Admissions Handbook for Undocumented Students

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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive guide on how to effectively assist the Northern Virginia undocumented student population apply and be admitted to George Mason University.
Oftentimes, families from around the world look to the United States for opportunity and prosperity. Because of their belief in the “American Dream” and the chance for better lives, many people immigrate to the United States. However, conditions sometimes “force families to make tough decisions. Sometimes circumstances and tough decisions manifest in families entering the United States without legal documentation. These families become America’s undocumented” (Gildersleeve, Rumann, and Mondragon, 2010, p. 5). These undocumented families live in our communities, attend our K-12 schools, and become our friends. On the national level, it is estimated that “65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools each year” (Deverall, 2008, p. 1251). Of these 65,000 students, only five to ten percent of them move on to continue their education at an institution of higher education (Deverall, 2008).

This low percentage is closely tied to fact that undocumented students who have lived in the United States for years and have completed an American K-12 education are currently required to pay out-of-state tuition upon their entrance to higher education in most states, including Virginia. Not only are these students required to pay out-of-state tuition, but they are also denied federal financial aid due to their immigration status. The only hope these students have of receiving financial assistance to pay for their education is through private scholarships that do not require a social security number to be provided on the application.

This handbook aims to address the needs of undocumented Northern Virginia high school students by creating an instruction manual for George Mason University faculty and staff to utilize in assisting students apply to and enroll at George Mason University. The handbook will replicate the student support efforts of Freedom University in Athens, Georgia at Mason. Freedom University was developed by four faculty members from the University of Georgia who help prepare undocumented high school students in Athens, GA for college by educating them on the application process and available scholarships.

The handbook will divided into the following three main sections:

**Part I: Understanding Northern Virginia’s Undocumented Student Population, Challenges Undocumented Students Face, and the Proposed DREAM Act**

This section will provide information on current challenges undocumented students face, explain the proposed DREAM Act, and list best practices for advocating for the passage of the DREAM Act in Virginia.

**Part II: Freedom University**

The second section of the manual will clearly outline how Freedom University is supporting undocumented students in the Athens, Georgia area and how these practices can be replicated at Mason. In particular, an overview of Freedom University will be given and methods for assisting local, undocumented students who wish to be accepted to Mason will be addressed.
Additionally, scholarships and grants available to undocumented students will be listed within this section.

**Part III: Communication Plan for Mason’s Assistance Programs for Undocumented Students**

Lastly, the third section of the manual will focus on how George Mason University faculty and staff can best communicate their assistance programs for undocumented students to the local community.
Part I

Understanding Northern Virginia’s Undocumented Student Population, Challenges Undocumented Students Face, and the Proposed DREAM Act
Understanding Northern Virginia’s Undocumented Student Population

Families who have immigrated to the United States without abiding by the proper legal regulations are known as America’s undocumented. Despite their undocumented immigration status, however, “the U.S. Supreme Court case Plyer v. Doe (1982) prohibited states from denying undocumented children a public K-12 education” (Eusebio and Mendoza, 2013, p. 4). According to the ruling, denying undocumented students an “education would create a ‘lifetime of hardship’… and a ‘permanent underclass’ of individuals” (Eusebio and Mendoza, 2013, p. 4). This educational opportunity and hope of eliminating the underclass of our undocumented population, however, stops after high school graduation.

Undocumented students in Virginia are currently required to pay out-of-state tuition while attending public institutions of higher education, even if they have lived in the state for the majority of their lives (Eusebio and Mendoza, 2013)! Additionally, these undocumented students are denied federal financial aid due to their immigration status (Eusebio and Mendoza, 2013). Therefore, the only hope these students have of receiving financial assistance to pay for their education is through private scholarships that do not require a social security number to be provided on the application.

Because of these financial challenges, many undocumented students are forced to end their educational journey after only receiving a high school degree. On the national level, it is estimated that “65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools each year” (Deverall, 2008, p. 1251). Of these 65,000 students, only five to ten percent move on to continue their education at an institution of higher education (Deverall, 2008). Statistics specifically for Virginia are hard to generate due to lack of self-disclosure of undocumented students; however, it can be assumed that these devastating statistics also hold true for the talented, undocumented population of Virginia.

It is especially difficult to gather clear statistics of undocumented students in the Northern Virginia region, but it can also be assumed that a large percentage of Virginia’s undocumented student population resides in the area. It is estimated that “half of the state’s foreign-born population resides in Fairfax County and about four-fifths reside in Northern Virginia” (Martin, 2009, p. 7). Furthermore, research indicates that undocumented families tend to reside in urban areas (Clark, Fix, Passel, and Zimmermann, 1994) allowing us to assume a large percentage of
undocumented students are graduating from local high schools every year.
Every student’s story is unique, however, research indicates that undocumented students are faced with distinct challenges including academic preparation, family support, affordability, and a fear of being discovered as undocumented. It is important for members of the faculty and staff to acknowledge and understand these challenges in order to best serve the undocumented student population.

