

# 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 presidents and chancellors** 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:** Allocate a fair and sustainable operating budget and salaries that adequately support UndocuEducators and their programs.

## 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:** Validate UndocuEducators' work and expertise on campus. Ensure fair compensation, adequate staffing, and proper classification for them. Uplift the undocumented narratives of staff and students.

## 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:** Support the creation of a sustainable undocumented student task force and funding allocation to hire full-time staff. Call on all campus members to create a safe and welcoming environment. Build institutional practices that do not rely on the goodwill of one or two people.

## 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:** Ensure your institution adheres to the [model policies by the CA Attorney General](#) to provide for the safety of UndocuEducators on your campus. Create awareness of and provide for the unique needs of undocumented educators by allocating funding to cover legal services and fees.

## 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:** Champion adequate health benefits for all UndocuEducators. Implement programs and promising practices that offer health support for part-time and temporary employees.

## 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:** Acknowledge the important role, expertise, and valuable service UndocuEducators bring to your campus (e.g. make a statement and post it on your website).