

UNITED WE DREAM



United We Dream[®]

**UNITED WE
DREAM
UNDOCUMENTED
STUDENT
GUIDEBOOK**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Overview

02

Current Policies

03

History of Social Movements

04

Advocacy Guide

05

Student Resources

01

OVERVIEW AND INTRO

INTRODUCTION

United We Dream is the largest immigrant youth-led network in the country that creates welcoming, supporting, engaging, and empowering spaces for young people—regardless of immigration status. The organization is a hub of resources on DACA, Deportation Defense, Immigrant Rights, and other topics pertinent to youth of diverse immigration statuses.

One of the main issues that undocumented youth face is the issue of college access and college retention. While action *has* been taken in recent years to reduce barriers for undocumented and differently-documented students when going to college or attaining higher education, there is still a massive gap to fill. Nowadays, 62.8% of *all* recent high school graduates matriculate into college, but only 5-10% recent undocumented high school graduates matriculate to college.

Furthermore, undocumented students tend to face unique challenges while they are in college that make it more difficult for them to graduate. It is clear that massive improvement is needed to make sure that undocumented students receive the right to the same level of education as other students in the country.

Through a compilation of interviews with university administration and undocumented students as well as secondary research, our team found four main challenges that become main obstacles for undocumented students when navigating college: 1) lack of specialized support and organized communication about resources for undocumented students; 2) legal and financial barriers to receiving opportunities while enrolled; 3) challenges associated with being a first-gen, low-income and/or BIPOC student along with being undocumented; 4) the lack of consideration for the challenges faced by undocumented/differently-documented students from outside Latin America.

In response to this problem, our team has created this guide for undocumented and differently-documented college students and their families to inform them of where they can seek assistance and how they can fight for themselves on-campus. We hope to make this guide as accessible as possible to encourage students to seek out supports, create community, and advocate for their needs. We imagine a world where students can access the fullness of college, regardless of citizenship status, in order to equip themselves with the tools, knowledge, and resources to achieve their goals.

CHALLENGES FACED BY UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

01

A lack of organized communication and specialized support that creates confusion for undocumented students about where to turn to in times of need. Oftentimes, there is conflicting information about who undocumented/differently-documented students should seek support from, and some administrations (i.e. financial aid offices) may not be informed of the relevant policies that affect undocumented students/immigrants. This limits students' access to and willingness to seek support on campus.

02

The effects of not having legal status in the US that limits opportunities while enrolled in school. Some of these effects include not having identification to apply for a job that could provide financial support or work experience, not being able to travel as easily with classes/extracurricular groups to have a well-rounded experience during college, and having less opportunities and chances of receiving a well-paying job out of undergraduate due to these roadblocks.

03

Undocumented/differently-documented students are more likely to be first-generation, low-income students and/or to identify as BIPOC, which can carry financial and social stressors. They may need to worry about providing for family or affording their basic needs while enrolled. These issues can worsen and compound the difficulty that undocumented students face in the U.S.

04

A lack of consideration for the challenges faced by undocumented/differently-documented students from outside Latin America. Because many of the resources are directed at undocumented students from Latin America, this may prevent undocumented students from Africa, Asia, or Europe from feeling like there is specialized support for them and reaching out for support even when they need it.

A BREAKDOWN OF RELEVANT TERMINOLOGY

1. Undocumented: [Undocumented](#) refers to anyone residing in a country without legal documentation.
2. DREAMer: [DREAMer](#) is an affirmative term for undocumented young people who arrived in the United States at a very young age.
3. Permanent Residents: [Permanent residents](#), or green card holders, are granted legal permission to live and work permanently in the U.S.
4. International Student: [International students](#) hold specific visas which allow them to pursue higher education in the United States. Undocumented students are not considered international applicants because they don't qualify for a visa.
5. Non-Citizen: A [non-citizen](#) refers to a person who is not a U.S. citizen
6. Mixed Status Family: A [mixed status family](#) refers to a family in which some family members are US citizens and/or have legal status while others are undocumented.

