

Cassie Barnhardt, Marisol Ramos, and Kimberly Reyes share a case study of an undocumented student's academic success to demonstrate the importance of administrative commitment, clarity, and consistency in supporting such students in the unique challenges they face.

By Cassie Barnhardt, Marisol Ramos, and Kimberly Reyes

Equity and Inclusion in Practice: Administrative Responsibility for Fostering Undocumented Students' Learning

AS PART OF A MULTIYEAR, MULTI-SITE FORD Foundation grant, the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good has been conducting research, working with campus leaders, and disseminating findings for the purpose of examining the manner in which higher education institutions serve college students whose immigration status is unclear or undefined. According to Roberto G. Gonzales and Alene Russell, roughly 65,000 undocumented young people graduate from high school annually in the United States, and of these individuals, estimates indicated that between 5 and 10 percent attend college. Notably the work of the National Forum has generated insights about the specific approaches that campuses pursue when working with undocumented college students, but perhaps

The individual names used in this article are pseudonyms. Likewise the name of the university has been changed, and all identifying characteristics have been modified.

more important, it has become abundantly clear that there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty among college personnel regarding even the most rudimentary administrative practices related to students whose immigration status is undocumented. In fact, a national study conducted in 2011 by John C. Burkhardt and colleagues at the National Forum that surveyed campus administrators found that 17 percent of financial aid administrators and 10 percent of admissions officers and registrars didn't know if their institution had adopted any particular position or practice regarding the admission of undocumented students. Further, more than half of all these administrators indicated that their institutions did not have any explicit practices outlined to guide staff through the admissions and financial aid processes when an undocumented student applied to their institutions.

Given the legal nature of the immigration issue, one would imagine that administrative practices on campus would be clearly dictated by statute. The

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reality is that in the absence of any federal comprehensive immigration legislation, the issue has been left to individual states to decide. In practice, the vast majority of states do not have a policy regarding access or tuition/financial-aid eligibility for undocumented students. According to the most recent summaries from the National Conference of State Legislatures, a handful of states have adopted restrictive policies—either explicitly prohibiting undocumented students who attended high school in the state from receiving in-state tuition or systematically banning undocumented students from admission to some or all public colleges in the state (as is the case in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina). Nevertheless, even when states have adopted some form of legislation, campuses serve as the arbiters of admissions, enrollment, and financial aid processes, which makes administrative practice the means by which college-ready undocumented resident students secure an opportunity to postsecondary education. Moreover, in light of all this uncertainty, campus administrators rely on prior frameworks of professional practice, such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA's) *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* and the ACPA's *Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards*, to coordinate

their activities and formulate their responses to circumstances involving undocumented students.

The case of Hillborough College reveals compelling insights into the typical challenges that undocumented college students face when pursuing a postsecondary education as well as providing a tangible example of how student affairs work unfolds when seeking to serve students confronted by these challenges. This case analysis, while having evolved from the circumstances surrounding a specific student's experience, was guided by our objective of understanding how educational opportunity is obtained through the work of administrators. To construct the case profile, we used secondary data analysis of publicly available information that described campus events, educational panels, and media accounts of campus happenings, and elaborated on the insights from these initial analyses by conducting semistructured interviews with campus student affairs personnel at Hillborough College. Our multiphase approach allowed us to explore the behind-the-scenes work of campus administrators without risking additional public attention to a specific undocumented student, which could unintentionally spur some type of direct exposure for said student and his/her family on account of the legal ambiguity associated with their immigration status.

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COLLEGE BOUND?

ACCORDING TO JEANNE BATALOVA AND MARGIE MCHUGH'S work with the Migration Policy Institute at the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, Kaitlyn is just one of the approximately two million undocumented young people in the United States who have prepared themselves academically and who possess the potential to attend college. Her family moved to the United States nine years ago from Vietnam and settled in a working-class neighborhood in California that reflected the plural heritages of the immigrant and refugee families that were drawn to the area since World War II. Upwards of 76 percent

of all residents in Kaitlyn's hometown identify with a racial or ethnic background other than white, and the majority of families reside in single-family residences. The local school district has been, and still is, among the best in the area, regularly exceeding the district and state norms on all standardized test indicators. Kaitlyn applied her talents through participation in the international baccalaureate program curriculum, and advanced to the top 10 percent of students in her high school while excelling in her extracurricular involvement as well.

