

## Case Study

A suite of support and financial-aid strategies find a home in a new campus center, and allow hardworking students to continue to pursue their higher education goals.

# Undocumented Students Dare to Dream

**EMILY\* '14 CAME TO** the United States from South Korea when she was 10 years old with her twin sister, her older brother, and their mother. Living in the United States, Emily always dreamed of going to college. “My family strongly believed that we lived in a country where, despite our difficulties, we could succeed if we worked hard,” she said. “I knew that, because of my undocumented status, my options for college were limited. But I also knew that there were more options for undocumented students in California.”

With many policies designed to assist undocumented people pursue higher education already in place, the California legislature passed AB 540 in 2001, which allowed for undocumented students to pay in-state tuition prices if they attended a California high school for three or more years, graduated from a California high school or attained a G.E.D., and filed an affidavit stating that they would apply for legal residency as soon as possible. Though Emily and her sister qualified for AB 540, Berkeley still seemed out of reach. High school counselors told Emily’s older brother, also an undocumented student, that he would not be eligible for financial aid because of his undocumented status. This was discouraging to him and both of his sisters.

Despite this, Emily and her sister applied and were accepted to both UCLA and Berkeley. Though still concerned about how they would finance their educations, the bigger question was how to choose between their two options. Emily and her sister attended a Berkeley orientation for admitted stu-

dents in Southern California. After learning of their undocumented status, a coordinator promised them she’d help them navigate the possibilities based on AB 540. This offer of support encouraged Emily to choose Berkeley.

Emily entered Berkeley as a freshman in the fall of 2009, but didn’t initially feel a sense of belonging within the campus community. “I never wanted to identify as an undocumented student. Never. I always had a feeling of being unwanted because of my status,” she said.

At the same time, financial pressures mounted. Unable to cover tuition costs, Emily had to drop out after one year at Berkeley. At the time, undocumented students were able to pay in-state tuition prices, but were barred from receiving government-sponsored financial aid, institutional scholarships, or student loans. Undocumented students in California had to rely on limited private scholarships or their own savings in order to pay tuition and expenses.

Emily worked for a year, saving her money to pay the following year’s tuition. In 2011, she re-enrolled at Berkeley. In that same year, the California legislature passed two key pieces of legislation — AB 130 and 131 — that allowed for eligible AB 540 students to apply for and receive scholarships derived from non-State funds at California public colleges and universities and to receive financial aid from State funds.

In 2012, Berkeley convened a special task force on undocumented students chaired by Vice Chancellor Gibor Basri. At the task force’s recommendation, Berkeley formed the Undocumented Student

*\*a pseudonym*



(Left to right) Berkeley Dreamer students Ivan Villasenor Madriz, Dalia Navia, and Aureo Mesquita with Meng So (bottom right), program director of the Undocumented Student Program

Program (USP) to aid the influx of undocumented students that the new legislation would facilitate. A generous donation made by Elise Haas established the Robert D. Haas Dreamer Resource Center in the fall of 2012, offering a physical space for the Undocumented Student Program as well as funding for a number of services to aid undocumented students in their pursuit of higher education. USP offers a wide number of services to undocumented students including academic counseling, emergency grants, housing resources, a Dream Lending Library, mental health and wellness, and immigration legal support.

In the same year, President Obama signed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) memorandum that allowed for undocumented immigrants meeting specific criteria to receive a reprieve from deportation as well as a work permit for up to two years. With this added support, USP served 103 undocumented students in the 2012-2013 year, 87 of whom were placed with pro bono attorneys through a partnership with Berkeley's Law International Human Rights Law Clinic. Through USP, undocumented students received critical financial support to cover the DACA ap-

plication costs, which would have otherwise been cost-restrictive for students like Emily.

For undocumented students, the Dreamer Resource Center offered not only vital resources for student success, but also a safe space. "The program helped me have a sense of belonging on the campus for the first time," Emily said. "I was moved to see staff members who were supportive of students like me, who supported our education and our future. It kept my morale up. There were counselors available to talk to who understood our situation."

With the resources and support of the Undocumented Student Program behind her, Emily graduated in May 2014. The day after graduation, she started her first job. She now serves as a community health specialist at Asian Health Services, a community health center and advocacy group for Asian immigrants and refugees. Emily sees her work as a continuation and extension of the support provided by the Undocumented Student Program at Berkeley. "The Berkeley pioneers who started programs like this encouraged me to find ways to give back to the community and help underserved



Berkeley Dreamers  
Yongbin Chang (left)  
and Juan Prieto

groups,” she said. “I learned that I could be undocumented and still be able to serve my community.”

The Undocumented Student Program sends a strong message not just to Berkeley students, but also to prospective students and to the broader community. “Berkeley is a school based on inclusion and equity,” she said. “Berkeley respects everyone’s dignity and right to an education.”

## The Catalyst Moment

The creation of programs and a center on campus where undocumented students can find support without judgment or fear.

### Best Practices

- » Build networks. Being in dialogue with other established programs within the UC system, Georgetown, and the University of Texas helped USP sparked the creation of a group of institutions that is poised to take on the broader agenda of “sharing the model” and communicating a sense of urgency for the importance of this work nationally.
- » Account for contextual challenges faced by undocumented students. In the absence of immi-

gration reform, USP provided immediate relief in essential areas of food security, mental health, and legal issues for undocumented students.

### Lessons Learned

- » Extend the discussion about undocumented students beyond cost. Access and equity support services are equally vital to success and have been integral to shifting institutional conversations on the topic.

### What’s Next

- » Working in partnership with Educators for Fair Consideration, USP will publish a college scorecard report, “Building Institutional Capacity to Serve Undocumented Students: California Report & Assessment Tool,” which will provide a framework on how institutions can better serve undocumented students.
- » The Standing Committee on Undocumented Members of the On-Campus Community will soon share an updated and enhanced set of campus recommendations on how Berkeley can provide a better campus experience for undocumented students, including emerging needs of graduate students.