RELEVANT TERMINOLOGY, CONTINUED

1. Temporary Protected Status (TPS): [TPS](#) may be granted to a person when a person's home country is experiencing conflicts rendering their return a threat to their well-being and safety.
 2. U Visa/U-Visa/U Non-immigrant Status: The [U Visa](#) is set aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity.
 3. Refugee Status: [Refugee status](#) is a legal protection available to people who have left their home country for their own safety and are afraid to return to any place in their home country.
 4. Asylum Status: [Asylum status](#) is a legal protection available to people who meet the definition of refugee who are already present in the U.S. or are seeking admission at the U.S. border.
 5. Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN):
[ITIN](#) is a tax processing number issued by the IRS to allow everyone to pay taxes, regardless of their immigration status.
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02

**CURRENT
POLICIES**

A Brief History of Policy Affecting Undocumented Students

1975

[Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) protects the privacy of students in K-12 public schools.

1982

[Plyler v Doe](#) served as a crucial precedent to guarantee that all children, regardless of immigration status, in K-12 public schools should receive the same access and opportunity to education.

Schools are not allowed to ask about documentation status nor are students obligated to disclose their status. A school cannot release a student's immigration status except in [exceptional circumstances](#).

1996

The [Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act](#) provides that undocumented students are not eligible to pay in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities unless US citizens are eligible under the same criteria regardless of whether they are state residents. Many states have passed tuition equity policies, which allows certain students regardless of immigration status to pay in-state tuition.*

2001

The [Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors \(DREAM\) Act](#) was presented to Congress to provide pathways to legal status and eventual citizenship for undocumented immigrants who arrived in the US as minors. Although the DREAM Act never passed, it provided the framework, structure, and language (i.e. Dreamer) for future policies.

2012

The [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#), an executive action by President Obama, provided temporary immigration relief and access to work authorization for certain undocumented youth. It improved access to higher education for students in some states. DACA does not provide a pathway to legal status or citizenship.

2018

Under the Trump Administration, the [Department of Homeland Security announced that DACA](#) would be coming to an end, and that new applications for DACA were no longer being accepted. But, in 2018, [a federal judge ruled that the Trump administration to terminate DACA was unlawful](#), keeping protections in place.

2021

[A Texas federal court ruled that DACA is unlawful](#) effectively halting the government's ability to grant DACA to first-time applicants. Current DACA recipients may continue to file for renewal.

2022

Last year, in Texas, Governor Abbott publicly stated he'd like [Plyler v Doe overturned](#), however, to date, that has not happened.

On October 31, [The Department of Homeland Security](#) formally established regulations for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. It does not reopen DACA to first time immigrants, change eligibility requirements, or protect DACA from challenges to its legitimacy.

2023

On September 13, 2023, a federal judge in the Southern District of Texas ruled DACA unlawful. Per the judge's order, first-time DACA applications continue to be blocked and cannot be processed. Individuals who have DACA (as of July 16, 2021), or whose DACA has lapsed for less than one year, can continue to apply for renewal of their DACA and work authorization and may apply for Advance Parole.

State-specific policies can be found [here](#).

STATE-SPECIFIC POLICIES

Tuition and financial aid policies differ by state, with some offering in-state tuition and financial aid, some offering little support, and some in between

