Coming Out of the Shadows:
How undocumented immigrant students transform institutions
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Abstract

In 1982, *Plyler v. Doe* upheld longstanding access to public primary and secondary education to undocumented immigrant students in the United States. However, that decision did little to help undocumented immigrant students after graduating from high school. The prospects of entering higher education diminish with scarce federal or regional policies that support undocumented students’ career and educational aspirations. Over the past decade, undocumented immigrant students have advocated for policy changes within their respective institutions through formal and informal advocacy, and through external strategies and tactics connected to the immigrant rights movement. This article will focus on the role that undocumented immigrant students play to obtain, sustain, and expand their participation within higher education institutions. We will incorporate Critical Race Theory as a framework to demonstrate that undocumented immigrant students successfully employ counter-storytelling as a method to transform institutions. We will illustrate how institutional changes in favor of undocumented immigrant students result from sharing their collective narratives and experiences. Additionally, we lay out suggestions and examples of institutional practices and programs that help undocumented students achieve their dreams in higher education. The authors draw from their own struggles and successes as undocumented immigrant students at the University of California, Los Angeles and as leaders within the immigrant youth movement.

Keywords: undocumented, immigrants, students, institutions, narratives, counter-stories, higher education
Introduction

On October 13th, 2010, the Georgia Board of Regents overwhelmingly voted to expel undocumented immigrant students from their top five state universities (Gutierrez & Tamura, 2011, December 1). The controversial vote came at the peak of the national campaign for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, federal legislation addressing the needs of this group of individuals (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2012). The move to expel an estimated 27 undocumented immigrant students from Georgia’s top universities became a symbol of the national battle to address the future of this small undocumented immigrant population (Gutierrez & Tamura, 2011, December 1). Out of the 11.2 million undocumented immigrants believed to reside in the U.S. (Passel & Cohn, 2011), undocumented immigrant children, youth and young adults encompass an estimated 2.1 million of the total population (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Within the context of being singled out for their academic success and the lack of federal immigration reform that might offer some relief, undocumented students and their allies are seeking out creative but pragmatic avenues to gain access to higher education and citizenship.

The battle to gain access to citizenship through higher education is not new. For several decades, immigrant rights organizations have worked at the local, state, and national levels to pass policies that would help integrate a new generation of immigrants in the country. They

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Another number, 501, is mentioned in a press release from the University System of Georgia, on the day this policy was passed. It is unclear whether the Board refers to an estimate of the whole university system or only the top five universities. The actual report was not found. [http://www.usg.edu/news/release/regents_adopt_new_policies_on_undocumented_students](http://www.usg.edu/news/release/regents_adopt_new_policies_on_undocumented_students)
achieved historic victories in 2001 in Texas and California, the states with the largest population of undocumented immigrant students (Batalova & McHugh, 2010), with the first extensions of in-state residency to undocumented students (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011). In the following years, several states passed their own versions of in-state tuition bills. Today, 12 states have implemented such laws, three of which also provide the opportunity for financial aid, opening a new era to equal access to education and immigrant integration across the country (National Immigration Law Center, 2012). Accessing colleges and universities in different parts of the country represents a significant step forward for undocumented immigrant students in their journey towards a pathway to citizenship.

Since 2001, thousands of undocumented immigrant students have had the opportunity to access and obtain degrees from institutions of higher education (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). In this context, students have also become involved in advocacy and organizing efforts at colleges and universities across the country and in their own communities. The best example is the DREAM Act campaign, led by undocumented immigrant students (Gonzales, 2008; Amador, 2011a). Ranging from educational events and forums, to rallies and protests outside of governmental buildings, to civil disobedience actions and hunger strikes, these young leaders have accomplished significant changes in policy and public awareness as a result of their organized, continuous and relentless efforts (Amador, 2011a). But as Georgia’s Board of Regents vote illustrates, student activists dedicated to the passage of federal legislation like the DREAM Act must continue to fight for equal access within their institutions of higher education. Attacks on equal access to education remain an imminent threat.

