

STUDENT WELLNESS AMBASSADOR POCKET GUIDE: Supporting Students with an Undocumented Legal Status

AN EXCITING PART OF BEING A STUDENT WELLNESS AMBASSADOR

is engaging with your student peers to conduct outreach for mental health and wellness. This quick guide will give you some strategies on engaging with students who may be undocumented on your campus to promote events, share information on student mental health, and connect students with key mental health resources on your campus.

In 2019, the Foundation for California Community Colleges partnered with Immigrants Rising to produce the Report, a landscape analysis of the California Community College system that looked to identify ways to better meet of students with an undocumented legal status. At the time, the report estimated that 50,000-70,000 California Community Colleges students were of an undocumented legal status.

The Dreamers Report was originally developed to respond to the possibility that many of these students would lose the protections provided by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which has become politically vulnerable in recent years. Upon analysis, however, the Dreamers Report found that “undocumented students face multiple system barriers beyond the threat of losing DACA protections,” going on to identify a number of opportunities within the institution for better serving this at-risk population. In concluding, the report identified six challenges facing the California Community Colleges system:

1. Inadequate ability to outreach to undocumented students and protect student data
2. Insufficient institutional support/campus-wide trainings
3. Need for dedicated stakeholders, staff, and space at each campus
4. Need for better access to financial support
5. Need for increased student engagement and direct services to increase student retention
6. Need for definitive guidance from the California Community College Chancellors Office¹

Many of the findings outlined in the [Dreamers Report](#) directly relate to the sort of support and services that you promote as a Student Ambassador. **This toolkit is designed to provide you with an overview of culturally informed practices for supporting students with an undocumented legal status, with an emphasis on mental health and wellness.** The suggestions, activities, and resources will help you design a safe space, conduct outreach activities, and coordinate with stakeholders across the campus. Students with an undocumented legal status often report elevated levels of stress and personal distractions related to their citizenship status.¹ As a Student Wellness Ambassador, you can help mitigate these stressors by designing inclusive events that engage students with an undocumented legal status. For many students with an undocumented legal status, a safe space can be an invaluable resource.² Providing these students with an environment in which they can share their stories and engage with the community around them can play a critical role in improving both mental health and academic outcomes.



USING PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE

Person-centered language emphasizes the individual over their health, mental health, and social conditions. Person-centered language is important to use when supporting a wide range of students, including those with an undocumented legal status. Person-centered language can help to fight against the role that language plays in producing a **culture of fear**.

- Terms such as “illegal” and “alien” are used to criminalize and produce fear—fear both of and for an individual.
- Over time, the fear produced by this language can result in trauma for these students.³
- Referring to these students as students with an undocumented legal status—instead of as undocumented students—emphasizes the student over their citizenship classification.



CREATING A SAFE SPACE

SHOW THAT YOU ARE AN ALLY

Posting relevant infographics and fliers helps to show that your campus' mental health services is a safe space for students with an undocumented legal status. Non-verbal demonstrations of support are vital for making a safe environment where important conversations can happen. For example, consider adding a butterfly symbol—which is now identified with Dreamers—to materials. If your campus has an Undocumented Student Center or hosts UndocuAlly trainings, there may already be a logo that students recognize as a welcoming symbol.



QUICK TIP

Share inclusive messages in places where students gather. Reach out to your health center, student services building, library, dining services, etc. to ask them to put up your poster or flier.

DESIGN WITH INTERSECTIONALITY

Students with an undocumented legal status—like the other students you support as a Student Wellness Ambassador—often have a number of identities. Some of these identities relate to nationality and ethnicity, but it is also important to consider the diversity of backgrounds with which these students might identify, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and religious faith. Acknowledging intersectionality is crucial for creating a safe space and designing effective events. Intersectionality is particularly important to consider when naming and advertising an event. For example, using Spanish in a title can be effective, but only if you're focusing on Latinx students.

[Informed Immigrant](#) features a series of posters that promote culturally-informed mental health practices. These resources can help you engage with students with undocumented status.

“[Supporting Undocumented Students](#)” is a training module provided by the California Community Colleges. This resource, which takes under an hour to complete, was developed in partnership with the Dreamers Advisory group. It provides an overview of promising practices, and covers a wide range of topics, including tuition, employment opportunities, and strategies for being an effective ally or UndocuAlly, a term used to refer to campus allies for students with an undocumented status. Ambassadors are encouraged to participate in [UndocuAlly](#) trainings on campus. Often this training is open to students.

The [AB 540 Ally Training Project](#) intended for faculty and staff can be a useful resource for Ambassadors, too. The training can help Ambassadors become informed about supporting and working with students with undocumented status; it also provides resources and best practices for student success.