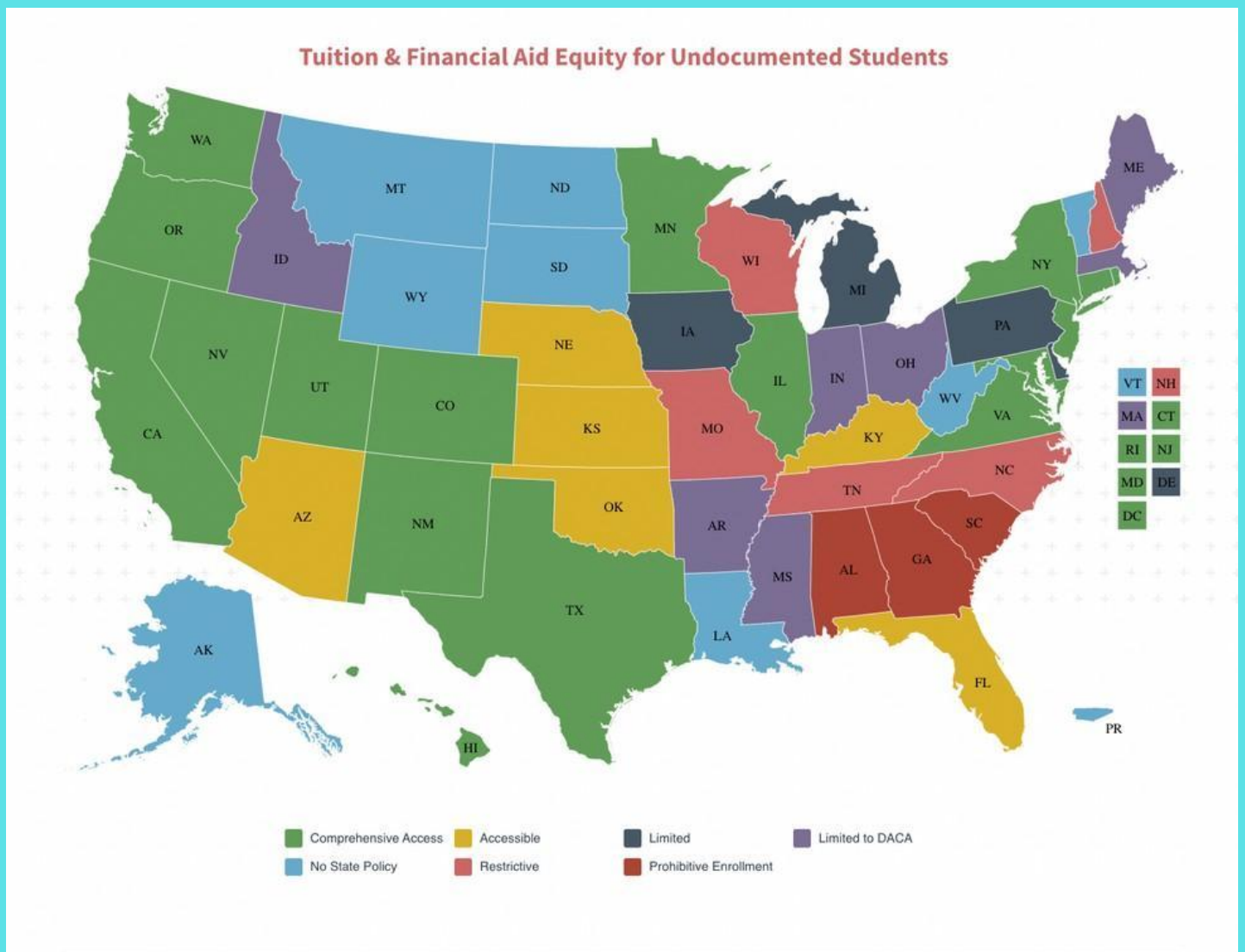


Image via Higher Ed Immigration Portal. For more detailed information and an interactive version of this map, [please visit their website.](#)

03

HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The history of undocumented student movements in the U.S. has been defined by students' passion for equal access to education and the rights of immigrants. This history can be broken down into two key movements: the Immigrant Youth Movement and the Sanctuary Campus Movement. In addition, social media activism has played a large role in undocumented student organizing over the years.

Understanding the history of these social movements can provide key insights to both students and administrators as they advocate for undocumented student rights.

IMMIGRANT YOUTH MOVEMENT

The Immigrant Youth Movement began in the early 2000s with the motivation of pushing for the acceptance of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act or DREAM Act. The first version of the act was originally introduced in 2001 and since then at least 11 versions of the DREAM Act have been introduced to congress. This act would have provided a legal pathway to citizenship for immigrants who came to the U.S. as children, either through college, work, or service in the armed forces ([American Immigration Council, 2021](#)). The most recent version of the DREAM Act, the Dream Act of 2023 (S.365), directs the Department of Homeland Security to grant lawful permanent resident status to certain undocumented people who entered the United States as minors. This would apply to those who have been physically present in the U.S. for four years preceding the passing of this bill, who have temporary protected status, or who have been granted DACA . Unfortunately, despite the many versions of this act and many years it has been introduced to Congress, it has yet to be passed.

