

UNDOCUALLY PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORS

The AB540 and Undocumented Student Center at the University of California, Davis held two focus groups in November 2014 to gather information from campus partners to assist in the development of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators, a professional learning opportunity.

**Focus
Group
2014**

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**AB540 AND UNDOCUMENTED
 STUDENT CENTER**

Focus Group Report Format:

1. Summary of Project
2. Introduction
3. Participant Demographics
4. Summary of Findings
5. Recommendations

UndocuAlly Program for Educators Focus Group Report

Summary of Project:

The AB540 and Undocumented Student Center at the University of California, Davis held two focus groups in November 2014 involving faculty, staff, graduate student researchers, and teaching assistants represented at the institution. Through the focus groups, the AB540 and Undocumented Student Center gathered information to help guide the development of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators to commence in winter 2015 quarter.

Introduction

The AB540 and Undocumented Student Center at the University of California, Davis held two focus group discussions with a total of 35 participants on Tuesday, November 18, 2014 and Monday, November 24, 2015. The focus group was conducted as part of the development process of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators. Participants provided information in two ways: individual responses, group dialogue, and written group responses.

The discussion was designed to gather information from faculty, staff, graduate student researchers, and teaching assistants in regard to the following outcomes:

1. To understand how educators define undocumented students
2. To understand what language and terminology is used by educators when working with undocumented students
3. To understand what educators perceive to be the experiences and challenges as faced by undocumented students
4. To understand what educators perceive to be challenges when working with undocumented students
5. To understand what information and/or resources educators find useful when working with undocumented students
6. To understand what educators consider should be the learning objectives of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators
7. To understand who educators perceive to be the most effective facilitators of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators on our campus
8. To understand what dates/times and ideal length would be ideal for the UndocuAlly Program for Educators

Participant Demographics

35 participants took part of both focus groups:

- 29 of the 35 participants were staff members
- 2 of the 35 participants were faculty members
- 4 of the 35 participants were graduate student researchers/teaching assistants
- 14 participants had more than 10 years experience working in a post-secondary setting
- 11 participants had 5 to 10 years experience working in a post-secondary
- 10 participants had less than 5 years experience working in a post-secondary
- 13 participants had more than 10 years experience working at the University of California, Davis
- 8 participants had 5 to 10 years experience working at the University of California, Davis
- 14 participants had less than 5 years experience working at the University of California, Davis
- 12 of the 35 participants noted that their interest to attend one of the focus group sessions was work related, (a direct link to their university position or unit interest/experiences)
- 9 of the 35 participants noted that their interest to attend one of the focus group sessions was related to their personal beliefs, (social justice concerns, servicing all students regardless immigration status, or personal connection to discrimination)
- 13 of the 35 participants noted that their interest to attend one of the focus group sessions was related to their interest in gaining more knowledge, (become well versed and informed regarding undocumented issues and challenges, or become experts in identifying and using effective interventions when working with undocumented students)
- 1 of the 35 participants did not provide a reason as to their interest to attend one of the focus group sessions
- 28 participants affirmed that they work directly with undocumented students, 4 participants affirmed that they do not work directly with undocumented students, 2 participants affirmed that they were unsure if they worked with undocumented students, 1 participant did not provide a response regarding if they did/didn't work with undocumented students

Educator Perspectives

Outcome 1: To understand how educators define undocumented students

Provide your definition of an undocumented student.

The majority of definitions provided by participants that defined an undocumented student revolved within legal and political contexts. Participants used a variety of terms and examples to illustrate their understanding. Participants offer the following definitions:

- Residing in the United States after a) overstaying their visas, or b) arriving without paperwork
- Living in the United States without the proper documentation
- A student who despite their legal status, has Constitutional rights
- Affected by legislation recently passed regarding authorization
- Students with unique circumstances that are not just legal, to include linguistic and academic challenges
- Students dealing with circumstances that they inherited; they were brought to the United States as children, without their consent

Participants also noted more generalizable definitions:

- Members of our community. Undocumented students are students.
- Belonging to first generation student populations
- People dealing with a lot of complex issues that required difficult choices

Outcome 2: To understand what language and terminology is used by educators when working with undocumented students

List terms you use when working with undocumented students.