Examples abound of efforts to combat the continued assault on immigrant students’ rights and to bring a better future for this disenfranchised population. Throughout this article, the
authors draw from their experiences and frame it as a California case study (an alternative scenario to that of Georgia), where students’ advocacy and organizing efforts within their institutions have granted them greater support and accessibility. The authors include a brief discussion of the internal and external challenges these students face and conclude with examples and recommendations for action to continue building tools of support and empowerment.

*The California Story*

In 1985, a court order upheld the practice of classifying California’s undocumented students as residents for tuition purposes if students met certain eligibility criteria (Leticia A. v. Board of Regents, 1985). The Leticia A. Network for Immigrant Access to California Higher Education, comprised of advocates, students, and community members, was formed in order to promote the success and implementation of the court order, and to continue advocating for undocumented students in the state of California (Guillen, 1). Until 1991, undocumented students were able to access in-state tuition rates and in many cases, financial aid.

In the early 1990’s, a University of California employee by the name of David P. Bradford won an injunction against the University of California, overturning the Leticia A. decision of 1985 (Regents of University of California v. Superior Court [Bradford], 1991). By 1995, undocumented students in California were unable to qualify for any form of in-state tuition or financial aid programs. The exclusion was compounded by Proposition 187, a ballot initiative in California that passed in 1994 and barred undocumented immigrants from accessing public benefits. The new law sought to deny the participation of undocumented students in any form of public education in California (Suárez-Orozco, 1996). Proposition 187 was later declared
unconstitutional (McDonnell, 1997) but the earlier Bradford ruling remained in effect in California’s colleges and universities.

It was not until the passage of Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) in 2001 that undocumented immigrant students gained access to in-state tuition once more (CAL Educ Code §§ 68130.5). However, AB 540 did not open pathways for financial assistance for this group of students. As a result of AB 540, increased waves of undocumented students were once again able to access higher education. Table 1, as documented by the University of California Office of the President, tracks the increased enrollment of undocumented immigrant students after the passage of AB 540.

Similar student population growth occurred within the other two major public higher education systems in California. Concurrently, with the rise in undocumented university student numbers in California, we have witnessed an expansion of the immigrant youth movement across the country. Texas similarly enacted in-state tuition and financial aid bill for undocumented immigrant students in 2001 (National Immigration Law Center, 2012) and became the first state to provide both in-state tuition and state funded financial aid opportunities for the students that attended and graduated the state’s high schools. Following these two states with the largest population of undocumented immigrant youth (Batalova & McHugh, 2010), a new era of

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2 In order to qualify for the AB 540 law, the student, regardless of immigration status, would have to meet specific requirements. The student must have attended a California high school for three or more years and graduated or have obtained a GED equivalent. The student must be currently registered or enrolled in a public accredited institution of higher education in California. If undocumented, student must file an Affidavit as required by individual institutions, stating that the student will apply for legal residency as soon as eligible to do so, as well as to reaffirm the criteria mentioned before. Finally, the student cannot be a non-immigrant holding a valid lettered non-immigrant visa.

3 California Legislative Committee Reports from 2011 report that about 3,600 AB 540 beneficiaries were enrolled in the California State University system, and 36,000 were enrolled in the California Community College system. While not all beneficiaries of AB 540 are undocumented, we can easily conclude based on the numbers provided by the University of California, that there is a higher number and ratio of undocumented students in these two systems (Nicol, 2, 3).
organizing for equal access to education and immigrant integration was born. In the years that followed, several states passed their own versions of in-state bills. Today, 12 states have enacted in-state tuition policies, three of which also provide the opportunity to financial aid benefits (National Immigration Law Center, 2012). Most recently, in California, undocumented students who are beneficiaries of AB 540 are now eligible for state financial aid through the passage of Assembly Bill 130 and Assembly Bill 131 of 2011.