Despite the DREAM Act failing to get passed, the Immigrant Youth Movement has still been successful in drawing attention to immigrant rights, especially the rights of undocumented students. It encouraged undocumented youth to speak out about their experiences, and the protests, sit-ins, and testimonials these youth forefronted meant that their existence could no longer be ignored. It is likely thanks to this movement that the resources available to undocumented students today exist. The Immigrant Youth Movement also encouraged the announcement of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which helped make college accessible to many undocumented youth from the time it was implemented in 2012 until today.



Key moments in the Immigrant Youth Movement

2006

[The Orange County May Day Protests, 2006](#): Nearly 40,000 students took to the streets in Orange County to protest for immigrants' rights as well as the right of immigrant children to attend school. This protest was one of the largest of its kind in Orange County and demanded national attention, drawing many people's awareness to the immigrant rights movement.

MARCH
2010

[Coming Out of the Shadows, 2010](#):

Chicago's Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL) held the first official "Coming Out of the Shadows" event in which they marched with around 700 other students under the banner "Undocumented and Unafraid." Undocumented workers also stepped forward during this march to share personal testimonials of their experience being undocumented and trying to attain post-secondary education. "National Coming Out of the Shadows" is now an annual week in Chicago where activists challenge current immigration laws and fight for the rights of undocumented students

APRIL
2010

[Trail of Dreams, 2010](#):

Four immigrant students gained national attention during a four day walk from Miami, Florida to Washington D.C. in an attempt to gain support in the passing of the DREAM Act.

MAY
2010

[UC Berkeley Hunger Strike, 2010](#):

A group of nearly 20 students participated in a 10 day hunger strike at UC Berkeley in order to gain a meeting with the University's Chancellor about their demands for the University to declare itself a sanctuary campus. This came in lieu of recent immigration laws in Arizona requiring officers to stop any person who they suspect may have migrated to the country illegally. They also called upon the University to rehire laid off janitors and drop disciplinary charges against previous students who protested this law.

[Occupation of Senator McCain's office by undocumented youth, 2010](#):

A group of undocumented students in graduation caps occupied Senator John McCain's office in May of 2010 to demand the Senator vote for the passage of the DREAM Act. This sit-in was an admiral act of bravery from these undocumented students, who were unsure if they would face legal retaliation and even possibly be deported for their protests, and their actions garnered national attention.

SANCTUARY CAMPUS MOVEMENT

[The Sanctuary Campus Movement](#) was inspired by the sanctuary city movement, which encouraged cities in the U.S. to agree to protect undocumented people from deportation and prosecution. The sanctuary campus movement became popular in response to threats from the Trump administration and subsequent changes to DACA which further complicated the process of receiving DACA and stalled out DACA applications. In order to be a sanctuary campus, Universities and colleges must agree to commit themselves to the following actions:

- Restricting ICE officers from campus unless they hold a valid warrant
- Instructing campus police to not enforce immigration law against students and members of the campus community
- Refusing to share information about faculty or student's immigration statuses with ICE unless they have a court order
- Implementing a "don't ask, don't tell" policy for the immigration statuses of faculty and students
- Making financial and legal services available to undocumented students on campus

Current universities who have committed to being sanctuary campuses include: Portland State University, Reed College, Wesleyan University, Pitzer College, Santa Fe Community College, University of Pennsylvania, Connecticut College, Drake University, and Swarthmore College.

RELEVANT SOURCES

- [Left Out But Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Student Movement](#) (Gonzales, 2008)
- [The Evolution of Undocustudent Resistance, Activism, & Empowerment](#) (Perez, 2019)
- [How Young, Undocumented Organizers Fought to Bring DACA into Existence](#) (Arteaga & Bercaw, 2020)



SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENTS

While social media played and is still playing an important role in spreading awareness and information about efforts regarding immigration, many of these movements have decreased in size and force, with a clear decline after around 2013. However, we will highlight the most influential campaigns to provide context on the successes of social media organization and the efforts of social media organizers. In 2010, March became National Coming Out of The Shadows Month, and 2011 saw the [National Coming Out of The Shadows Week Campaign](#), a youth-organized event in which undocumented youth and allies uploaded hundreds of video testimonials onto Youtube and Vimeo. Keeping into account the difficulty for undocumented students to engage politically with the risk of deportation, this ability to share one's story became a way for undocumented students to take action despite the risks, making their stories more trustworthy. This act of coming out also helped to establish identity. However, this movement fizzled out [after 2012](#), and many of these videos are deleted or inaccessible today. In addition, resources and websites regarding immigration issues that were once hubs for activists are now inactive. One of these websites they mention is [DreamActivist.Org](#), "a community of over 300,000 activists from around the country" passionate about the issues on deportation. The website is now inactive, despite the amount of resources that it had.