Immigrants Rising's [Mental Health Connector](#) provides psychological support for young people with an undocumented legal status. This resource, freely available throughout the state, connects youth with professional therapists, and it emphasizes a strength-based approach that fosters resilience.

MEET STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

As you assess the environment around you, remember that there are various student leaders and clubs throughout your campus that can play an instrumental role in the outreach process. This can help generate the trust required to make your events and activities feel like a safe, inclusive space. Some campuses have clubs for students with undocumented legal status, but you might also consider networking with other cultural student groups and clubs.

Outreach in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes is another great way to meet students where they are. English Language Learners do not often get included in outreach efforts for events. A big community of students with undocumented status takes ESL classes. Many campuses also have an UndocuScholars Program. These programs are designed to provide academic and other services and resources to students, families, and allies of those who are undocumented.

STUDENT CLUBS

Men of Color, BRASS, Guardian Scholars, Queer- Straight Alliance, Diversity Clubs, Associated Students, Black Student Union, Asian American Club, Latinos Unidos, Muslim Student Assoc, undocumented and unafraid, Peer and Community, Circle K International, DSPS, EOPS, Puente Umoja, ESA Dream Centers

USING STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

Consider designing creative events that allow students with an undocumented legal status to share their own experience and stories. This can help to foster what is sometimes referred to as a strength-based approach, which recognizes the resilience and power that these students have demonstrated during their experiences.

Each Mind Matters/Sanamente is California's Mental Health Movement and provides key resources for you to use to promote the message of mental wellness in English and Spanish. [Sanamente](#) goal is to provide mental health awareness, which is inclusive of the Latinx Community in an accepting climate free of stigma.





One option for event design is to organize an **UndocuTalk**—also called a healing circle or talking circle—for students of undocumented legal status. An UndocuTalk can help to demystify mental health services by emphasizing

individual and community experiences. An UndocuTalk is a structured event, and the rest of this section describes the process in more detail while also providing tips for organizing a successful UndocuTalk. At the end of this section, you'll find links to additional resources.

UNDOCUTALK

These events are organized around talking circles that provide students with a safe space to share their stories with others who have had similar experiences. UndocuTalks provide students with the opportunity to recognize their own resilience, as well as the chance to form a community and find allies who might be uniquely positioned to share insight. UndocuTalks—and the other strength-based approaches described below—can be a helpful tool as an alternative to more traditional forms of mental health services; they can also help promote community and solidarity on your campus.

Before the UndocuTalk begins, make sure that the group establishes its own agreements about how members will treat one another. Some suggested agreements⁵ include:

-  Participants will treat one another with respect
-  Participants will listen with an open heart and open mind
-  Participants will find ways to honor differences in others and in themselves instead of trying to “fix” each other
-  Participants will respect that all stories shared in the UndocuTalk are confidential

It is also important to not identify undocumented students in a group setting. A student may be willing to share with the Ambassador their immigration status, but they may not feel comfortable sharing in a larger setting. It's also important to be clear about whether this UndocuTalk event is open to students who identify as undocumented only or if it is an open space for undocumented students and allies. Knowing this information up front helps students have a realistic expectation for the event. This could also help them make an informed choice about whether or not to disclose their documentation status.

UndocuTalks can be emotionally charged experiences that activate unexpected reactions for participants. Although all UndocuTalks are different, the critical conversations and sharing process that occur can produce a range of emotions, and it can be helpful to provide some sort of check-in or debriefing process at the end to make sure that everyone (including the host) feels prepared to process the experience. Participants who need extra support after the event may benefit from a referral to speak with a counselor; given the emotional nature of these experiences, event hosts should have contact information on hand for a crisis counselor.

For additional details about how to plan and facilitate an UndocuTalk, visit The Practice of Healing's "[The Practice of Healing Circles](#)," as well as the ALA's "[Restoring to Wholeness](#)."

OTHER ACTIVITIES

An UndocuTalk is just one option for Student Ambassadors as they design creative events that support students with an undocumented legal status. Other suggested activities that can be done virtually or in person include, but are certainly not limited to:



HOST A

MOVIE SCREENING

A shared viewing of a topically appropriate film can provide students with a new way to think about their own experiences, and a film can provide a natural starting point for group dialogue. You can view a list of some suggested films [here](#), but consider engaging participants by letting them vote on (or even suggest) which film they're interested in viewing. Doing so can help with engagement and making sure participants are invested in the outcome of the event.



HOST A

BOOK CLUB

Like a movie screening, a book club can provide shared content for students to discuss. Skyline College is an excellent example of this practice: [Skyline's book club](#) lets students vote for the book that they would like to read. It is open to students with an undocumented legal status, as well as their allies. In addition to the books suggested by Skyline College, Alberto Ledesma's *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* provides a glimpse into the psychological and philosophical concerns of undocumented immigrant youth, and it can be a strong platform for mental health activities.



