Lighting The Way For Undocumented Students At UC:
Free Speech, Civic And Political Engagement

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UC ADMINISTRATION

UCLA

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The following is a list of recommendations for the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) on advocacy, policies, and services to better support undocumented students, protect their freedom of speech, and enhance their civic and political engagement at the ten campuses of the University of California system and nationwide. These recommendations are the product of UC-wide research, webinars, and conversations with UC student leaders, directors of the multiple UC Undocumented Student Programs, and UC administration, experts, and faculty. These recommendations are a small contribution to address the immense challenges, needs, and issues that need to be resolved by the University of California, the California State government, and the federal government to further equal opportunity for undocumented students at UC and nationwide.

Recommendations:

1. FUNDING

The University of California should press the California State Legislature and the federal government to direct greater funding towards resources, services, and basic needs for undocumented students at UC.

- The goal for UC should be to increase funding for all undocumented student programs, centers, and services by creating a multi-million dollar systemwide fund to better assist these entities as well as the UC Immigrant Legal Services Center, UC basic needs campus-initiatives, and mental health services for undocumented students.
- UC should support its ten campuses to create new (and increase existing) legal services, leadership training, opportunities, and advocacy plans to further free speech and civic and political engagement for undocumented students in order to uplift and amplify their voices.
- It is crucial that UC and the State of California work together to invest for undocumented students, particularly amidst the economic challenges faced in the last year because of the COVID pandemic.

2. EMPOWERING STUDENTS: LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The University of California should better empower undocumented students to speak up and speak out.

- Providing undocumented students with leadership skills, opportunities, education, and orientation on free speech and civic and political engagement will empower them to contribute to produce real change through policies that directly and positively impact their lives and those around them.
- Increasing and creating new training and opportunities to develop leadership skills will prepare undocumented students to push for their causes, objectives, and demands in new civic and political spaces. It will also prepare them for future career goals and life experiences.
- Moreover, creating more UC events focused on civic and political engagement for undocumented students and the student body as a whole should be a priority in the upcoming years. This should include a student-led UC-wide annual initiative. I propose an annual UC-wide event called #USeeSpeakOurVoices to launch civic and political spaces, panels, forums, and symposiums during each Spring quarter/semester. This event will invite both undocumented and documented students to be part of a dialogue about current national and international political issues as well as about free speech and its challenges.
- Finally, UC and its Academic Senate should study the possibility of including a Free Expression/Civic and Political Engagement/Know-Your-Rights course (or courses) in its general education curricula and/or in its diversity course requirements.

3. SERVICES AND UC INVOLVEMENT

UC should create new tools and services such as UC-wide Know-Your-Rights trainings and a UC-wide Know-Your-Rights toolkit for undocumented students created with the participation and collaboration of student leaders and advocates.

- UC should also advocate for greater legal orientation workshops for undocumented students, their families, and documented students with undocumented parents.
- UC should support the creation of a UC-wide Undocumented Alumni Association, following UCLA's model, where this systemwide organization supports career, professional, and networking opportunities for UC undocumented student alumni and current students.
- Furthermore, UC should openly advocate to have more undocumented students applying to civic and political engagement opportunities and positions, including and not limited to systemwide committees, conferences, the UC Board of Regents (via the Student Regent seat), and others.

4. STATE AND FEDERAL ADVOCACY PLAN ENGAGING STUDENT LEADERS

The University of California should create a state and federal advocacy working group and plan that includes student leaders from the UC Undocumented Student Coalition, UCSA, and UCGPC to advocate for undocumented students at the state and national levels.

- This might include legal advocacy: for example, though most scholars agree that the First Amendment includes and protects undocumented immigrants in the United States, there is a need that the U.S. Supreme Court express this via clear precedent.
- Most fundamental, however, is legislative action for comprehensive immigration reform and a path to citizenship for all undocumented students and their families.