Given Kaitlyn's leadership qualities and academic excellence, it would appear that she would have little trouble gaining access to a higher education institution in the state where she resided for nine years. According to the University of California Regents and California State University, one-eighth of the top-performing students have access to a UC school, and the CSU schools place priority on admitting well-prepared students from the area. Yet, as higher education professionals know all too well, "getting in" is only part of the equation for college access. Given the skyrocketing costs of higher education, the financial aid package is the critical factor in determining whether college attendance is possible. For undocumented students like Kaitlyn, their immigration status renders them ineligible for the federal financial aid that makes college possible for so many students. During Kaitlyn's high school years, there was a continual effort in California to enact state-level legislation that would provide access to financial aid for academically prepared undocumented students, but this legislation was vetoed by then Governor Schwarzenegger.

Ready for her future and hoping for the best, Kaitlyn applied to nearly two dozen colleges. Of the many schools she applied to, she was admitted to only one public in-state institution and placed on the waiting list at a private institution outside of her home state. At the time, as a matter of practice, the public in-state institution did not provide any form of financial aid to undocumented students. Admitted to only one college and without financial aid, Kaitlyn found herself in the bind that has become commonplace for college-bound undocumented youth across the country. While a select number of states have policies that are designed

to be more inclusive for undocumented students (such as those that allow undocumented students to be charged in-state tuition at public institutions in their states of residence), this doesn't always translate into obtaining access to public colleges and universities. In fact, Burkhardt and colleagues found that public institutions were associated with a reduced chance that the campus would also have a policy that granted some form of financial aid to undocumented students.

The sheer technical complexities inherent in undocumented college students' attempts to seek and obtain any type of financial aid are widespread across college campuses. In brief, the essence of the problem resides in the ubiquity of the requirement that students complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order for their financial need to be evaluated. This task, in and of itself, results in the FAFSA functioning as a gateway for other types of non-federal financial aid. Essentially, as higher education legal scholar Michael Olivas reminds us, even when a student is not eligible for federal aid, as is the general rule presently, there is still a chance that they may be eligible and qualify for state and/or institutional aid. However, undocumented students face the hurdle of self-reporting and "outing" themselves (or their parents) as being undocumented by providing the requisite FAFSA information. (For additional detail outlining the nuances of how state policy and institutional practice intersect with federal tax laws, and the resulting barriers that undocumented students confront when seeking financial aid, see Olivas's *Review of Higher Education* article "Undocumented College Students, Taxation, and Financial Aid: A Technical Note.")

With Kaitlyn's chances for funding looking grim in her home state, she was left with few options but to hope for a chance of going to college by somehow coming off the waitlist at Hillborough College. Fortunately, her patience was rewarded.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXTS FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

HILLBOROUGH COLLEGE IS A HIGHLY selective, private liberal-arts, and residential institution with an enrollment of approximately 1,500 students.

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The college is nestled in a small town in the suburban perimeter of a major metropolitan city. The students at Hillborough are predominantly traditionally aged students, who attend school full-time. The campus is extremely cosmopolitan, drawing nearly 90 percent of its students from out-of-state or international locations, and enrolling more than 60 percent non-white students. Approximately two-thirds of students attending Hillborough receive some type of financial grant assistance to cover the \$52,000 annual cost of attendance. Although Hillborough is a liberal-arts college, it has a strong focus on science, technology, engineering, and math programs along with curricula aimed at addressing global needs and enriching students' overall global understanding. Extracurricular involvement among the student body is high, with over 100 campus organizations, including a number of political, advocacy, service, and activist-oriented groups.

The state in which the college is located is similar to most states in the country in that state policies relating to college-bound undocumented immigrants are unstipulated. Specifically, this means that there is no statute that prohibits undocumented students from gaining admission to a postsecondary institution within the state. Additionally, there is no explicit provision restricting undocumented residents from receiving in-state tuition while attending the state's public institutions. Given that Hillborough is a private institution, however, this legislative environment exerts little to no direction over the manner in which the college acts relative to undocumented immigrant applicants and students. Nevertheless, Hillborough has decided to be proactive by including information about the financial aid procedures for undocumented students as part of its staff training. This process allows financial aid staff members to comply with all legal requirements as they relate to individual student circumstances, and also provide consistency for the institution. Furthermore, as a matter of administrative practice, Hillborough College has attempted to be clear and consistent by adopting an institutional policy that explicitly allows students who are undocumented residents in the United States to be admitted to the institution. Once students enroll, these individuals are classified as "international" for the purpose of residency reporting. In admissions, Hillborough uses the Common Application—which explicitly asks applicants to identify their citizenship status. Hillborough admissions staff reviews an applicant's dossier regardless of whether an individual has responded to this particular item on the form since there are differences in how individuals complete the various fields, and admissions officers must evaluate the merit and

qualifications for admission based upon the information with which they are presented.