At the national level, a heated immigration debate has evolved since the introduction of the DREAM Act appeared in Congress in August of 2001 (Gonzales, 2009). The federal Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, introduced by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) would provide a pathway to citizenship to undocumented immigrants who arrived to the U.S. before the age of 16 and meet specific criteria. As a bill that has typically enjoyed bipartisan support and endorsements from business, labor, educational institutions and other sectors of society, the DREAM Act has instilled hope for undocumented young immigrants across the country. For many, even if their state offers the benefit of in-state tuition or financial aid, there always remains the dilemma about being able to exercise their degrees and work in the formal economy.

The federal DREAM Act propelled undocumented students and their allies to coordinate, organize, and educate the country on the issues undocumented immigrant students, but it has also propelled local and regional immigrant youth mobilization. Organizing tactics have intentionally

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4 The qualifiers need to be present in the country for at least five years before the enactment of the bill. They also must have good moral standing, graduate from high school, and enter higher education or the armed forces. During a six year temporary permanent residency period, the DREAM Act-eligible individual (or as they are commonly referred to as ‘Dreamers’ aptly named after the legislation that has formed so much of their collective organizing experience) would have to complete at least two years of college or of military service. At the end of the six year period given that the requirements have been met, the applicant would be eligible for legal permanent residency.

5 For more resources and information about the DREAM Act and the different sectors that have come out in support of the bill, see: http://nilc.org/dreamsupport.html; www.dreamresourcecenter.org.
targeted institutions and systems that exclude undocumented immigrants from being full participants in society. This new movement of young immigrant leaders focuses on local and federal targets. When Congress is not in session and an opportunity for a federal immigration reform is not in sight, student organizers turn their attention to reforming other spaces that deprive immigrant youth from reaching their dreams.

**Coming Out of the Shadows at UCLA**

With one of the highest concentrations in the country, over 62,000 undocumented immigrant youth call Los Angeles their home (Valenzuela & Escudero, 2009, p.9). As the top public university in the city, it is no surprise that UCLA has attracted and benefitted from many undocumented students who have enrolled and graduated despite incredible odds (Wong, Shadduck-Hernandez, Narro, Valenzuela, 2008). Since the passage of AB 540 in 2001 (Abrego, 2008), the number of undocumented students attending UCLA has significantly increased, creating the need to provide particular services and equal opportunities.

In 2003, a critical mass of undocumented students at UCLA convened to discuss issues they faced on campus. The discussion led to the formation of a support and advocacy student group to find solutions to many of the barriers they faced as undergraduates. Still undercover, they decided to name their organization Improving Dreams, Equality, Access, and Success (IDEAS). Many of the issues these students hoped to tackle were initially administrative in nature, dealing mostly with the systemic way the university treated them. The first efforts that

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7 The group’s name did not include any reference to immigrants or immigration in an attempt to dissuade opposition from discovering their presence on campus. This further highlights the beginnings of a new chapter in the immigrant rights movement where students were just beginning to publicly disclose their undocumented status.
students and the institution collaborated on included campus education projects for specific
departments including career counseling services, institutional conferences and informational
events for frontline staff, and later discussions with counseling and psychological services. Some
difficulties students faced revolved around campus transactions, such as visiting the health center
and lacking U.S. government-issued identification to verify their status as a student (Escobar,
Lozano, & Inzunza, p. 73). Other problems were tied to state-wide policies, like the inability of
the University to process scholarships for undocumented students (Cooper, p.22). While many of
these struggles were not unique to this particular generation of undocumented undergraduates at
UCLA (See Ashcraft), undocumented students were ready to sustain their role at the forefront of
the discussion, adapting the methods of counter-storytelling as a way to advocate for themselves
and build a cohort of narrators ready to advance social change (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Undocumented students were motivated by the constitutive effects of AB 540, which provided
them with a legislative common identifier understood and sanctioned by the law (Abrego, p.
716). Students were able to connect with one another by identifying as “AB 540 students”,
presenting a new source for empowerment for this population (Abrego, p. 729). Through their
collective power, undocumented undergraduates organized an array of actions to address their
needs within the academy.