**Academic Preparation**

Undocumented students face a multitude of challenges within the secondary education system. Because undocumented students oftentimes come from families that are considered “working class or working poor,” they typically attend underperforming high schools (Gildersleeve and Ranero, 2010, p. 23). Furthermore, due to the challenges associated with attending underperforming high schools, undocumented students may not receive the guidance necessary to gain a full understanding of the benefits of higher education, how to apply to institutions or for financial aid, or what to expect once admitted to a school.
Family Support

The majority of undocumented students are also classified as first generation students. First generation students are commonly defined as individuals whose parents did not receive an undergraduate degree (Choy, 2001; Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Gardner and Holley, 2011). As first generation students, undocumented students face distinct challenges including less family support related to higher education, pressure to work while attending school, and discomfort with interacting with faculty members (Gardner and Holley, 2011). Each of these challenges proves to be difficult for first generation and undocumented students; however, the lack of family support in relation to higher education can be detrimental for undocumented students looking to continue their education past high school. Because the parents of most undocumented students have not attended college in the U.S., they are unfamiliar with postsecondary education in the United States (Arriola and Murphy, 2010). Therefore, the family members of undocumented students oftentimes find themselves without the adequate cultural knowledge to be able to provide guidance to their students as they apply and transition from high school to college.

Despite the fact that many families do not have the cultural knowledge to be able to guide their students through the transition process from high school to college, the parents of undocumented students regularly push their students to attend institutions of higher education (Arriola and Murphy, 2010). Because undocumented families tend to view a post-secondary degree as a pathway to job security and financial stability, they oftentimes encourage their students to pursue higher education (Hernandez, Hernandez, Gadson, Huftalin, Ortiz, White, Yocum-Gaffney, 2010). Therefore the parents and family members of undocumented students frequently rely on K-12 education to guide their students through the application and transition process (Arriola and Murphy, 2010).

Affordability

As previously mentioned, undocumented students who have lived in the United States for years and have completed an American K-12 education are currently ineligible for in-state tuition, federal financial aid, work study, or most other financial assistance (Barnhardt, et. al., 2013; Gonales, 2010; Perez, 2010; Gildersleeve and Ranero, 2010). Without this financial assistance, it is extremely difficult for undocumented students to afford to attend institutions of higher education. According to The American Immigration Council, “almost 40 percent of undocumented children live in families below the federal poverty line, compared to just 17 percent of native-born children” (AIC, 2013, para. 25). Additionally, “the average income of undocumented immigrant families is 40 percent lower than both their native-born and legal-immigrant counterparts” (AIC, 2013, p. 25). Because of the high cost of higher education, undocumented students’ chances for earning a college degree and upward mobility are limited (Gonales, 2010).

Fear of Being Discovered as Undocumented

One of the most significant challenges undocumented students face as they consider enrolling in an institution of higher education is the fear of being discovered as undocumented. Because
applying and enrolling in an institution requires individuals to provide a significant amount of personal information to the university, undocumented students oftentimes fear they will be exposed as undocumented through the process (Hernandez, et. al., 2010). This fear regularly causes feelings of “anxiety, alienation, depression, and stress” for undocumented students (Perez, 2010, p. 35).

Despite the fact that the families of undocumented students regularly push for their students to attend institutions of higher education, they also fear the college application process as they worry their student will not only expose themselves to deportation, but will “out” their entire family (Arriola and Murphy, 2010). This pressure from home causes stress on many undocumented students who ultimately are forced to live two different identities. Through the college application process, undocumented students are forced to hide their citizenship status; however, at home, they oftentimes find themselves reassuring their parents of the benefits of higher education despite the risk of deportation (Hernandez, et. al., 2010).

Many undocumented students also have a substantial fear of deportation due to their lack of connection with their native country. Because many undocumented students traveled to the U.S. at a young age, they typically do not remember their native-born country and may struggle with the national language (Hernandez, et. al., 2010). Research indicates that the majority of undocumented students view themselves as Americans, not citizens of their native countries. Therefore, this lack of identity with their native countries causes an immense fear of deportation that undocumented students must face when applying and enrolling in institutions of higher education (Hernandez, et. al., 2010).