Another important movement was the "No More Closets" Campaign in 2013, led by the [Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project](#) (QUIP). The campaign called for undocumented LGBTQ Youth to come out as "UndocuQueers". This campaign fizzled out after its first year, highlighting how fluid the energy within the movement is, all depending on the legislation and action taken around the subject of immigration.

Recently, organizations like United We Dream, President's Alliance, E4FC no Immigrants Rising and FWD.us have led large social media movements on the issues undocumented communities face. Trending hashtags associated with this movement and with the fight for undocumented student/youth rights, have had a lasting impact on social media platforms throughout the years.

Students and college support centers can use these hashtags on social media.

Some of these hashtags include:

#DREAMers
#DACA (#withDACA &
#DefendDACA) #HereToStay
#WithDACA

In addition, United We Dream has also popularized the hashtags #WeAreHome to secure legislation and #HomelsHere to defend DACA in court.

#HereToStay
#WithDACA

#WeAreHome
#HomelsHere

04

ADVOCACY GUIDE

Having established historical social movements advocating for rights and protections for undocumented students, we now outline ways for undocumented students to safely organize on their own campuses.

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING ON YOUR CAMPUS

BEGIN WITH RELATIONSHIPS

01.

Relationship-building is foundational to effective organizing. Beginning with the people around you and expanding through campus networks, inform and invite others to join your cause. Student organizers we interviewed discussed taking classes centering on the immigrant experience, joining affinity groups for students of color or low-income students, and involving themselves in other social organizing on campus to connect with other undocumented students or students interested in supporting the cause. These relationships will help to sustain and support you when obstacles arise.

IDENTIFY SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GOALS OF ORGANIZING

02.

Identifying your aims will help to clarify the purpose of organizing, especially as you are looking to garner support around your cause. Some examples of goals of varying scopes: Call on school to appoint one full-time administrator with lived experience or deep knowledge of undocumented student experience to serve as point person for undocumented students. Designate school as a sanctuary campus. Form official undocumented student group to represent and advocate for the needs and cause of undocumented students. Create and call on schools to help fund an undocumented student center.

BUILD COALITIONS WITH OTHER CAUSES

03.

Effective social movements are often supported by diverse coalitions of people united for a cause. Reaching out to student groups, particularly those of other marginalized groups, can help to spread awareness and gain support for the cause of undocumented students. Student organizers we interviewed discussed forming coalitions with student organizations representing foster youth, LGBTQ+ rights, and Black Lives Matter. Furthermore, gathering the support of documented allies can help to protect and support the voices of undocumented students. These coalitions may have resources or ideas to help further the cause of undocumented students.

REMEMBER EVERY LITTLE BIT COUNTS!

04.

Celebrate the little victories along the way! Every additional person, email response, event organized is one step closer to achieving the empowerment and support of undocumented students.



CREATING AN UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT RESOURCE CENTER

Here are some practices recommended by established undocumented student centers around the nation:

01

Secure funding streams through the university.

02

Form partnerships with off-campus organizations supporting undocumented communities, such as specialized counseling services, workers' rights organizations, food banks, legal services, affordable housing, and community health clinics

03

Hire and train staff to have knowledge of different forms of documentation, such as DACA, Temporary Protected Status, asylum, refugee status.

04

Providing funding support for DACA and other fees.

05

Invite attorneys to offer workshops and legal support services to students

06

Facilitate field trips to universities and businesses to expose students to potential future pathways

07

Provide a secure physical space for students to gather comfortably and safely to socialize, work, and organize.

08

Be accessible to students by supporting them through in-person *and* virtual modes of communication

KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE WHILE ORGANIZING

Your well-being is a priority as you are organizing. As an undocumented student, sharing your status publicly may pose certain risks. Although some organizers have found sharing their stories publicly to be an effective tool of social organizing, you are never obligated to share your own story in an identifiable way. As you are organizing, you can choose to remain anonymous (forming relationships with trusted documented allies can be very helpful to help keep your identity confidential if you so choose). Some student organizers have also described using symbols such as the butterfly surrounding their organizing to protect the identities both of themselves and those interested in joining. [Linked here](#) is a guide for finding healing through activism, created by Black Lives Matter, but many of the materials can also be adapted to the cause of undocumented students.

