

Building Effective Support for UndocuEducators in Higher Education

Undocumented educators (or “UndocuEducators”) are vital to undocumented student success in higher education. Their **shared lived experiences** provide them with **special expertise and cultural competency** to effectively guide students through college. However, UndocuEducators face challenges that make it difficult for them to retain or thrive in their roles. Their **high turnover** rate means that institutions are **losing out on valuable guides and mentors** for their students. See our [full guide](#) for more recommendations on supporting UndocuEducators.

When colleges and universities champion UndocuEducator success, they equip their undocumented and first-generation students with some of the best support possible. Together, we can transform the culture of support for undocumented immigrants in our institutions!

Below we have identified **six tangible recommendations for administrators** to better support and retain UndocuEducators.

1. Allocate Adequate Funding

Challenge: Oftentimes undocumented student centers receive limited funding that covers only part-time personnel. Therefore, UndocuEducators in these roles routinely extend beyond their job responsibilities and outside of their paid hours. Institutions also often scramble to come up with a programming budget, making it hard to develop and sustain adequate services.

Recommendation: Allocate funding that is equitable and aligns with the institution's mission to support students while retaining current staff members.

Take action: Advocate for and be transparent about budget and funding allocations. Develop budget proposals that adequately take into account program and staffing needs.

2. Classify Roles Accurately

Challenge: As first-generation professionals, UndocuEducators often have less traditional work experience or credentials, and so tend to be hired in temporary or lower paid positions that do not reflect their unique expertise. Their drive to serve their students and community, combined with their responsibility to financially support loved ones, make them more likely to accept these undercompensated positions.

Recommendation: Support and advocate for the appropriate classification of all undocumented student support staff across California’s higher education institutions to be in alignment with their job responsibilities.

Take Action: Ensure proper classification, fair compensation, and adequate staffing. Validate the expertise of the UndocuEducators. Facilitate proper communication and respect among department heads and undocumented student personnel.

3. Share Responsibility Campus-Wide

Challenge: UndocuEducators are often the only people considered responsible for meeting the needs of



UndocuEducator

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UndocuEducators are formerly or currently undocumented individuals who work in higher education, which includes DACA recipients and those in the process of adjusting their immigration status. They are often most visible when working at Dream Resource Centers or Undocumented Student Programs.

undocumented students. Their intimate understanding of their students' challenges gives them unique insight, but a lack of cross-departmental collaboration produces piecemeal and unsustainable efforts to address student issues. This results in UndocuEducators being overworked and feeling burnout.

Recommendation: Establish liaisons in key departments to share responsibilities and educate other staff members about undocumented issues and tasks they can take on. Develop or expand a **strong undocumented student task force** that builds institutional support for undocumented students.

Take Action: Ensure adequate staffing that matches undocumented student needs. Identify campus partners to support in undocumented-related responsibilities.

4. Address the Impact of Immigration Status

Challenge: Lack of institutional awareness around immigration status and legal policies places undue burden on UndocuEducators who are affected personally and professionally. While institutions have improved their legal support for undocumented students, UndocuEducators are often left out of accessing these benefits.

Recommendation: Create, support, and promote awareness and understanding about the complex immigration policies UndocuEducators are confronted with. Develop action plans that include financial, legal, professional, and emotional support for UndocuEducators when their immigration status is affected.

Take Action: Work with HR to create and adhere to a straightforward and equitable hiring and onboarding process centered around a clear understanding of immigration policies. Create a pipeline of **inclusive fellowships** that provides paid professional development opportunities for all students and alumni, regardless of immigration status.

5. Offer Suitable Health Benefits

Challenge: Since many UndocuEducator positions are temporary, part-time and/or grant funded, employers often are unable to offer health benefits to undocumented educators, creating a challenge to prioritize their well-being. If they do receive health benefits, they may be limited to options that do not fully support their needs.

Recommendation: Allocate funding for adequate health benefits for all UndocuEducators, including temporary and part-time employees. Create partnerships with organizations that assist undocumented people in finding accessible healthcare options including suitable mental health care.

Take Action: Ensure your institution is vocal in supporting undocumented educators and provides for their unique needs such as mental health services that center the undocumented experience.

6. Recognize the Whole Person

Challenge: UndocuEducators experience secondary trauma when working with undocumented students as they face similar issues. They often support the needs of their students while not receiving adequate support themselves. This creates a barrier that prevents UndocuEducators from prioritizing their needs as undocumented people, regarding their students' status as more important than their own.

Recommendation: Build awareness of the challenges UndocuEducators face and promote understanding of what they offer to the campus. Provide UndocuEducators with professional development opportunities designed to help them build a sense of belonging, center their own needs, and find collaborative solutions.

Take Action: Ensure that UndocuEducators are able to participate in and allocate paid work time for professional development opportunities designed for them.