**Racism and Bias**

Although undocumented students may migrate from many different countries around the world, research indicates that a majority of undocumented immigrants in the United States are from Latin American countries (Huber, 2010). Therefore, it is important to recognize many undocumented students are faced with the challenges of racism and bias both inside and outside of the educational system. Because many undocumented students are People of Color, they have been affected by the “ideological function of white supremacy” (Huber, 2010, p. 79). Through the ideology of white supremacy, white dominance is defended and whites benefit “at the expense of People of Color” (Huber, 2010, 80). But not only are undocumented students required to endure racism and bias associated with being individuals of color, they must experience nativism. According to Huber (2010), nativism is defined “as the practice of assigning values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, and to defend the native’s right to dominance, at the expense of the non-native” (p. 80). Many undocumented students, therefore, express feelings of discouragement and fearfulness throughout their educational trajectories (Huber, 2010). They are also exposed to the racial hierarchy within the United States’ educational system and in turn internalize the “stereotypes imposed by the white majority about People of Color” (Huber, 2010, p. 91). Because of this internalization of the white majority’s beliefs, undocumented students are challenged by “negative self or racial group perceptions” (Huber, 2010, p. 91).
The DREAM Act: Past and Present

As a proposed solution to the broken educational system of requiring undocumented students to pay out-of-state tuition, the Development Relief and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act has been brought before Congress. According to Aimee Deverall (2008), the DREAM Act “would enable undocumented students who (i) have lived in the United States for at least five years, (ii) have graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or have been admitted to an institution of higher education, (iii) are ‘of good moral character’, and (iv) arrived in the United States before the age of 16 to apply for conditional permanent resident status,” (p. 1253). After completing either two years of military service or graduating college, these individuals would then have the opportunity to apply for legal citizenship. The bill, however, has not been legalized. Therefore, the undocumented students of the Northern Virginia community are still not receiving the support they need from Virginia’s system of higher education. As Del. Alfonso Lopez (D-Arlington) stated in a recent interview with the Vienna Patch, “we are encouraging the talented undocumented student population of Virginia to either leave our wonderful state after high school graduation and “take their talent with them or become a burden on the social safety net” (Spencer, 2013, para. 11).

Terms and Conditions of the DREAM Act

- Enables undocumented students who:
  - Have lived in the United States for at least five years
  - Have graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or have been admitted to an institution of higher education
  - Are ‘of good moral character’
  - Arrived in the United States before the age of 16 to apply for conditional permanent resident status
- After completing either two years of military service or graduating college, these individuals would then have the opportunity to apply for legal citizenship.

History of the DREAM Act:

The DREAM Act was first created as a means to grant students who have grown up in the United States and graduated or obtained a GED from an U.S. high school the opportunity to go to college without being subjected to the high costs of out-of-state tuition and without being denied access to federal financial aid (Amador, 2011; Deverall, 2008; Flores, 2009; Gildersleeve, et. al, 2010). According to The American Immigration Council (AIC), the DREAM Act “was first introduced in 2001 by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) in the Senate, and by Representatives Howard Berman (D-CA) and Chris Cannon (R-UT) in the House” (The American Immigration Council, 2013). Since the bill’s introduction, the DREAM Act has come up for vote numerous times, but has yet to be passed into law. In 2003 and 2004, the DREAM
Act was passed by the Senate Judiciary Committee, and was voted as an “amendment to the comprehensive immigration reform bill in 2006” (AIC, 2013). However, after a similar comprehensive immigration reform amendment was not passed in 2007, the DREAM Act was modified and considered as a stand-alone bill. As a stand-alone bill, the DREAM Act received “a bi-partisan majority vote of 52-44 in the Senate, but failed to reach the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture” (AIC, 2013, para. 18). Despite this failure, the DREAM Act was once again brought up to Congress in 2010 and eventually passed in the House of Representatives, but denied by the Senate.

Most recently, the Obama administration announced that it would accept requests for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals in June of 2012 (AIC, 2013; Gearhart, 2013). This initiative was designed by the Obama administration to “temporarily suspend the deportation of young people residing unlawfully in the U.S. who were brought to the United States as children, have graduated from U.S. schools and generally match the criteria established under legislative proposals like the DREAM Act” (AIC, 2013, para. 1). Although receiving requests for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is a step closer to the passage of the DREAM Act, the process for completing such a request is tedious, confusing, and time consuming, therefore causing further discouragement and frustration among the population of America’s undocumented youth (Gearhart, 2013).