Once IDEAS became a university-sanctioned student group, students further developed
the organization’s goals and methods. Understanding their privilege as undocumented students
who have entered a prestigious university, IDEAS members began to initiate projects and
programs to address the unique barriers that undocumented students may face in their quest to
access higher education. Since then, they continue to develop relationships with financial aid
offices, high school counselors, teachers, and youth. They have also developed trainings and
workshops for students and teachers to support their aspirations for higher education. Organizers focused on student support and advocacy similar to other student-initiated retention projects. Some of the effective strategies we developed included a process for knowledge building, interwoven with identity formation with a broader desire for social change (Maldonado, Rhoads, Buenavista, p.634). Undocumented students were proactively addressing their own challenges, with the understanding that their efforts were not isolated, in fact, they were contributing to a larger movement of immigrant rights and equal access to education, augmenting their identity from students to change makers and leaders in their own communities.

Grassroots advocacy became a source of power for the organization. As student members began sharing the multiple issues and barriers they faced outside the university, they began to connect more actively to the immigrant rights movement regionally and nationally. IDEAS students also organized within the university by changing the campus climate through conversations with administrators and associating with other student organizations with similar or sympathetic interests. It was not until 2007 when IDEAS first publicly came out to the UCLA community at a demonstration held on campus in support of the federal DREAM Act. A few years later, on March 10, 2010, the first National Coming Out Day of Action took place across the country as undocumented youth shared their stories and called for the passage of the DREAM Act (Amador, 2011a). Though many undocumented students have publicly shared their stories in different spaces in the past, the Coming Out of the Shadows, or Coming Out actions, became the official action of the undocumented immigrant youth movement. Invoking the powerful and well-known rhetorical framing of the LGBTQ movement, undocumented students sought to expand the definition of marginality and invisibility and its associated harms. Declaring themselves to be “Undocumented and Unafraid,” youth within this movement use the
power of their stories to shed light on the injustices that stem from the U.S. broken immigration system (p.112). In 2007, IDEAS members at UCLA laid the foundation for a national movement of immigrant youth that would change the course of national immigration politics.

Establishing itself as a legitimate and well-respected student organization, IDEAS continued to increase its membership. However, the low retention rates of students due to the hardships associated with paying tuition every quarter remained an issue. Although the opportunity to pay in-state tuition came with the passage of AB 540 in 2001, the law fell short of providing state and private financial aid. Grassroots fundraisers became a constant activity for IDEAS members on campus, as students creatively strategized to help one another pay for the next quarter. Fundraising efforts varied from *pupusa* and *tamal* sales to movie screenings and even talent shows, all organized by IDEAS members with the support of other student organizations (Chu, 2011, May 2). The students also engaged in collecting donations from supportive staff, faculty, and administrators with whom they built long-lasting and meaningful relationships along the way. Administering the money raised in a legal and systematic way became necessary for the students and allies on campus. A private scholarship fund and scholarship application was developed to help streamline and maximize fundraising efforts. Supportive allies were nominated for an independent scholarship selection committee and were instructed to determine the distribution of the awards based on the students’ needs and their involvement with IDEAS. While the funds raised do not fully meet the needs of the undocumented student population on campus, the narratives that stemmed out of this project
supported a broader statewide push for a change in policy to legally and equitably access public funds with the California Dream Act.8

Despite the fear of exposure and risk of deportation that many undocumented students face while living in the United States (Gonzales, 2009; Chan, 2008; Tran, 2008), another constant anxiety that follows students is the yearly increases in public college and university tuition. For example, in the fall of 2009, the University of California system voted to increase student tuition by 32% to total 10,000 dollars per year per undergraduate student (McClanahan, 2011; Amador, 2011b). Tuition fees and hikes burden all students, but especially undocumented students. The continuous hikes have launched a backlash of organizing and activism in California higher education institutions. On November 18 and 19, 2011, when the vote to increase tuition was scheduled to take place at the UC Regents meeting, undocumented students took key roles in the organizing efforts with the larger student body to prevent the hikes from passing (Amador, 2011b). Despite the efforts of students across ten campuses (Newfield & Lye, 2011; Amador, 2011b), the UC Board of Regents passed the tuition increase, leaving the most affected students, the undocumented students, uncertain of their future (Amador, 2011b).

