updated February 14, 2018, <https://www.uscis.gov/archive/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>. Individuals were eligible to apply for DACA status if they entered the United States before age sixteen, were under age thirty-one when the program was announced, lived in the United States continuously for at least five years prior to the program announcement, and had no serious criminal record.
- 3 Roberto G. Gonzales, “DACA at Year Three: Challenges and Opportunities in Accessing Higher Education and Employment,” American Immigration Council, 2016, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/daca-year-three-challenges-and-opportunities-accessing-higher-education-and-employment>. For a discussion of state context, see Kara Cebulko and Alexis Silver, “Navigating DACA in Hospitable and Hostile States: State Responses and Access to Membership in the Wake of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 13 (November 2016): 1553–74.
- 4 Caitlin Patler and Jorge Cabrera, “From Undocumented to DACAdmented: Benefits and Limitations of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, Three Years Following Its Announcement,” UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, 2015, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6b56v27p>; Randy Capps, Michael Fix, and Jie Zong, “The Education and Work Profiles of the DACA Population,” Migration Policy Institute, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/education-and-work-profiles-daca-population>; Tom K. Wong and Carolina Valdivia, “In Their Own Words: A Nationwide Survey of Undocumented Millennials,” United We Dream, 2014, <http://unitedwedream.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Undocumented-Millennials-Survey-Summary.pdf>.
- 5 “President Napolitano Earmarks Aid for Students, Researchers,” University of California Office of the President, November 1, 2013, <http://link.ucop.edu/2013/11/01/president-napolitano-earmarks-aid-for-students-researchers/>.
- 6 “UC President Napolitano Announces Multiyear Support for Undocumented Students,” University of California Press Room, May 11, 2016, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/uc-president-napolitano-proposes-multi-year-support-undocumented-students>.
- 7 One student did not provide a response to one item in this question, n=507.
- 8 Three students did not provide a response to one item in this question, n=505.
- 9 Three students declined to answer this question, and twenty-four did not know, n=481.
- 10 Forty-five students declined to answer this question, and six did not know, n=457.
- 11 Five students declined to answer, and twelve did not know, n=491.
- 12 Nineteen students did not know, n=489.
- 13 Two students provided invalid responses, n=506.
- 14 One student did not provide a response to each of these questions, n=506.
- 15 Suzanna M Martinez, Katie Maynard, and Lorrene D Ritchie, “Student Food Access and Security Study,” University of California Global Food Initiative, 2016, <https://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/food-access-security/student-food-access-and-security-study.pdf>.
- 16 One student did not provide a response to this question, n=507.
- 17 Four students did not provide a response to one of these items, n=504.
- 18 Sheldon Cohen and Denise Janicki-Deverts, “Who’s Stressed? Distributions of Psychological Stress in the United States in Probability Samples from 1983, 2006, and 2009,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 42, no. 6 (June 2012): 1320–34.
- 19 James Tsai et al, “Multiple Healthy Behaviors and Optimal Self-Rated Health: Findings from the 2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey,” *Preventive Medicine* 51, nos. 3–4 (September–October 2010): 268–74.
- 20 Laura E. Enriquez, Martha Morales Hernandez, and Annie Ro, “Deconstructing Immigrant Illegality: A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Stress and Health among Undocumented College Students,” *Race and Social Problems* 10, no. 3 (August 2018): 193–208.
- 21 Fourteen students did not provide a response to all three questions, n=494. The percentages for each type of opportunity do not add up to the total percentage who had accessed a professional development opportunity because students could report accessing multiple types of opportunities.
- 22 Four students did not provide a response to this question, n=504.
- 23 Four students did not provide responses to these two questions, n=504.
- 24 Of the 433 DACA recipients, 23 did not provide a response to both questions, n=410.