Despite the fact that the DREAM Act has not yet been passed on the federal level, there are several U.S. states that have implemented versions of the bill. While states do not have the power to legalize the status of undocumented individuals, “they may allow undocumented students to attend their universities and qualify for in-state tuition” (AIC, 2013, para. 24). Therefore, 14 states have passed their own versions of the DREAM Act and allow this special population to receive in-state tuition despite their immigration status if certain requirements are met (Flores, 2009). Among these states are Texas, California, Illinois, Utah, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Washington, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Minnesota (AIC, 2013). The DREAM Act in these states requires undocumented students to: “i) attend a school in the state for a certain number of years; ii) graduate from high school in the state; and iii) sign an affidavit stating that they will apply to legalize their status as soon as they are eligible to do so” (AIC, 2013, para. 26; Flores, 2009). Several other states have debated over the passage of their own version of the DREAM Act, including Virginia; however, Virginia denied the bill in February 2013 when the DREAM Act was “killed by the House Appropriations panel” (Schmidt, 2013, para. 2).
History of the DREAM Act:

- **2001**
  - Introduction of the DREAM Act

- **2003 & 2004**
  - The DREAM Act was passed by the Senate Judiciary Committee

- **2006**
  - The DREAM Act was voted as an amendment to the comprehensive immigration reform bill

- **2007**
  - The act was modified and considered as a stand-alone bill

- **2007**
  - The act received a bi-partisan majority vote in the Senate, but failed to reach the votes needed to invoke cloture

- **2010**
  - The DREAM Act was passed in the House of Representatives, but denied by the Senate

- **2012**
  - Obama administration announced that it would accept requests for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

- **2013**
  - A state-level version of the DREAM Act was killed by the House Appropriations panel in Virginia
Best Practices for Advocating for the Passage of the DREAM Act in Virginia

There are several different ways to become an advocate for the passage of the DREAM Act in Virginia ranging from raising public awareness to writing to elected legislators. The most important steps for becoming an advocate for the passage of the DREAM Act, however, is to listen, research, connect, and speak out for the equality of undocumented students.

Listen

It is extremely important to listen to the stories of George Mason University students. Many undocumented students hide their immigration status due to fear of deportation. However, through educated, nonjudgmental, and careful listening, advocates may be able to hear the untold stories of these undocumented students. When working with undocumented students, be open to their life experiences and provide them with a safe space for disclosure.

Research

Stay up-to-date with all news related to the passage of the DREAM Act in Virginia. Establish email notifications for news stories related to Virginia’s DREAM Act and follow important state and educational leaders through social media (such as the governor, state senators, and local representatives). Utilize the following websites as a starting point for gathering reliable and current news related to the DREAM Act:

- [www.immigrationpolicy.org](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org)
- [www.dreamact.info](http://www.dreamact.info)
- [www.nilc.org/dreamsummary](http://www.nilc.org/dreamsummary)
- [www.facebook.com/VADREAMAct](http://www.facebook.com/VADREAMAct)
- [www.freedomuniversitygeorgia.com](http://www.freedomuniversitygeorgia.com)
**Connect**

Find and connect with individuals already fighting for the passage of the DREAM Act. Mason DREAMers, for example, is a registered student organization at George Mason University advocating for change. Follow Mason DREAMers on Facebook (facebook.com/MasonDreaMers) for more information on their own advocacy programs and how to get involved.

**Speak Out**

Write Virginia's elected officials arguing for the passage of the DREAM Act. Utilize the list of state and local representatives below to reach out to those involved in making change in Virginia:

- **Governor Terry McAuliffe**
  1111 East Broad Street
  Richmond, VA 23219

- **Senator Tim Kaine**
  388 Russell Senate Office Building
  Washington, DC 20510

- **Senator Mark Warner**
  475 Russell Senate Office Building
  Washington, DC 20510

- **US House Representative Jim Moran**
  2252 Rayburn HOB
  Washington, DC 20515

- **US House Representative Frank Wolf**
  233 Cannon Building
  Washington, DC 20515

- **US House Representative Gerry Connolly**
  424 Cannon HOB
  Washington, D.C. 20515
Part II

Freedom University
Overview of Freedom University

Freedom University was developed by four faculty members from the University of Georgia who volunteer their time on the weekends to expand the educational opportunities of undocumented students in Athens, Georgia. According to the institution’s website, Freedom University’s core values are framed around counteracting the unequal access to higher education undocumented students face and upholding the United States’ “most cherished principles of equality and justice for all” (Freedom University, n.d., para. 1). Through this mission, the volunteers of Freedom University assist students who are attempting to overcome the unique challenges they face as undocumented individuals by providing a safe space to share, develop, and learn. Freedom University volunteers take the time needed to work with students individually in order to gain a better understanding of their educational goals and to assist them through the various challenges they face applying and enrolling in college (Sanders, 2012).