The tuition hikes showcased the position and influence of undocumented students. Support across the California higher education systems gathered, culminating in a systematic change in the state legislature. Following this momentum, the California Dream Act passed and was signed during the 2011 legislative session (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2012). Divided in two bills (AB 130 and AB 131), the California Dream Act significantly addresses the financial aid needs of undocumented AB 540 students by providing opportunities

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8 The California Dream (AB 130 and AB 131) allows AB 540 beneficiaries to access state funds like Cal Grants, and the Board of Governor’s Fee Waivers. It also allows students to apply and compete for institutional scholarships, and it allows the University to process outside private scholarships.
to apply and compete for private and state financial aid in California’s public colleges and universities. An effort greatly lead by undocumented students and student allies across the state, the passage of this Act symbolized the support built by undocumented students across the state for this cause (De la Paz, 2011, October 11). Currently, students are engaged in assisting potential beneficiaries of the new law to apply by conducting workshops and meetings on the UCLA campus with the assistance of university officials. Students in other regions of the state are also leading these efforts to assure that high school students and graduates are aware of the benefits that this law brings.⁹

Since 2001, when Assembly Bill 540 (CA) and House Bill 1403 (TX) were signed into law, great efforts have been taken to continue opening the doors to higher education for undocumented immigrant students across the nation.¹⁰ At UCLA, the formation of IDEAS as an undocumented student support group evolved into a national advocacy and organizing entity within the immigrant youth movement. The work done by undocumented students at the UCLA campus began to change the way the institution was doing its work. From grassroots, informal support systems by students and allies, the movement for immigrant students has grown into institutionalized structures that have paved the way for many more undocumented students higher education.

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⁹ Many organizations, student-lead and allies, are working on the implementation and education of the California Dream Act. The Dream Resource Center provides information and a useful handout on the California Dream Act on its website: www.dreamresourcecenter.org. Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC), a community based organization in the California Bay Area also provides useful information on the California Dream Act and local scholarship opportunities: www.e4fc.org. Finally, the California Dream Network has also been engaged in the process of education and implementation of the bill: www.cadreamnetwork.org.

¹⁰ For information about Assembly Bill 540 in California, see: www.dreamresourcecenter.org or www.ab540.com. For information about House Bill 1403 in Texas, see: http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1528.PDF.
The Dream Resource Center

After several years of interacting with a growing group of undocumented students at UCLA, faculty and staff on campus came together to support the academic experiences and journey of these individuals. In 2007, the UCLA Labor Center taught their first course on immigrant rights and higher education at UCLA. In close collaboration with IDEAS, a syllabus was developed to reflect a curriculum supplemented by the voices of undocumented students on campus (See Figure 1). IDEAS leaders served as teaching assistants and were able to augment the course by providing personal testimonies of their experiences as undocumented students. This class embraced the efforts that undocumented students at UCLA had been fighting for years as a source of knowledge and critical insight to be used in the classroom.

Inspired by the class, undocumented students, student allies and the faculty developed the book *Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out* (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). Using the book as an educational tool, hundreds of events have taken place to inform a broader community of the issues impacting undocumented students in the U.S. These events also served as leadership development and base-building opportunities; developing and strengthening communities of undocumented students on campuses across the nation. Received with enthusiasm by the academic community, policy makers, and by the general public, *Underground Undergrads* is now in its fourth printing and has sold more than ten thousand copies to date. The *Underground Undergrads* project developed into the Dream Resource Center (DRC) in 2011 in order to continue to provide quality experience and leadership opportunities for immigrant youth. The Dream Resource Center intends to support the infrastructure needed to prepare for the day when immigration reform
would provide undocumented immigrant youth with a pathway to citizenship. Ultimately, the Dream Resource Center, as a part of the UCLA Labor Center, uses its institutional affiliation to connect the immigrant community to the university.