EMAIL TEMPLATE

Looking for ways to start organizing and advocating for undocumented students on campus? Sending this email to university administration is a great start.

Dear [insert university official name],

It is estimated that around 5-10% of undocumented students matriculate to college compared to 63% of the general population. Of these students who are able to attend college, many face a myriad of challenges related to their legal status which can threaten students' most basic needs like housing and food security. Many undocumented students are unable to attain well paying jobs while attending college and after graduation due to their legal status. Due to policies surrounding federal financial aid, it is also never guaranteed that these students will even have the financial resources to finish paying for their college education in order to graduate.

If our [college/university] wants to commit itself to being equally accessible to all populations in the U.S., we must make changes to our current programs in order to better support the vulnerable population of undocumented students on our campus. We can do this through many means, starting with assigning official spaces and people which are responsible for supporting undocumented youth. Many colleges across the U.S. have initiated Undocumented Student Resource Centers which serve the purpose of supporting undocumented youth by providing them with academic, financial, and legal services. Such a program could help our campus better commit itself to protecting and supporting undocumented students on their educational journeys. Our campus might also commit itself to being a sanctuary campus which would also serve to create a safe space for undocumented students as they attain their post- secondary education. The guide attached below includes a more specific list of best practices which our [university/college] might commit itself to in order to better support the undocumented students on its campus.

The fight for undocumented students' rights to education is not a fight that can be taken up by them alone. The insecurity of undocumented students statuses means they constantly have to consider how advocating for themselves may make them vulnerable to arrest or deportation.

That is why it is your responsibility as a [university official] to advocate for programs that can support these students in attaining post-secondary education and graduating from college.

The guide attached below includes some suggestions on how our university can better support undocumented students. We hope that this might inspire you to consider what resources you might advocate for to increase college access for undocumented students at our [university/college].

[You might also include some more specific requests here if there are particular supports you find necessary for the success of undocumented students on your campus. You can refer to our administrators' guide for some common support other colleges have committed themselves to.

Sincerely,

[insert student group organization or name, may also sign as an anonymous undocumented student]

05

**FURTHER
RESOURCES**

&

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

STUDENT RESOURCES

APPLYING TO COLLEGE

- [Cappex](#): universities and states that support undocumented students

AFFORDING COLLEGE

- [Immigrants Rising](#): list of scholarships for higher education without a social security or proof of citizenship requirement.
- [Dream.US](#): national scholarship for undocumented students where scholars are paired with one of the 80+ partner colleges committed to serving undocumented students.



LEGAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- [Immigration Law Help](#): map and contact information of nearby affordable legal services
- [United We Dream](#): instructions on how to obtain a driver's license or state ID
- [#FindYourAlly](#): free immigration and case support for students, faculty and staff on CA community college campuses

OTHER RESOURCES

- [Informed Immigrant Resource Library](#): includes a wide range of resources for undocumented students and immigrants, including ways you can advocate for your rights and protect yourself while doing so
- [Immigrants Rising](#): includes many different resources for undocumented students intending to apply to college including mental health resources, scholarship resources, advice for gaining income, and more


LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

- [My Documented Life](#): website with resources for undocumented students written by current/former undocumented students
- [Living in the United States: a Guide for Immigrant Youth](#): a compilation of resources for immigrant youth living in the United States including descriptions of immigration relief, general advice on applying for benefits, driver's licenses, financial aid for colleges, bank accounts and credit cards, filing taxes, and more

BASIC NEEDS SERVICES

- [Network of Food Banks](#): website which locates the nearest food bank near you
- [Affordable Housing](#): website and database of affordable housing near you

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 - Ethan Jenkins, Program Coordinator of the The Immigrant Student Support Initiative at Queens College, CUNY
 - Paola Puerta-Dominguez, Assistant Dean, Undocumented Student Services at Rutgers University-New Brunswick Undocumented & Differently-Documented Student Respondents
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**UNITED
WE
DREAM**

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