

Supporting the Mental Health of Undocumented and Immigrant Students: What Clinicians Need to Know

Questions and Answers

Diana Peña, PhD – Staff Psychologist UC Berkeley CAPS & Counselor for the Center for Educational Equity and Excellence

Daniel Arturo Alfaro Arellano – UCSD undocumented Student Services Coordinator

Q: Has there been a decrease in students attending the undocumented students center due to the name of the center and not wanting to be identified as undocumented due to safety concerns?

A (Dr. Peña): Since the election, we have seen increased apprehension and reluctance in approaching our physical location due to safety concerns in this political climate.

Though we don't have quantitative data, many students have expressed anecdotally the fear of visibility and vulnerability around congregating in the center.

In observing this, our USP team (Undocumented Student Program) has been working hard to establish and continue fostering credibility and trust among the student community (i.e. healing circles, community gatherings, satellite locations, etc.). Of note: emergency grants, legal support, mental health support and academic counseling are still high in demand and student usage.

A (Daniel): No. In the contrary, there has been an increase in one-on-ones with the Coordinator of Undocumented Student Services at UC San Diego. Although, there are students who are reluctant to come to the Undoc Center, many others have been very proactive in seeking information after the presidential election. The wrong approach here is to “mask” the center or the services; the goal should be to normalize the space so students feel as comfortable visiting the Undoc Center, as they do visiting other spaces, such as the financial aid office.

Q: Dr. Peña mentioned having mental health liaisons available through UCPD for 5150 assessments and other situations where having uniformed officers responding may further aggravate the situation. I wonder if she could share some information about how to bring similar programs to all of our campuses.

As a member of our student life team and a Mental Health First Aid instructor, I often struggle with the instruction to "call 911" when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis. I know it is our best resource sometimes but I also know that there are some members of our community who simply will not call knowing that a uniformed and armed officer would respond. Plain-clothes officers could potentially make a world of difference in these situations and would be a benefit not just to our undocumented population, but also to students from other communities that have understandably strained relationships with law enforcement.

Thank you so much and looking forward to our continued conversation.

A (Dr. Peña): Thank you for this question. I appreciate the sensitivity to community members who, for many reasons, feel reticent to call law enforcement during a mental health crisis. At UCB CPS, we get consultations calls from members of marginalized communities who have similar fears and we find this

Supporting the Mental Health of Undocumented and Immigrant Students: What Clinicians Need to Know

Questions and Answers

challenging as well. Sometimes, it's useful to ask about those fears in case there's misinformation about what could happen. For example, on our campus, students don't have to show government ID when reporting any type of victimization. I always make sure that undocumented students know this; a campus ID or other form of ID will suffice. When clarification of procedure is not the issue, I help students weigh the pros and cons of the calling/not calling depending on the risk at hand.

Regarding the partnership we have with our mental health liaisons, I'd like to clarify a few things: a) our mental health liaisons are UCPD officers who, most days, are not in law enforcement uniform, b) liaisons weren't appointed; rather grew from relationships that were fostered over the course of many years between the counseling center and UC police department, and c) that these particular officers may not always be available to fulfill the request if they are off duty or already involved in another situation. I've consulted with counseling staff that have played a big role in developing these relationships (including our hospitalization coordinator) and they emphasized the importance of ongoing dialogue and relationship building that has led to this place in our relationship. Specifically, listening to what their needs are on the field and us communicating what our needs are for the clinical process. Our clinical directors have also participated in regular meetings with UCPD directors/leadership, provided mental health consultation, etc.

Some additional thoughts:

1. We are fortunate to have access to the Berkeley Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team - mental health clinicians accompanied by Berkeley City police (in uniform). Though police are present, the folks doing the assessment are not police and not in uniform. This type of team doesn't exist in every city/county, but it might be worth exploring in your campus community.
2. UCPD on our campus participates in a university-wide "Students of Concern Committee", which has been another great way of developing relationships across campus and facilitating their awareness of student concerns, campus climate, resources, etc.
3. UCPD on our campus has gone through a 48 hour crisis intervention training, which includes a cultural responsiveness training and some dialogue on interactions with marginalized groups. You could advocate for this type of training on your campus if it doesn't exist.

Q: Are schools and university campuses safe environments - referring to places such as the restrooms - messaging on the walls to target the vulnerable students? How is this addressed on campus?

A (Daniel): All UC campuses have policies that state where it is appropriate to post messages. This is UC San Diego's policy:

Posting: General

This section of PPM 510 shall govern all outdoor public space at UC San Diego. Approval is not required for posting any materials that are in compliance with this section. The general public may post notices or announcements on bulletin boards, kiosks, and locations designated for this purpose. Information concerning the location of these boards and kiosks may be obtained at

Supporting the Mental Health of Undocumented and Immigrant Students: What Clinicians Need to Know

Questions and Answers

<http://ugr8.ucsd.edu/judicial/appendE.html>). Except as permitted herein, no posters, handbills, or any other form of announcement or statement may be placed on or against, attached to, or written on any structure or natural feature of the campus including, but not limited to the ground, trees, doors, signs, light poles, waste receptacles, building exteriors, windows, and fences and walkways. Postings shall not damage university property or facilities. Posting on top of other current postings is a violation of this policy as is the removal of other current postings.

Persons who are posting literature are encouraged to respect others' posting needs. Duplicates may be removed if posting space is unavailable.

Chalking

Chalking is permitted only on sidewalks of the university grounds that are exposed to weather elements and not covered by a roof or overhang. The material used to mark sidewalks must be water-soluble stick chalk. The use of markers, paints, oil-based products, sprayable chalk, or other types of markers or liquids is prohibited. Chalking is prohibited on other surfaces including roadways, buildings, steps, seating walls, benches, tables, signs, poles, columns, trash receptacles, trees, and other surfaces, structures and fixtures. The university has no responsibility to preserve or remove chalked messages from sidewalks. Environmentally sound clean-up is encouraged.

In the case where a posting falls outside of our policy, the administration will convene and determine next steps.

Q: What's the best place for high school students to learn about the options they have in attending a UC or CSU or to get answers to some of their concerns regarding their status?

A: Following are three resources where undocumented students can learn more about their options for pursuing higher education at UC/in California:

- Systemwide Resource Website for Undocumented Students: <http://undoc.universityofcalifornia.edu/>
- Information on Immigration: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/immigration>
- Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC): <http://e4fc.org/>