The development of the DRC is an example of the impact of counter-storytelling as a tool for organizing and change. As noted by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), counter-stories serve as methodological and pedagogical tools to create meaningful challenges towards racism and discrimination. Based on counter-storytelling, undocumented immigrant students in Los Angeles have informed and influenced the development and mission of the Dream Resource Center. The Center integrates the narratives of immigrant youth in its work by developing tools and programs based on these narratives and providing resources to a growing movement of immigrant leaders. This model produced the new student-written publication, *Undocumented and Unafraid: Tam Tran, Cinthya Felix, and the Immigrant Youth Movement* (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2012). The book captures the lives of Tam and Cinthya, pioneers of the immigrant youth movement who tragically passed away in 2010 in the midst of the escalation of the federal DREAM Act campaign. Additionally, the book includes voices of youth across the country who have played key roles within the immigrant youth movement over the past ten years.

Grounded in the priorities as determined by the students themselves, the Dream Resource Center also launched Dream Summer in 2011, a national internship and scholarship opportunity program for Dream Act student leaders. Dream Summer placed 102 students with social justice, labor, and community organizations in five states. Strong working relationships were forged between students leaders of the immigrant youth movement and organizations. Students received assistance in identifying scholarships for their education and sustaining themselves as part of the immigrant youth movement. In 2012, Dream Summer will directly incorporate the
intersectionality between immigrant and LGBTQ movements by placing Queer Dream Act student leaders with LGBTQ organizations. Queer Dream Summer is a reflection of how such an institution adapts and develops to a growing need and demands of its base community.

For many reasons, developing a program that supports marginalized communities like undocumented students has been a difficult endeavor. The Dream Resource Center measures its success by how well its projects directly improve the lives of undocumented immigrant students. Currently, the center is working on two new projects which aspire to have long-lasting effects on the lives of those within the undocumented student movement. The first one, called CIRCLE (Collective of Immigrant Resilience through Community Led Empowerment), attempts to address the unique socio-emotional challenges undocumented youth face, such as struggles with cultural identity and social stigma and mental health and wellness awareness. With the leadership of undocumented young professionals and a network of mental health agencies and allies, CIRCLE is expected to launch in the fall of 2012. The second, Dream University, aims to provide access to higher education for undocumented students across the country through an accredited online program. These two pioneer projects respond to the need for tailored mental health support and institutional opportunities for immigrant youth. Like all projects at the Dream Resource Center, they foster a space for leadership development of activist youth. They also help students prepare for the day when higher education is a pathway to citizenship by increasing their personal capacity and expanding their social network of change makers. This unique example demonstrates that undocumented students can also empower institutions to become central organizing hubs and connectors of knowledge and resources, both geographically, and intellectually. As a model of pragmatic social change grounded in counter-narrative and
storytelling, the Dream Resource Center should be replicated across the nation in institutions of higher learning.

*The Pivotal Role of the Institution: Reflections from California*

While some institutions act in favor of undocumented students, a gap between needs and resources remains to be solved (Chen, 2012). Meanwhile, a lack of standardized methods and policies indicate that development in this area will continue to rely on best practices and research while Congress agrees on a solution (Chen & Herrera, 2010). This means institutions have a unique opportunity to lead the way and change lives proactively instead of waiting on politically charged decisions made by the government. The institution must be open to adapting to students’ needs, and be able to utilize their position of power in order to transform policies. Lessons from California, and more specifically UCLA, explain that the power behind institutional changes in favor of undocumented students is a result of a meaningful relationship between the institution and the students. Ultimately, the dialogue between the different facets of the institution and its students is paramount to success.