Participants stated terms used in political and legislative practices. It is important to note that there were many occasions that the group did not agree on the same definition for terms. There was much discussion regarding clarifying definitions of terms and identifying how those terms could be used for future professional learning. The following terms were provided by participants:

- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
- Cal Dream ACT
- Undocumented versus illegal/alien
- Papers
- AB540
- Deportation
- Safe communities versus secure communities versus sanctuary cities

Participants also noted terms regarding the psychosocial well-being of undocumented students:

- Access to health insurance and care
- Mental health and counseling
- Linguistic diversity

One participant indicated a positive term they associated with undocumented students, “Opportunity. Looking at [undocumented] students’ set of circumstances, they look for space to build their life.”

Outcome 3: To understand what educators perceive to be the experiences and challenges faced by undocumented students

What are some experiences and challenges undocumented students face?

All responses provided by participants indicated negative associations between experiences and challenges undocumented students face regarding, living a “life of secrecy. Trying to keep [their immigration status secret from others.” They used various words to describe undocumented students’ experiences and challenges, “Vigilance is what they feel they have to exercise in order to protect themselves emotionally and physically. They feel pressure to make careful, important distinctions on who they can trust.” They cited:

- Deportation and other issues of immigration retaliation
- Separation from family
- Travel issues (both domestic and international)
- Criminal victimization
- Psychological and emotional toll
- Daily discrimination
- Housing and safety issues on campus
- Sexual violence
- Work barriers post-college graduation
- Building trust and mentorship
- Financial Aid and funding resources
- Battle fatigue
- Employment
- Access to free and legal resources

Participants also identified that they faculty and staff were unaware of how they could become resources and/or what resources were available to undocumented students. “Undocumented students end up have to delicately explain their status to faculty and staff members who are not sensitive to their situation.”

Participants also expressed fear of sending an undocumented students to the ‘wrong resource.’ “I have a fear of sending them to a resource and them getting a bad experience there. And then they are turned off to getting help there. Not everyone is going to be an ally, and when someone is already so vulnerable, this is a big fear.”

Outcome 4: To understand what educators perceive to be challenges when working with undocumented students

What are your perceived challenges when working with undocumented students? Feel free to use illustrations and examples.

The responses that activated lively dialogue was provided by participants was regarding privilege, race, and positionality.

“It happens all subtle ways. Answering, ‘Where are you from?’ Having to face that several times a day, means you don’t fit here. You don’t fit into the cookie cutter Davis. The intent may not be malice, but the impact is making a student feel unwelcome.”

“We need to unlearn oppression and privilege.”

“Imposter syndrome- they don’t feel like they belong here. Battle fatigue. Constantly having to justify why you are here”

Other perceived challenges included:

- Culture of care- “Having to be creative, personal, and familial through the support provided.”
- Expert in terminology and laws- “Not knowing the difference.”
- Access to legal resources- “Cultural pieces around domestic violence and sexual assault.”
- Legal benefits- “Not quite sure what legal benefits they have.”
- Employment- “They feel stuck”
- Deportation- “If they leave, they won’t be able to come back.”
- Academic success- “Psychological pressures in academia”
- Travel- “Not knowing the process”
- Financing education- “They are earning under the table income. It takes away from their studies.”

Outcome 5: To understand what information and/or resources educators find useful when working with undocumented students

What information and/or resources would you find useful when working with undocumented students?

Participants agreed that they felt a sense of helplessness for not being well versed in legal terminology and policies. They stated that the majority of the time, the student knows more than they do in relation to navigating campus resources.

“The student will be the expert, having gone through all the campus departments, but the stress of having to teach me causes more stress.”

A second point participants agreed on is being unsure if they are confidential resources that cannot be subpoenaed by court law and issues dealing with disclosure of immigration status.

“Are we confidential resources for someone based on their immigration status? Whether legal or student life related? I want to avoid triggering an unwanted report.”

“What do I do when someone tells me I’m undocumented? How can I be better supportive?”

Other information and resources participants identified as useful:

- Managing health conflict in classrooms regarding immigration discussions
- Mechanism to award funding via departmental support
- A reference sheet regarding immigration policies and terms, that would be regularly updated
- A list of confidential resources, including names and contact information of allies
- Updated website with relevant content information

A participant commented that, “Undocumented students have a lot of family support than other students who are here legally. But when they run into trouble, the usual resources are not available. So know what is available, would be helpful.”

A second participant commented, “If I worked with undocumented students in the past, I don’t know. It is not something I am aware of. I’ve been on campus for 25 years.”

Outcome 6: To understand what educators consider should be the learning objectives of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators

What should the learning objectives be of the UndocuAlly Training Program? (As a group, what are your top three priorities).

