Writing in Community at the Undocumented Student Success Center

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Introduction

Undocumented college students are important members of college communities as well as contribute to the diversity and inclusion/equity work in those spaces.

Research demonstrates that undocumented students face important legal, financial and social barriers when enrolling in institutions of Higher Education (Bjorklund, 2018). One way universities have worked to improve students’ experiences on campus is through "Dream Centers.” Dream centers have the potential to increase a sense of welcome for undocumented students (Rosas, 2020). They also teach the campus community about immigration status vulnerabilities, barriers as well as undocumented students resilience.

There are over 700 undocumented students at CSUSB. Since 2015, the Undocumented Student Success Center (USSC) has been an important site of resources and community-building for students and families.

Project Description and Goals

Initiated in the Spring of 2019, the USSC Migrant Writing Circle seeks to build community among undocumented students at CSUSB as well as other constituents who frequent the USSC. Participants meet every two weeks to write, reflect, and, if they feel comfortable, share about their experiences on a number of topics.

The project has two interrelated goals
1. Contribute to improving the sense of community undocumented students feel on campus.
2. Compile and disseminate texts that visibilize the undocumented student experience on campus.

In order to achieve these goals, students produce a personal immigrant archive – a repository of ideas, stories and reflections that visibilize the lives and histories of migrants in our community. They choose what to write and share within the circle, which is a confidential space.

They have also produced different narratives to share with the campus community. Most narratives do not include names to maintain confidentiality. One example is a zine which illustrates the importance of the USSC to writing circle members. The zine includes written narratives about the center as well as spatial maps to visualize the myriad activities and relationships that occur at the USSC. The maps also illustrate the need for additional space for those activities to transpire in more meaningful ways.

Discussion

There is no one undocumented experience (Aguilar, 2019). Undocumented college students can experience different immigration statuses (e.g. DACA) across time and these shape specific experiences alongside, geographic location, family background, race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and other facets of social location.

References