Freedom University, however, goes well beyond just educating undocumented students on how to successfully apply and enroll in college. The institution also provides college-level instruction to undocumented students in order to assist in their academic development and even offers scholarships to help offset the lack of federal financial funding available to students who have been accepted to four-year institutions (Freedom University, n.d., para. 3). The faculty members of Freedom University also are educated on the issues surrounding the passage of the DREAM Act and have taken steps to advocate for a state version of the bill to be passed in Georgia (Freedom University, n.d., para. 5).
Methods for Assisting Undocumented Students Utilized by Freedom University

As previously mentioned, Freedom University is founded on the idea that students, regardless of immigration status, have an equal right to quality higher education. Therefore, the institution utilizes several different methods for supporting the undocumented student population in Athens, Georgia. Specifically, Freedom University assists local undocumented students through the college application process, helps them find financial aid, provides scholarships, offers college-level course instruction, and advocates for the passage of the DREAM Act.

**Assistance Applying for College**

Upon high school graduation, many undocumented students incorrectly assume they cannot legally attend college (College Board, n.d., para. 1). In the United States, however, there is no federal law that prohibits undocumented students from attending institutions of higher education. However, institutions across the country are free to enforce their own policies related to proof of citizenship or legal residency within the application process (College Board, n.d., para. 1). Therefore, many institutions will not accept undocumented students because they do not have the documentation to prove their citizenship or legal residency. The instructors at Freedom University are familiar with which institutions across the nation are friendly to the admittance of undocumented students (Sander, 2012). Through this knowledge, Freedom University professors are able to direct their students to institutions where they will not need to show legal citizenship documentation throughout the application process and will be able to highlight their academic achievements rather than their immigration status.

The volunteers at Freedom University also have a clear understanding of the challenges
undocumented students face. As previously mentioned, undocumented students are regularly first generation college students and do not benefit from having family members who contain knowledge of the higher education system in the U.S. (Gardner and Holley, 2011). Therefore, the professors at Freedom University are diligent in educating their students on the college application process and regularly guide their students through this, oftentimes, overwhelming and daunting practice (Sander, 2012).

**Assistance Finding Financial Aid**

As previously mentioned, undocumented students are currently required to pay out-of-state tuition in all states in which a state-level version of the DREAM Act has not been passed (Amador, 2011; Deverall, 2008; Flores, 2009; Gildersleeve, et. al, 2010). These states include all but the following: Texas, California, Illinois, Utah, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Washington, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Minnesota (AIC, 2013). Additionally, undocumented students are prohibited from receiving federal financial aid (Amador, 2011; Deverall, 2008; Flores, 2009; Gildersleeve, et. al, 2010). Freedom University is located in the conservative state of Georgia, where a state-level version of the bill has not yet been passed. Therefore, undocumented students in the state and many other states across the country are required to pay the high prices of out-of-state tuition without the help of federal financial aid. Because undocumented students regularly face financial challenges, this hurdle makes higher education unattainable for most of them. The instructors at Freedom University, however, are up-to-date on private scholarships that do not require proof of citizenship, verification of legal residency, or a social security number in order to apply (Sanders, 2012). Through this knowledge, the Freedom University volunteers are able to direct their students to scholarships offered by private sources in hopes that they will receive the financial assistance needed to be able to continue their education beyond high school.

**Freedom University Scholarships**

In addition to knowing about private scholarships available to undocumented students, Freedom University offers their own financial awards to “low-income immigrant students who have been admitted to a four year college or university” (Freedom University, n.d., para. 1). The scholarships are funded by the donations of supporters of the institution and assist undocumented students pay for at least 80% of their tuition costs (Freedom University, n.d., para. 1). Recipients of the scholarships are limited to recent high school graduates in the Athens, Georgia area who do not have permanent residency or citizenship in the United States and are in need of financial assistance to pay for college (Freedom University, n.d., para. 2). Every year, the scholarships serve as a gateway to higher education for several undocumented students in the Athens, Georgia area.

**Class Offerings**

Freedom University goes one step beyond educating undocumented students on the college application process and assisting the students receive financial aid “provide[ing] rigorous, college-level instruction to all academically qualified students regardless of their immigration status” (Freedom University, n.d., para. 1). Through the course offerings, Freedom University is
educating Georgia’s undocumented population who are not able to attend institutions of higher education (Sanders, 2012). As stated in the institution’s mission, Freedom University believes “all Georgians have an equal right to a quality education. Separate and unequal access to higher education contravenes this country’s most cherished principles of equality and justice for all” (Freedom University, n.d., para. 1). Previous course offerings have included Introduction to Ethnic Studies, Ancient World Cultures, and Latin American Literature and Cultures (Freedom University, n.d., para. 3).

