Preparing Undocumented Students for Graduate & Professional Studies

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01 Overview

02 UndocuGrads Research

03 UndocuGrads Initiative @ The University of Michigan
GENERAL OVERVIEW
THERE IS A GAP IN LITERATURE FOCUSED ON UNDOCUMENTED GRADUATE STUDENTS

• Literature on higher education accessibility and support for undocumented students without or with DACA (DACAmented) has mostly focused on undergraduate students

• Literature on undocumented graduate students is focused on testimonios and personal narratives that document the individual stories of undocugrads
  • Need to independently navigate the higher education process
  • Social support focused on undergraduates
  • Fear of disclosing their status to staff and faculty
  • Limited sources for financial aid

Vasquez et al., 2021; Freeman & Valdivia, 2021; Montiel, Valenzuela Ramirez, & Perez, 2020; Chung, 2022.
In 2021, 19.3% of DACAmented post-secondary students were in graduate programs and 80.7% were undergraduates (U.S. Census Bureau).

In 2021, 12.8% of Undocumented post-secondary students were in graduate programs and 87.2% were undergraduates (U.S. Census Bureau).

TheDream.US national surveys indicate a downward trend of interest in pursuing a graduate degree amongst undergraduate TheDream.US scholars (22.22% decrease from 2019-20 to 2022-23 survey years, 56% in 2022 compared to 72% in 2019-2020).

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 and 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
THEDREAM.US 2023 NATIONAL SURVEYS

TheDream.US 2022-2023 Scholars

- 36% DACAmented and 53% Undocumented
- 56% of scholars want to pursue graduate degrees
  - Majority (54%) interested in Master’s programs
  - 18% interested in Doctoral programs
  - All others indicated interest in professional degrees or “other”
TheDream.US 2023 Alumni:

82% DACAmented and 4% Undocumented

83% of alumni had completed or were pursuing graduate programs to some extent

- Completed graduate program with a graduate degree
- Currently attending a graduate program
- Accepted for Fall 2023/accepted but did not have funding to attend
- Applying for Fall 2023
- Interested in applying in the future
TheDream.US 2023 Alumni – Completed Grad Programs/Pursued Grad Programs

Top 3 factors when deciding where to apply were:
- Cost of tuition and related expenses
- Accessibility of grants and scholarships
- Academic curriculum offered

Top 3 concerns to complete graduate program:
- Paying for school
- Incurring debt/paying back loans
- Career opportunities post-graduation

Majority were pursuing or had completed Master’s programs (~90% Master’s degrees earned, 60% Master’s degrees pursued)
• Majority of respondents pursued a Master’s degree (54%) in comparison to 23% who pursued Doctorates or a Terminal degree

• Top challenges for graduate students include:
  • Regardless of immigration status, students named funding as their top challenge (lack of financial aid, finding scholarships, etc.)
  • Working while in graduate school
  • DACAmented students also named community and support groups as a major difficulty
TIE INTO RESEARCH

• Downward trend in interest towards graduate school
• Less pursuit of Doctorate degrees in comparison with Master’s
• Undocumented and DACAmented students are primarily concerned with funding when applying to and during graduate programs
• Not sure what else to include here lol
UNDOCUGRADS RESEARCH

Graduate School Accessibility for Undocumented Individuals Across the United States
MOTIVATION AND GOAL FOR OUR RESEARCH

• Our study emerged from a need identified by undocumented scholars through our various programs including Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP)

• **Goal:** Evaluate university policies on admissions, tuition classification, financial support, and social support for undocumented graduate students

• Assessed the following groups
  • Michigan Universities
  • Big 10 Universities
  • Association of American Universities (AAU)
  • Ivy League Universities
  • Private and Public Universities
  • California Universities
METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

1. Searched for policies specifically for undocumented students in institutional websites (admissions, tuition classification, funding, and social support)

2. Assigned preliminary accessibility designations for each university (least to most accessible)

3. We reached out to all contact liaisons from the list of universities to request an interview and/or to fill out a questionnaire

4. Conducted “consistency checks” by comparing universities with the same designation to each other
   • Used a rubric with accessibility designations ranging from least to most accessible for the four categories
   • Phase I focused on Michigan institutions and Big 10 universities
   • Phase II focused on AAU members, California universities, private universities and Ivy League universities
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ASSESSMENT OF ALL INSTITUTIONS

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Unpublished data, manuscript in progress.
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COMPARING AAU TO NON-MEMBERS

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America’s leading research universities: By the Numbers.
COMPARING CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITIES TO NON-CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITIES

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### DESIGNATION REASSESSMENT AFTER QUESTIONNAIRE OR INTERVIEW WITH LIAISON

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**Accessibility Ruler**

- Least Accessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Accessible*
- Most Accessible

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SUMMARY

• Data supports anecdotes by undocugrads in literature
  • Greatest area for improvement in institutional support for undocumented students is funding
  • Hard to identify accessible grad programs because there is discrepancy between what is online vs what information you would learn from liaisons
• Greater university resources and progressive legislation can lead to greater accessibility for undocumented grad students (AAU and CA).
• Misconception about private universities having greater funding than public universities
• In partnership with the President’s Alliance, we will create a centralized tool based on our research that can reduce the added burden undocumented people encounter when navigating graduate school enrollment
UNDOCUGRADS INITIATIVE @ THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
UNDOCUGRAD TRAINING AT U-M FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

Where to Start? Undocumented Undergraduate and Graduate Students

- National Advocacy and Policy Landscape
- Creating Long-Term Inclusion
- UndocuGrad Mental Health Workshop
Comparing Michigan Universities to Non-Members

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Least Accessible

Somewhat Accessible

Accessible

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WHO WE ARE

Student-led undocumented graduate student organization at the University of Michigan
INITIATIVES

• Grad Guide
• Preview Weekend
• Launch Event
• Mentorship with SCOPE
• Community Dinners/Discussion/Planning
• Conversations with Guest Speakers
  • MIRC, First Gen Empower
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Not enough literature on undocumented graduate students – Publish and share the work you are doing!

• Identify a contact person for both undergraduates and graduate students – Needs can differ and expertise is essential

• Use “graduate students” in statement of support – Language clarity can matter, policies can differ

• Overreliance of DACA to solve financial aid questions for undocumented students
  • More upcoming undocumented students without DACA or other protections
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Preparing Students to Pursue Graduate & Professional Studies

Steve Li
MA Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Student
Yale University

Joyce Zamorano Sanchez
Graduate Student
CSU Sacramento

Juan Soltero
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