Our experiences indicate that institutions can act proactively to address the needs of students by connecting them with existing networks of undocumented student and youth organizations. For example, one national organization, United We Dream Network (UWD), is affiliated with 40 immigrant youth-led groups throughout the country, many of whom are based at institution of higher education. A second national network is the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA), also connected with different immigrant-youth led organizations. In California, the California Dream Team Alliance and the California Dream Network mobilize undocumented immigrant youth in the state through campuses or community-based organizing. At UCLA, faculty, administrators and staff often refer new undocumented students on campus to IDEAS for
support and services. A direct connection between the institution and the movement is crucial for a student to feel supported and connected to a broader group of individuals who share his or her struggle. However, it is equally important that the institution not default to these sources, which can place an additional administrative burden on the undocumented youth organizers within these student associations. Instead, academic offices should build on the experience and knowledge of undocumented undergraduates to further augment and support organizational initiatives. \(^{11}\)

At UCLA, campus alliances have developed to achieve resource-sharing structures as well as creative strategies to support undocumented students. Internal factors foster the collaboration that contributes to a pro-immigrant student culture. For example, an “Ally Committee” comprised of the different departments, centers, programs, and groups (including those of undocumented students) convene to share information and strategies to better support undocumented students on campus. In particular, the University has taken a proactive step towards institutionalizing support for marginalized students \(via\) a new center situated under the Student Affairs departments. In addition to serving undocumented students, the Bruin Resource Center serves former foster youth, transfer students, veterans, and students with children. Two other campus programs that have been instrumental to the development of the student group IDEAS, and at the forefront of exploring paths of success for undocumented students have been the Academic Advancement Program and the Center for Community College Partnerships. Both

programs were among the first to interact with undocumented students and work with them to find ways to ensure their academic success.  

Many of the fundamental protections of institutions to act in support of undocumented students in California are possible from statewide and system-wide policies which safeguard institutions from retaliation. Other states do not enjoy the relatively amicable structures that allow for growth of support and resources for this population. California’s example, as described throughout this article, is highly contrasted to Georgia’s current state, where staff and faculty allies must work off the clock, in underground spaces, to provide hope for the undocumented students banned from their public institutions. However, Georgia’s example is also a lesson for advocates of equal access to education. As the institution was unable to bring about change to support a sector of their student body, the educators and allies took their strengths to continue to provide an education for those banned by the state. Furthermore, Georgia’s educators, affected by external pressures, focused in their internal networks and assets, turning a crisis into an opportunity. Today, the battle to ban undocumented students from higher education in Georgia continues, as the state considers legislation to strengthen and expand on the decision by the Regents of the University of Georgia (Hing, 2012, March 30).

Collaborative efforts between different sectors of society continue in order to achieve gains for the undocumented student population. Examples of student organizational growth at university campuses and institutional resources demonstrate the progress and support created by the advocacy and organizing of the students. But even while this progress continues, external

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13 For more information on resources and student organizations in California, see “Underground Undergrads: UCLA undocumented students speak out” (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education 2008); the California Dream Network at www.cadreamnetwork.org. For a national list of immigrant youth-led organizations, visit www.unitedwedream.org or www.dreamactivist.org.
factors and pressures continue to impact many of the students attending colleges and universities across the country. One example is the record high number of deportations in recent years. More than 1.2 million deportations have been recorded by president Obama’s administration within its first three years (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, Montel, 2011). Undocumented immigrant youth are among the individuals deported, even after the Administration has emphasized that DREAM-eligible youth are not a deportation priority (Morton, June 17, 2011). The deportation crisis across the country has caused undocumented youth to act strategically and collectively; fighting back in an attempt to stop them from happening.

Some of the tactics to stop deportations of undocumented youth, also called Education Not Deportation (END) campaigns, includes the collaboration of students, schools, community and political leaders. One of the most visible campaigns began when, on September 15, 2010, Steve Li, a college student at the City College of San Francisco, was arrested and detained with his family by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers in San Francisco (Rev, D., 2010, November 13). For sixty days, Steve remained in ICE custody in California as well as in an Arizona detention center (King, J., 2010, November 15). Due to efforts from students and community leaders in California and across the nation, Steve Li was released one day before his deportation date. Besides the thousands of calls made and petitions signed on his behalf, the role of institutions also played an important in this campaign. The involvement of the president of the City College of San Francisco board of trustees as well as of the Teachers Union supported the efforts to stop Steve Li’s deportation (Rosenfeld, L., 2010, November 9; San Francisco Community College Federation of Teachers, 2010, November 9). As this example shows, action from members of higher education institutions can play a significant role in pursuing relief for

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14 The END campaign campaign is a project out of the United We Dream Network: www.endourpain.com
undocumented students. Finally, such external pressures can place the institution in a difficult position, but with enough internal support, education and advanced relationships, actions in favor of the students could be achieved.