*Taking Action*

Beyond assisting with the college application and financial aid processes and educating undocumented students, Freedom University actively fights for the passage of the DREAM Act and educational justice. The institution’s Facebook page, for example, hosts photos from events in which the students and faculty members have joined together to advocate for the needs of undocumented students. The institution regularly holds panel discussions on issues related to educational justice for undocumented students, attends rallies, and meets with other ally organizations in order to help share the stories of Georgia’s undocumented population.

Additionally, Freedom University regularly updates their website, www.freedomuniversitygeorgia.com, with important policy changes as the laws surrounding undocumented students are rapidly changing. The website even allows visitors to sign up for email alerts in order to stay up-to-date on all issues pertaining to undocumented students and the status of the proposed DREAM Act. Visitors of the website are also encouraged to sign up to volunteer their time to help advocate for educational justice by assisting with outreach, fundraising, and the transportation of Freedom University students to class.
Replicating Aspects of Freedom University at George Mason University

The efforts of Freedom University are impressive. The institution has worked to create a just, equitable environment free from racism, bias, and nationalism for the undocumented population in Athens, Georgia. George Mason University should use Freedom University as a model for creating a similar campus climate conducive to attracting and supporting undocumented students. Because Mason is also located in a state where a state-level version of the DREAM Act has not been passed, several of Freedom University’s efforts could easily be replicated to educate Northern Virginia’s undocumented residents. In an effort to focus on the institution of George Mason University specifically, the sections below outline several techniques for assisting students through the institution’s application process, as well as various techniques for helping them find financial aid to attend. Lastly, Freedom University’s course offerings are explored as an additional option for Mason’s faculty and staff as a way to support undocumented individuals.

Assistance Applying To Mason

Undocumented students oftentimes believe they are unable to attend college due to their immigration status (College Board, n.d., para. 1). However, there is neither a state nor a federal law that prohibits academically qualified undocumented students from attending institutions of higher education (College Board, n.d., para. 1). Undocumented students, however, must take the appropriate actions when applying to colleges to ensure they are properly representing themselves on the application. In particular, there are several specific steps undocumented students should take when applying to George Mason University. See below for answers to the most frequent questions undocumented students will have when filling out the application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undocumented Students’ Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Mason’s Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the application ask for a social security number?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I don’t have a social security number?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the application have an appropriate “box” for me on the section that asks about citizenship?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the questions pertaining to social security numbers and citizenship status, undocumented students should use the rest of the application to highlight their academic and civic
achievements. Applicants who choose not to disclose information regarding citizenship nor provide a social security number are not automatically denied admittance to George Mason University. Utilizing these application tips allows all academically prepared undocumented students fair consideration and admittance into the university.

Assistance Receiving Financial Aid at Mason

One of the largest hurdles undocumented students face is how to pay the high cost of a higher education without the assistance of in-state tuition or federal financial aid. Undoubtedly, this process is daunting and many undocumented students become discouraged after discovering their financial aid options are limited. However, using the scholarships listed below, undocumented students can apply for financial assistance without providing proof of citizenship, verification of legal residency, or a social security number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Name</th>
<th>Amount:</th>
<th>Requirements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Dream Project Scholarship</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Virginia residents who will attend an accredited college or university and has demonstrated hard work and community service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvin Cox Memorial Scholarship</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>Written essay on college ambitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discover Scholarship Program</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>2.75 GPA and relevant community service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton Prize in Race Relations</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>Students must show how they had a positive impact in race relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Foundation</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Students must demonstrate leadership in LGBTQ issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship America – Best Buy Scholarship</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>Available to high school students, who are active in their communities and excel in academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicano Organizing and Research in Education</td>
<td>$500-$1,000</td>
<td>Only for undocumented students of Chicano or Latino descent / essay and letter of recommendation required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Peace Scholarship Program</td>
<td>$250-$500</td>
<td>Written autobiography on peace relations required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphan Foundation of America</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>For students within the foster care system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Putter Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>Up to $6,000</td>
<td>Students must demonstrate participation in expanding civil rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountainhead Essay Contest</td>
<td>$50 – $10,000</td>
<td>Essay contest for high school juniors and seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALEF Fulfilling Our Dreams Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>$500-$2,500</td>
<td>Students must be of Central American descent or Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Patrick Charnon Memorial Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>Students must demonstrate they are working towards creating peace and tolerance for others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Offering College-Level Courses to Northern Virginia’s Undocumented Population

As previously mentioned, Freedom University offers college-level courses to the undocumented population of Athens, Georgia free of charge. University of Georgia faculty members volunteer their free time to offer courses such as Introduction to Ethnic Studies, Ancient World Cultures, and Latin American Literature and Cultures (Freedom University, n.d., para. 3). The courses have been extremely popular among the Athens community and could be adapted to serve Northern Virginia’s undocumented population. The steps below indicate a clear outline for implementing similar course offerings, if there is interest in implementing similar classroom experiences.