Once students are admitted, the college offers financial aid to highly competitive students, and undocumented students are among those included for consideration. If an undocumented student is one of those individuals selected to receive aid, their aid package is presented in the form of institutional loans and grants. When instances emerge where staff members are faced with particular policy matters on account of a student's undocumented status, the established response at the college is for staff to forward these issues directly on to senior campus administrators and the campus General Counsel for advice and resolution.

Overall, the admissions and financial aid processes at Hillborough are enacted in ways that reduce ambiguity, thereby striking a balance between the need to enact equity for all students and the commitment to be inclusive of students who have been marginalized or are encumbered by their undocumented immigration status. The institution's modus operandi is simple: (1) the campus policy explicitly states that undocumented students are eligible for admission; (2) the campus subsequently trains its staff so they are equipped with a baseline of procedural awareness for applying the policy; and (3) the resulting clarity of administrative practice provides undocumented students with an opportunity for an education. Surprisingly, these straightforward practices are not normative throughout the field of higher education. John C. Burkhardt and his contributors at the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good report that the *National Forum's* survey of admissions professionals found that 40 percent of campuses indicate that they explicitly allow for the admission of undocumented students; and in a parallel analysis of financial aid professionals, just slightly more than one-fourth of the campuses claimed the same. Further, 64 percent of the individuals surveyed indicated that they do not receive any training regarding how financial-aid procedures are specified for undocumented students, which suggests that many staff are flying blind when navigating this critical point of opportunity for undocumented students. The reality is that many undocumented students come from families with very limited resources, and beyond that, they are ineligible to work legally while attending college due to their immigration status. With financial constraints posing such a large threat to educational opportunity, campus administrators play a pivotal role in accurately relaying the nuances in admissions and financial aid policies specific to undocumented students. Further, now that college attendance is among the inclusion criteria for the US Department

of Homeland Security’s *Deferred Action*, the ability of campus administrators to remove barriers to college for undocumented students through transparent, professional practice has never been more important. As things currently stand, the lack of clarity regarding campus policies and practices may contribute to staff avoiding the matter altogether—an inaction that may function to systematically overlook educational opportunity for academically qualified undocumented students across the nation.

SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR LEARNING AND SUCCESS

AS A HILLBOROUGH STUDENT, KAITLYN was assigned to Dean Devin Skyles as part of the regular academic and developmental supportive infrastructure that is provided to all enrolled students. Before meeting Kaitlyn, Dean Skyles had worked with a handful of undocumented students. He reflected back on these experiences, observing that undocumented students tend to “fly under the radar,” rarely self-identifying themselves to their dean, but when they do so it is often on account of their undocumented status having created some sort of systematic barrier to securing the types of educational or support services necessary to be successful in college. The dean’s insights highlighted the inherent complications undocumented students face associated with basic matters of wellness such as taking time off from school to attend to health-related issues; the limitations on pursuing any form of paid internship to ready one’s self for a subsequent career; and the absence of a chance to participate in a study-abroad program. In observing these trends, and motivated by Kaitlyn’s questions and professional aspirations, Dean Skyles began a conversation with his Hillborough colleagues in the career development office.

At the time of Dean Skyles’s inquiry, the career development director was unaware that the college enrolled undocumented students. Through a series

of conversations between the dean and the director, they identified a mismatch between what the campus had promised its students in terms of the types of experiences it would offer and the lack of a compatible structure to make these experiences universally accessible for all students. Specifically, Kaitlyn’s talents and competencies made her a desirable candidate for a summer internship, but her undocumented immigration status prohibited her from actually getting paid. The dean described Kaitlyn’s situation as resonating with the director because it revealed a systematic barrier that prohibited some of its students from accessing the types of educational experiences upon which the college defined its undergraduate experience. According to a Hillborough administrator, staff were united around the core principle of “doing what we can to help students benefit from their education and [to] be happy and productive”; and when practices fell short of this ideal, there existed a mutually agreed-upon opportunity for change. Administrators saw themselves as advocates for students, and their advocacy was based on enhancing students’ learning. Hillborough prided itself on rigorous classroom experiences, but it also defined its mission as supplementing formal academic work with research-based and career-focused internships to ready “Hillborough students to make their mark in the world.” Therefore, shortchanging any student of a core Hillborough educational experience was unacceptable and provided strong motivation to develop a solution that would not only assist Kaitlyn, but also increase opportunities for other students whose individual circumstances would also make them eligible for unpaid internships. Moreover, the college initiated a summer fellowship program to provide modest funding for living expenses and for work in unpaid internships. With the college’s help, Kaitlyn was able to overcome a fundamental obstacle to her learning.

