Effectively Serving the Undocumented Student Population

California State University, Fullerton (CSUF)

Center for Research on Educational Access & Leadership (C-REAL)

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2012 CSUF AB 540 & Undocumented Students CONFERENCE
PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY

- Funded by the University Mission and Goals Initiative
- Partnership between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs
- Understand the educational experiences of undocumented students from student and faculty/staff perspective
- Explore the needs and challenges of undocumented students to create a safer campus environment
  - Create training materials for departments on issues regarding undocumented students
  - Develop a clearinghouse
  - User friendly website and guidebook
In 2008, the creation of the AB 540 Task Force and the AB 540 Student Service Committee were organized. The Task Force aimed to identify barriers and obstacles to retention and graduation, recognizing the significant population of undocumented students who, although they are not tracked by the system, significantly contribute to the university's student body.
PURSUING THE AMERICAN DREAM
Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) enacted in 2002 in California
- Other states: Illinois, Texas, New Mexico, New York, Washington, etc.

Became aware of their status during high school (Chavez, Soriano, Oliverez, 2007)

Opt to attend community college due to their limited financial resources (Olivarez et al. 2006) and tend to work part time jobs to pay for tuition (Contreras, 2009)

Honoring the sacrifices and struggles of their families and friends (Hernandez, Hernandez Jr., Gadson, Huftalin, Ortiz, White and Yocom-Gaffney 2010)

Brought to the United States at a young age by parents and identify as American (Perez, 2010)
Undocumented students exhibit
- High levels of academic achievement
- Leadership participation
- Civic engagement patterns
- Psychological resilience
- Perseverance
- Optimism

(Perez et al. 2009 and 2010)
METHODOLOGY

- Undocumented Students
  - Survey - online and paper
    - Explore career aspirations and expectations, perceptions of the university, and utilization of program services
  - Interviews - in person
    - Explore educational and personal experiences in the K-20 system

- Faculty & Staff
  - Focus Groups
    - Assess preconceived knowledge and experience with undocumented students as well as their beliefs regarding the quality of resources and access available to this population
Demographics (N=55)

- Gender
  - 72% Female
  - 27% Male

- Age Entering the United States
  - 50% 0 to 5
  - 30% 6 to 10
  - 18% 11 to 15

- Residence
  - 53% Orange County
  - 27% Los Angeles County
  - 15% Riverside County
  - 6% San Bernardino
Perceptions of the University

- 80% of students reported that college life had been difficult
- 44% of students believed that college does what it can to assess their needs
- 67% believe the university will help them meet their educational goals
- 53% believe the university will help them meet their career goals
- 33% of students believe that university administrators are aware of the challenges undocumented students have
- 55% of the students are aware of resources available for AB 540 students
Educational Aspirations

- Only 15% would consider dropping out of college
- 76% want to complete a Law Degree, Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.
- 23% want to complete a Masters or teaching credential

Educational Expectations

- 26% BA
- 43% Masters
- 29% Law Degree, Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.
SERVICES NOT UTILIZED BY STUDENTS

Percentage of Students

- Career Center
- Office of Financial Aid
- Housing & Residential Life
- Center for Internships & Community Engagement
- University Police
- Federal Work Study Program
- International Education & Exchange

Students
Advocates for Higher Education

“We gave information during an open house and we also talked about AB540 and a lot of the parents were shocked to see that I was AB540, I was undocumented and that I was doing it, and they were all asking how, how did you do it? So I know that I was making an impact and that I was educating and empowering my community with what we were doing and although the whole HSF program doesn’t allow AB540 students to get the scholarships, I didn’t have like a negative feel for it, I understood and I just said well, that doesn’t mean I can’t contribute”

“I feel like this school empowered me, like it’s okay to be undocumented, I feel like my professors, like even though they never told me directly, I think they were telling, in general, you should speak up and that your voice means something.”
Feel indebted to parents

“My mom, she tells me almost every day, the reason why I’m here in the U.S. is because of you. You’re the reason why I’m here to give you a better education.”

“She had to work at the garbage place separating things and I remember her coming and she smelled, like there was this, just dirty and I knew what it was about and I felt bad, and I asked her, why are you doing that? That doesn’t, that’s not a place you have to be at. And she said I don’t care what I have to do to feed you, I don’t care what I have to do to make sure that you guys have an education and it hit me so deep that I just told myself, that I can’t, I can’t just settle for less, I can’t just do the minimum at school, I have to do more.”

High levels of academic achievement
Identity Issues

“I wasn’t aware of being undocumented and what it meant. My family never talked about that, I never really heard anything. So I grew up thinking I was equal, purely equal.”

“We want a normal, I guess you can say, an American life, and I mean, just the fact that you get deported, it kind of kills you spiritually, it would destroy all of my hopes and dreams.”

“That just makes me nervous, I feel like I can do it, but I am here by myself. I don’t know anyone. I don’t know anyone from that side of my family in Mexico, I feel like if I were to get deported I would die there, I don’t know anybody. How would I survive there?”
Struggles to complete college

- Financial
- Participating in research/ getting internship experiences
- No career opportunities available after college
- Transportation

“I want to be a server again at a Denny’s because, I love it. I love everything that I do. I know everything that I have to know about it. And I say it like that, even though I don’t know for sure because I don’t think I have time to be negative about it.”

“I do want to go to graduate school but at the same time I am kind of hesitant because if I finish school, my masters, I am not able to get a job. And I kind of don’t want my education to go to waste. But at the same time, I am kind of hopeful that something will happen.”
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

- Compiled list of scholarships
- AB 540 resource center
- Financial aid
- Equal representation in the all disciplines
- Job opportunities on campus
- Legal counseling
- Academic advisement
- Updated website for AB 540 students
- Discipline specific volunteer opportunities for internships
- Workshops
Faculty/Staff Perceptions

- Rated CSUF very low in effectively serving undocumented students
- EOP office as “hub” for undocumented students
- Visible academic persistence and psychological resilience exhibited by undocumented student
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Recommendations from Faculty/Staff

- Faculty and staff want/need more resources to increase awareness of characteristics and needs of undocumented students

- Formalizing the existing informal network to develop a clearinghouse that would make it easier to direct undocumented students

- Task Force

- Mandatory trainings- “AB 540 Safe Zone Stickers”
 CONNECTION TO PAST LITERATURE

✓ Predominantly Latino
✓ Advocacy of Higher Education
✓ High educational attainment aspirations
✓ Financial struggles
✓ High levels of students academic persistence and determination
✓ Importance of family support
**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- Follow-up study on student population once upcoming policies (i.e. AB 130, AB 131, new Obama immigration policy) go into effect

- Investigate and analyze undocumented student population throughout the CSU system

- Follow-up study on post-undergraduate undocumented students

- Encourage other campuses/communities/organizations to assess and evaluate the experiences of their own undocumented population
REFERENCES


Individually brainstorm

- What are the barriers that undocumented students encounter on my campus?

Share

- What barriers are on your campus?
- What are your recommendations to better serve undocumented students?
- How do you predict that the State and Federal Dream Acts, if passed, will effect undocumented students educational aspirations and attainment?
- What is the role of a higher education institution in being an advocate for immigration policy reform? If any?
RESPONSE TO BARRIERS

- Institutional
- Student & Academic Affairs
- Community
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THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING OUR SESSION!