**Step 1: Conduct market research to determine interest and needs among Northern Virginia’s undocumented population**
Utilize connections within the community and with advocate groups, such as Mason DREAMers, to find undocumented individuals or advocates for educational equality who could shed light on the needs and interest of Northern Virginia’s undocumented population. More information on community organizations are discussed in Section III.

**Step 2: Develop an institutional mission**
Use the results of the market research as well as your dedication to educational equity for undocumented students to develop an institutional mission.

**Step 3: Brainstorm and write learning objectives**
Use the institutional mission as a baseline for developing learning objectives and strategies for how to best meet the needs of undocumented students through free, college-level courses.

**Step 4: Identify potential curriculum offerings**
Consider the interests of undocumented students and knowledge areas that may need to be enhanced in order to increase the probability of college enrollment.

**Step 5: Outline commitments and expectations of students and faculty members**
Clearly outline the expectations of both students and faculty members. Remember to consider time commitments and learning objectives.
Step 6: Identify and approach potential faculty members
Identify and approach individuals who may be interested in serving as faculty members. Make sure to reference the results of the market research, the institutional mission, and all expectations in each conversation.

Step 7: Gain commitment of faculty members
Follow up with all potential faculty members in order to gain final commitments and identify what course(s) they will be teaching.

Step 8: Start to market Mason’s Freedom University and develop an institutional website
Start to market Mason’s Freedom University and develop an institutional website listing the mission and potential course offerings. More information on a plan for community outreach is listed in Section III.

Step 9: Develop semester schedule and determine textbooks needed
Once commitments have been finalized from all faculty members and availability has been determined, develop a semester schedule of courses and list of all textbooks needed. If necessary, utilize connections in the community for the donation of books.

Step 10: Update website
Update the website to reflect the semester schedule and to allow students to register for classes online.

Step 11: Hold faculty meetings to discuss course offerings and the semester schedule
Schedule faculty meetings in the weeks before the start of class in order to reiterate all expectations and communicate the schedule for the semester.

Step 12: Continue to market course offerings to Northern Virginia’s undocumented population
Utilize strategies set forth in Section III to communicate Mason’s own Freedom University to the local community.

Step 13: Finalize classroom locations
Finalize all classroom locations and notify students of classroom localities.

Step 14: Begin the semester!
Once professors have been selected, classroom locations have been set, and students have gathered, there is nothing left to do but to teach!
Part III

Communications Plan for Mason’s Assistance Programs for Undocumented Students
Communications Plan

To effectively serve Northern Virginia’s undocumented population through the various initiatives outlined within this handbook, it is important to communicate the assistance programs being offered by Mason faculty and staff with the local community. The section below outlines several different communication techniques for sharing the admissions and financial aid assistance programs for undocumented students as well as lays the framework for the next steps for fully developing and marketing Mason’s Freedom University.

Reciprocity

It is important to remember that in order to be the most effective in assisting undocumented students, Mason faculty and staff will need to partner with the local community and undocumented individuals. As Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) mentioned in their article “Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes,” Aristotle and Piaget “both suggest that difference and democracy can be compatible. The conditions deemed important for this compatibility include the presence of diverse others and diverse perspectives, equality among peers, and discussion according to rules of civil discourse” (p. 341). Therefore, I find it important to emphasize the need for Mason’s faculty, staff, and administrators to reach out to the local community to find undocumented individuals and allies who are willing to collaborate on the creation and implementation of the assistance programs for undocumented students. By diversifying perspectives and promoting equality among documented and undocumented individuals, Mason’s assistance services will have a larger impact on the local community than if the programs were strictly ran by those without restrictions due to immigration status.

Community Outreach

To develop reciprocity and communicate effectively with the local community, Mason faculty and staff will need to heavily rely on adequate community outreach. According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, setting appropriate goals for community outreach is the first step to a successful communications campaign (NTIA, 2014, para. 15). To set such goals, it is important to have a clear understanding on what message(s) need to be communicated relative to the establishment of the assistance programs for undocumented students. Therefore, before starting your community outreach campaign, consider the following questions while setting your communication goals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will most benefit from your services?</td>
<td>Help the undocumented community understand how they can best use your services. This message may change depending on your audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the individuals and community groups need to know about your programs?</td>
<td>Set clear communication goals and think through various strategies for communicating your different offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I build trust within these organizations and with undocumented individuals?</td>
<td>Consider your audience and make changes to your communication techniques as needed. Remember that it may be helpful to communicate in different languages other than English. Also utilize your connections with Mason's advocacy groups, such as Mason DREAMers, to show credibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I prove the success of other assistance programs for undocumented students?</td>
<td>Use the information listed within this handbook to share Freedom University's story and how the institution has successfully assisted many undocumented students in the Athens, Georgia area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the most effective forms of communication?</td>
<td>Consider various communication mediums such as flyers, presentations, and other marketing material needed to clearly and effectively share your message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can we measure our communication success?</td>
<td>As you define goals, make them measurable and reportable in order to track progress and make strategy adjustments, as needed (NTIA, 2014, para. 20).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After your outreach goals have set, it is important to identify various individuals and community organizations to which you would like to reach. Utilize the lists below of organizations both inside and outside of the Mason community as a guideline for your community outreach.