In some states, policy precludes students from accessing and participating in institutions of higher learning. However, the authors of this article have articulated the impact that any action taken by the institution on behalf of its undocumented students supports a larger effort to bring relief to the affected population. Adding to the number of examples described above, the public statements by university Chancellors and Presidents in support of undocumented students adds a positive influence to the immigration debate. For instance, the public support for immigrant inclusive laws from the Chancellors at UCLA and UC Berkeley influences staff and administrators in such institutions to be proactive about their role in supporting this student population (Block, 2009, January 12; Birgeneau, 2011, September 13). In 2010, the University of California awarded IDEAS with the inaugural President's Outstanding Student Leadership Award, highlighting the contributions of undocumented students at institution like UCLA (UC Office of the President, 2010). Furthermore, the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) endorsements of the California Dream Act legislation as well as of AB 540, further legitimizing the supportive work being done throughout the University of California system (California Assembly Committee on Higher Education, 2011, March 15). The authors argue that the public support from higher education leaders like the ones described here open the doors for other individuals and leaders to become proactive on this issue.

Conclusion

Since the passage of Assembly Bill 540 in California and House Bill 1403 in Texas in 2001, undocumented students have been accessing higher education at significant levels. But the
continuous absence of systematic and comprehensive practices and policies continue to limit the support and accessibility to college for these students across the nation. The experiences lived by California’s undocumented students in higher education institutions, how they have been able to influence and change universities practices and policies, demonstrate that a pathway of support can be paved.

The authors have demonstrated that the undocumented student experience advises the institution, and that the margin of support is higher when the institution is proactive. Discussions of successful actions based on public statements of support by university officials and financial sustainability programs on behalf of the students were developed to further illustrate the power of the students’ voice. The organizing efforts taking place at the grassroots level as well as within the institution was grounded in methods of counter-storytelling drawn from Critical Race Theory. Paired with organizing and advocacy led by undocumented students, other factors contribute to the enrollment of these students at universities. These include growing formal and informal peer support systems; growing institutional support; qualifying for in-state tuition; and even further financial support either from the University or outside private sources. While the authors’ perspective on how the undocumented immigrant youth movement has influenced and affected institutions sheds light on these institutional changes and increase on enrollment, much remains to be explored. For example, how can an institution reframe a political paradigm (such as the one undocumented students face) and shift it creatively to further support them? Can an institution become a sanctuary for undocumented students and frame it as a retention issue? What are key differences between the power of a public institution versus a private one? As presented in this article, undocumented immigrant students continue to challenge such structures and bring these dialogues forward in their struggle for equal access to education. As advocates,
allies, and undocumented students continue to explore these and other issues, and they continue to be at the vanguard of this topic, the authors hope the dialogue and changes continues to build across the country.
Appendix
Immigrant Rights, Labor and Higher Education

Winter 2007

Asian American Studies M166A, Chicana/o Studies M156A
Labor and Work Place Studies M166A (Course ID # 242896200)

MONDAYS, 3:00-6:00PM
LOCATION: TBA (Bunche or SAC)

Figure 1

This course will focus on the new immigrant rights movement, with particular attention to labor and higher education. The course will provide an overview of the history of the immigrant rights movement, and will examine the development of coalition efforts between the labor movement and the immigrant rights movement nationally and locally. There will also be special focus on the issue of immigrant students in higher education, the challenges facing undocumented immigrant students, and the legislative and policy issues that have emerged. Students enrolled in the course will conduct oral histories, family histories, research on immigration and immigrant rights, write poetry and spoken word about the immigrant experience, and will work to collectively develop a student publication on immigrant students in higher education.

Table 1
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