Although many undocumented students choose not to discuss their status with campus officials, Kaitlyn brought lots of questions to Dean Skyles, many of which revolved around overcoming limitations of

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Administrators must have clarity about institutional mission and how it will be pursued in practices and programs, a commitment to fairness by preparing staff to implement policies with equity, and a widespread norm to address unresolved issues through the lens of helping students to succeed.

some kind. Initially, Kaitlyn was focused on navigating the logistics of being an undocumented student, but her interests were subsequently drawn to generating awareness of the experiences of students like herself. Over time, Dean Skyles observed Kaitlyn gaining her voice in the college community from a bit of a distance, just as any adviser does by giving students adequate space to come to terms with the complexities of their own personal circumstance or identity—including the social, cultural, political, or ideological forces that exert varying degrees of constraint on their opportunity or status. In exploring her own identity, Kaitlyn found support among an affirming peer group of DREAM Activists (students and their allies organizing for securing immigrant opportunities in education and a path to citizenship) in her state. Kaitlyn participated in citywide rallies, and later served as an organizer herself. Like several undocumented students, Kaitlyn publicly revealed her status—not at a rally, but rather during a campuswide lecture as a way of connecting her own experience with the content of the discussion.

Dean Skyles reflected back on the importance that he assigned to the fact that Kaitlyn disclosed her immigration status during a campus lecture. He noted that faculty had attended that particular event in large numbers, which created a level of awareness that might not have been achieved in another venue. Following the lecture, Kaitlyn wrote a piece for the campus paper and organized a teach-in; faculty participated, and staff were generally supportive. Dean Skyles also remarked that while staff members' personal knowledge of immigration issues and level of comfort with student activism varied, there was wide agreement that it was Hillborough's job to support students independent of their personal feelings about such issues. In fact, Hillborough situated Kaitlyn's story not as one of social justice, but one of student achievement. With the global mission of the institution, Dean Skyles offered that the institution was comfortable with the idea that it was preparing students to be international researchers and professionals who needed to be ready for crossing borders and

moving from country to country. Therefore, Kaitlyn's circumstance was seen through the lens of a larger campus narrative that already valued and embraced the idea that international boundaries create opportunities and challenges.

AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE, ATTENTION, AND ACTION

THE CASE OF HILLBOROUGH COLLEGE PROVIDES insight into how everyday actions of administrators have a remarkable impact on the lives of some of our most vulnerable students. Students whose immigration status is unclear and undefined not only face the inherent challenges that society and popular culture confer upon them on account of their membership in a particular social-identity group, but as Evelyn Nakano Glenn's work reminds us, they also lack political and civil rights. Without Hillborough's administrators exercising a sustained adherence to a common set of professional ethics and standards for their work in the field of student affairs, it is arguable that Kaitlyn may not have had a chance to learn or develop her talents. In order to ensure such opportunities, administrators must have clarity about institutional mission and how it will be pursued in practices and programs, a commitment to fairness by preparing staff to implement policies with equity, and a widespread norm to address unresolved issues through the lens of helping students to succeed. These are the ingredients for creating a path to opportunity, social inclusion, and learning both for the individual student (Kaitlyn) and the campus community as a whole.

Outside of the Hillborough case, we know that administrative practice becomes more inclusive and transparent for undocumented college students when student affairs associations provide their membership with the relevant information and professional support. Specifically, the aforementioned national study revealed that campuses are roughly twice as likely to implement an inclusive admission policy for undocumented students (rather than a restrictive policy), along with offering some form of financial aid to undocumented

students when the student affairs staff on campus are aware and informed of their professional association's affirmative position relative to the issue. These findings hold true even after accounting for variation in institutional type and selectivity of admissions, along with the differential influence of state-level policy environments, population demographics, economic factors, and ideological tendencies among the polity.

With respect to the issues pertaining to undocumented immigrant college students, the ACPA has certainly asserted its position publicly. In June 2011, Executive Director Gregory Roberts testified to a congressional subcommittee on behalf of the association to support the passage of the federal DREAM Act. Furthermore, last winter the ACPA Commission for Social Justice Educators' newsletter *Voices* published Elizabeth A. Jach's synopsis of the struggles undocumented college-bound students face; there have also been convention programs and other Commission-sponsored events. This case study and these other resources are available for student affairs educators who seek greater understanding about how to best support undocumented students on campus. Kaitlyn and the thousands of other students like her rely directly on student affairs educators to realize their agency and stay true to a commitment of educational opportunity for all students.

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