### Mason Departments and Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Multicultural Education (ODIME) | Phone: 703-993-2700  
    Email: odime@gmu.edu  
    Website: odime.gmu.edu |
| Early Identification Program (EIP)                                    | Phone: 703-993-3120  
    Email: eip@gmu.edu  
    Website: eip.gmu.edu |
| Compliance, Equity, and Diversity                                     | Phone: 703-993-8730  
    Email: cde@gmu.edu  
    Website: integrity.gmu.edu |
| Mason DREAMers                                                         | Website: masondreamers.wordpress.com  
    Facebook: facebook.com/MasonDreaMers |
While coordinating the community outreach, remember that this is a great opportunity to develop reciprocity and build partnerships with community allies. Utilize these partnerships to increase collaboration on the assistance programs for undocumented students while also joining forces with ally organizations to advocate for educational justice through events, presentations, and other activism activities. Also remember to make note of all meetings with individuals and organizations to be able to have adequate records of your successes, challenges, and how to improve in order to better accomplish your outlined goals.

**Next Steps**

Once relationships and partnerships within the community have been established, it will be important to continue all outreach efforts in order to fully promote Mason’s Freedom University. Although advocating for educational equality for undocumented students is an essential human issue, it will be important to utilize traditional business marketing practices in order to promote support systems and advocate for the rights of the undocumented members of the Northern Virginia community. Therefore, I recommend creating a marketing plan in order to spread the word about the various support programs available. Although some allies may find the business terms used in the section below unusual or perhaps even counterintuitive to assisting undocumented students, I believe utilizing the steps outlined to craft an overall marketing plan will create a broad base of support for undocumented students within the community. It is important to note, however, that all communications and connections must be authentic in order to be effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| NOVA Presente | Phone: (703) 851-0616  
Email: noahcofc@gmail.com  
Facebook: www.facebook.com/NOVAPRESENTE |
| The Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations | Email: vacolao@gmail.com  
Website: vacolao.org |
| The Dream Project-VA | Phone: 703-942-9748  
Website: www.dreamproject-va.com |
| Dream Activist Virginia | Facebook: facebook.com/DreamActivistVirginia  
Email: isa@dreamactivist.org |
| Catholic Charities of Arlington - Hogar Immigrant Services | Phone: 703-534-9805  
Website: www.ccda.net  
Email: hogar@ccda.net |
| Just Neighbors Immigrant Ministry (Falls Church) | Phone: 703-979-1240  
Website: www.justneighbors.org |
| Just Neighbors Immigrant Ministry (Herndon Office) | Phone: 703-979-1240  
Website: www.justneighbors.org |
| Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation | Phone: 804-378-4099  
Website: www.vahcc.com  
Email: jane.vukmer@vahcc.com |
Each of these steps will be essential in the development of the marketing plan. Without a well thought out and established marketing and communications plan, the efforts of the Mason faculty and staff who are volunteering their time to assist local undocumented students will not be fully effective. I encourage all individuals interested in developing Mason’s assistance programs for undocumented students to utilize these suggestions as a guideline as they continue their research on how to best market their assistive programs to the local community.
As previously mentioned, families from around the world look to the United States for opportunity and prosperity. Because of the chance to better the lives of their families, many people migrate to the United States. However, conditions sometimes “force families to make tough decisions. Sometimes circumstances and tough decisions manifest in families entering the United States without legal documentation. These families become America’s undocumented” (Gildersleeve, et. al, 2010, p. 5). The children of these undocumented families are currently receiving public primary and secondary education but experience limited access to higher education due to the fact that they must pay out-of-state tuition and are ineligible for federal financial aid. Through the implementation of the assistance programs outline in this handbook George Mason University faculty and staff have the opportunity to provide local undocumented students with increased access to higher education. By increasing access for these students, you will be making a difference in the life of each student as well as enhancing the future of the nation’s economy. It is my hope that you find this information purposeful as you work to improve broken educational and immigration systems!
References


Gadson, R., Hernandez, I., Hernandez, S., Huftalin, D., Ortiz, A., White, M., & Yocum-Gaffney,