Participants worked in groups based on the tables they were sitting at. Participants were given a limited amount of time and wrote down their responses on paper that was provided. This document was then collected at the end of the focus group session for review and analysis.

Objectives developed by participants:

- Build knowledge and awareness
- Empathize with undocumented students’ experiences
- Identify population needs and challenges
- Learn strategies and provide support on being an UndocuAlly
- Educate campus community
- Address prejudice

Outcome 7: To understand who educators perceive to be the most effective facilitators of the UndocuAlly Program for Educators on our campus

Of the following, who would you consider to be the most effective facilitators of an UndocuAlly Program for Educators at our campus? (Undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, and/or faculty)

Participants worked in groups based on the tables they were sitting at. Participants were given a limited amount of time and wrote down their responses on paper that was provided. This document was then collected at the end of the focus group session for review and analysis.

Participants agreed that undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and faculty should serve as facilitators for the UndocuAlly Program for Educators. They indicated a preference for having at least two people that hold different positionalities, stating that students would offer the best perspective regarding experiences, challenges, and needs of undocumented students. Specific roles were assigned to each aforementioned group:

- Undergraduate students- student panel, identify student needs and challenges, advice/option for resources, strategies to be an ally
- Graduate students- identify student needs and challenges, advice/option for resources, strategies to be an ally, address prejudice
- Staff- identify resources and opportunities, strategies to be an ally, and include legal clinic representative
- Faculty- identify and build resources, policies, terminology, and laws, and include law school professors

One group mentioned that they would like to have an outside facilitator with expertise in immigration policy.

Outcome 8: To understand what dates/times and ideal length would be ideal for the UndocuAlly Program for Educators

What dates and times would work best for you to attend an UndocuAlly Program for Educators? What would be an appropriate time length that would be most convenient for your schedule?

Participants worked in groups based on the tables they were sitting at. Participants were given a limited amount of time and wrote down their responses on paper that was provided. This document was then collected at the end of the focus group session for review and analysis.

Participants' responses varied per their specific work related roles and responsibilities. However, participants agreed that certain quarter periods, time blocks, and incentives would enhance attendance:

- All sessions should be conducted during regular university business hours
- More than one offering per quarter
- No sessions in the first three weeks of any quarter
- Not on Mondays
- Fridays would work best for staff (afternoon)
- Fridays would not work at all for faculty
- Mid-day, to include lunch/snacks

Participants agreed that the UndocuAlly Training for Educators should not last more than 3 hours. They offered alternatives:

- Online condensed version
- Offer to take to departments
- Divide UndocuAlly Program for Educators into more than one session
- Always offer lunch/snacks

Recommendations

It is clear from the responses and discussions that faculty, staff, graduate student researchers, and teaching assistants identify the need and value of implementing the UndocuAlly Program for Educators. They want more knowledge regarding immigration policies and terminology, authentic understanding of students experiences, challenges, and needs, and support in their development as UndocuAllies. Participants offered several ideas regarding the content of professional development they would benefit from. Recommendations fall into three major categories: Expertise, Student Voice, Allyship.

Expertise:

- Access to reliable and up to date information. Provide website and handouts that can be used as resources to maintain knowledge and build awareness of any changes in immigration policy. Identify campus partners to connect undocumented students with to avoid Aggie shuffle.
- Ongoing professional development. Offer UndocuAlly Program for Educators more than once a quarter. Provide online version to meet time demands of faculty.
- Identify on-campus experts on immigration related topics to leverage their knowledge. Build a visible support network of legal resources. Of specific interest is in identifying funding mechanism and employment opportunities.
- Clarify educators' responsibility to maintain information confidential versus required reporting.

Student Voice:

- Firsthand accounts of undocumented students' narratives. Provide their perspective on what they need. Critical participation in the UndocuAlly Program for Educators. Students are experts in their own experiences.
- Identify practical, yet effective interventions to use when working with undocumented students. The need to feel empowered via the use of resources and strategies when working with undocumented student populations.
- Interest in relieving stress from students having to navigate campus resources. Educators feel a responsibility in knowing what to do instead of having students experience negative interactions on campus.

Allyship:

- Very supportive of registering for and promoting UndocuAlly Program for Educators. Must provide dates of sessions well in advance.
- Provide ongoing support and resources for UndocuAllies so that they can be well prepared to serve undocumented students. One professional learning session is not enough. Provide ongoing workshops with detailed information on specific topics for further inquiry.
- Provide a visual to place in their office area so they are identifiable as UndocuAllies.