HOST AN

ART NIGHT

Art can provide students with a creative medium for expressing themselves and sharing their stories. The California Community Colleges provide a [helpful template](#) for an image and caption activity, but consider providing a variety of media, such as modeling clay or other creative options. Providing tactile forms of engagement can help students express themselves and feel comfortable.

QUICK TIP

Students may be concerned about their privacy.

If you're holding your event in person, set guidelines for cellphone use. To ensure that the event remains a safe space, consider disallowing cell phone use from within the room. Students might be concerned about privacy and audio or video recordings.

If you're holding your event remotely, be sure that the platform you're using is secure, and can accommodate students who might wish to participate with audio but not video.

IDENTIFYING RESOURCES FOR YOUR CAMPUS

It is likely that, at some point during your time as a Student Ambassador, you will have to help peers on campus and in the community learn more about mental health and wellness resources while your school practices social distancing.

COVID-19

The Chancellor's Office has collated a range of [resources](#) to support students who have an undocumented legal status during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The contents of these resources are constantly shifting due to the ongoing nature of the situation, but the resource is designed to provide students with financial services and support, as well as with assistance for meeting basic needs. Immigrants Rising has collated a similar [set of resources](#) that are particularly relevant during the Coronavirus pandemic. In addition to sharing these links with students, it can be helpful to occasionally review their contents to stay informed about the most up-to-date resources available.

NEWSLETTER

Because the political and legal landscape surrounding students with an undocumented legal status is continuously changing, additional resources for supporting them are in constant development. The Foundation for California Community Colleges has developed a newsletter that shares these resources and other important updates. Students with an undocumented legal status and their allies can sign up for this resource [here](#). Additionally, the Foundation for California Community Colleges, in collaboration with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, is developing a series of webinars related to current immigration policies. A webinar discussing the June 2020 Supreme Court ruling in defense of DACA and its implications was presented on June 24, 2020 and a recording of the presentation can be accessed [here](#).

UNDERSTANDING ONE'S RIGHTS

As an ally, it is helpful to be familiar with one's rights when confronted by enforcement agents. These rights apply to everyone who lives in the United States, regardless of legal or citizenship status, but many of us do not take the time to learn about these rights because we take for granted that they will not be infringed. This represents a form of privilege based on citizenship status. Familiarizing yourself with these rights can help show solidarity and allyship, as well as simultaneously making sure you can help from a teaching perspective, too.

The National Immigration Law Factsheet provides an overview of rights for students confronted by law enforcement agents. In addition to suggesting various practices, it also includes [printable sheet](#) (sometimes referred to as a "red card") that students can use in order to enact their rights while remaining silent.

LEGAL RESOURCES

There are a variety of directories that students can use to locate legal services, including those provided by [Department of Social Services at CA.gov](#) and by [Ready California](#). The Department of Social Services is currently offering financial assistance for those students who are eligible to renew their DACA status. This assistance covers the cost of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) fees through providers on this [list](#).

Additionally, the [Immigration Legal Services Project](#) provides students, faculty, and staff with a range of no-cost immigration legal services. Currently, due to COVID-19, these services have transitioned to virtual appointments through a platform that explicitly covers student privacy and confidentiality. Colleges are working with selected legal providers to offer these services.

As a resource for your peers, you may consider compiling this information and sharing via e-outreach activities (social media posts, online classroom presentations, email blasts, etc.) if your college is still social distancing. Once the college shifts to in-person outreach on your campus, the resources can be shared at tabling events, classroom presentations, handing out flyers, or other ways to share the information.

The tools and resources discussed above are intended to provide you, as a Student Ambassador, with the strategies and insight to better support students with an undocumented legal status. While the Dreamers Report identified trends across the California Community Colleges system, the steps that you take to help your campus successfully address them will depend on your school's community and the needs of its students. By providing inclusive services that use a strengths-based approach, your campus will be better positioned to support the needs of students with an undocumented legal status.

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¹ Enriquez, Laura E. et al. "How Can Universities Foster Educational Equity for Undocumented College Students: Lessons from the University of California." <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/031649nf>.

² Wangenstein, Leonor L. Building Undocumented Student Support in Higher Education Through a Culturally-Responsive Lens. <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Building-Undocumented-Student-Support-in-Higher-Education-Through-a-Culturally-Responsive-Lens.aspx>

³ Campos, Lilianna and Esmeralda Zamudio. Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Undocumented/DACAmented College Students. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWisM5lphFE&t=2118s4>

⁴ Please note the link to Supporting Undocumented Students training offered by the Vision Resource Center requires a college email

⁵ Tips adapted from Heal Circles Global