

INTERNAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT: UNDERSTANDING & SUPPORTING UNLV'S IMMIGRANT & MIXED-STATUS COMMUNITIES THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

(Data collected in Spring 2021)



UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT PROGRAM

A STUDENT RESOURCE

THE INTERSECTION AT UNLV

Prepared by:

Andrea Corral Rodríguez, B.A. & Mariana Sarmiento Hernández, M.S.W.

Additional Contributions by: Kathleen Bergquist, Ph.D.,
Vanessa Núñez, M.A. & Nayelli Rico López, B.A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS?	3
UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN NEVADA.....	4
UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS AT UNLV	6
METHODS.....	7
DEMOGRAPHICS	8
FREQUENCY OF USE: ACADEMIC RESOURCES.....	12
FREQUENCY OF USE: HEALTH & WELLNESS RESOURCES	16
FREQUENCY OF USE: FINANCIAL RESOURCES	19
FREQUENCY OF USE: ADVOCACY RESOURCES	20
FREQUENCY OF USE: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	25
MOST HELPFUL RESOURCES ON CAMPUS	28
LEAST HELPFUL RESOURCES ON CAMPUS.....	29
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	30
GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNLV	31
BARRIERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.....	32
STUDENTS' PERSONAL STRENGTHS	33
RECOMMENDATIONS	34
LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....	35
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	36
REFERENCES.....	37

Note for faculty, staff, administrators & UndocuAllies:
For resources on how to best support UNLV's immigrant communities,
please refer to the [Undocumented Student Program's website](https://www.unlv.edu/diversity/undocumented),
<https://www.unlv.edu/diversity/undocumented>

WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS?

Undocumented.

According to Immigrants Rising (n.d.-b), “The term ‘undocumented immigrant’ refers to anyone residing in any given country without legal documentation. It includes people who entered the U.S. without inspection and proper permission from the government, and those who entered with a legal visa that is no longer valid” (para. 1). This includes individuals with or without Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA; Immigrants Rising, n.d.-c).

In 2017, it was estimated that 10.5 million undocumented individuals lived in the United States (Kamarck & Stenglein, 2019). Moreover, there are approximately 643,560 DACA recipients residing in the U.S.; Nevada has the 12th highest population of DACA recipients in the country with 12,100 individuals (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020).

Dreamers.

The term “Dreamers” originates in the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2001. Since then, at least 11 versions of this bill have been introduced to Congress with no success in hoping to provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth. More recently, a 2010 version was five votes short in the U.S. Senate, thereby leaving millions of undocumented individuals in immigration limbo (American Immigration Council, 2021).

DACA Recipients.

In the summer of 2012 President Obama signed an executive order, DACA, which provided undocumented individuals who met certain criteria with a work permit and protection from deportation. Criteria included having arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16 and having arrived before 2007 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). DACA has been subject to legal scrutiny and extensive litigation. On December 4, 2020, a Federal District Court decision restored DACA to its original version and initial applications were once again accepted after a three-year rescission enacted by the Trump Administration in 2017. In addition, benefits were restored to two years rather than just a single year, and advance parole was once again accessible (Immigrants Rising, n.d.-a). However, on July 16, 2021, a ruling in the state of Texas once again prevents the processing of first-time DACA applications (Immigrants Rising, n.d.-a). On October 5, 2022 The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals deemed DACA illegal and in the meantime the Final Rule issued by the Biden Administration in August 2022 is to be evaluated to determine its legality (National Immigration Law Center, 2022); for the most up-to-date information, please visit [Informed Immigrant](#).

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN NEVADA

Locally, policy changes have affected undocumented youth in the state of Nevada including A.B. 275, Driver Authorization Cards from the DMV and the establishment of the Governor's Office for New Americans amongst others.

A.B. 275.

This 2019 bill has paved the way for undocumented individuals to pursue professional opportunities in which licensure is required. As long as all other eligibility criteria for professional licensure are met, an individual's immigration status cannot prevent them from pursuing licensure in the state of Nevada. If an undocumented individual does not have a Social Security Number (SSN), they may utilize an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) for the licensing process.

Driver Authorization Cards.

The Nevada DMV has been accepting applications for Driver Authorization Cards (DAC) since 2014 after legislative approval in 2013. This policy has allowed undocumented individuals to be granted driving authorization for four years; however, it should be noted that in some cases, it cannot serve the purpose consistent of an identification (McDonald, 2017). It should also be noted that while DAC are valid for four years, the Driver's License for DACAmented individuals (i.e., DACA recipients) is only valid for the duration of their employment authorization, which is currently two years. In order to receive a DAC, an individual must provide proof of identity, show that they are a Nevada resident, take the written and driver test as well as ensure that all documents are translated to English (Department of Motor Vehicles, n.d.).

Governor's Office for New Americans.

The establishment of the Governor's Office for New Americans (ONA) is the result of the 2019 Nevada legislature. This office is designed to provide support to immigrants in the state of Nevada from undocumented immigrants to refugees. ONA seeks to provide immigrants with the tools necessary to be successful in their new home, which includes economic issues, resources for navigating the COVID-19 pandemic as well as any help with traversing policy in real life (Governor's Office for New Americans, n.d.).

Nevada Immigrant Coalition.

The Nevada Immigrant Coalition (NIC) has been an interdisciplinary collaboration between various organizations (e.g., attorneys, unions) since 2004 that aims to assist immigrants and refugees in the state with services as well as providing all immigrants, regardless of their immigration status, a voice through policy. For example, NIC has been hosting Latino Lobby Day since 2009 in efforts to improve the rights of immigrants and simultaneously promoting civic engagement throughout the state. Some members of NIC include Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center, Asian Community Development Council, Immigrant Center for Women and Children, Indivisible Reno Chapter, and the UndocuNetwork (E. Castro, personal communication, April 16, 2021).

287(g).

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) previously participated in the 287(g) program, which grants certain local enforcement officers the ability to assist Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) with their immigration enforcement priorities (i.e., taking undocumented individuals into custody regardless of whether charges were pressed; Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center, n.d.). Currently, Nye County is the only county in the state that is still participating in the 287(g) program after their contract renewal in the summer of 2020, despite pressure from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) discouraging the renewal. Although LVMPD terminated its contract with ICE in 2019, information can still be exchanged informally between local law enforcement and ICE, leading to continuing deportations (Strott, 2021). Additionally, legal and community advocates have highlighted the continued negative impacts of LVMPD collaboration with ICE on the safety and well-being of undocumented Nevadans (Kagan, 2020).

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS AT UNLV

Student Activism.

At UNLV, there have been positive changes for undocumented students led by activism from students, staff/faculty, and community members. In 2016, the UndocuNetwork Registered Student Organization was established, which provided visibility and advocacy around undocumented student concerns. The UNLV All Access Taskforce (now the Undocu Taskforce) was established in 2016 to bring together campus advocates with the goal of assessing and enhancing support and resources for these communities. Support for undocumented students was facilitated through the addition of staff roles including the Latinx Program Coordinator at the Student Diversity & Social Justice Office (SDSJ), and the Resource Coordinator/Undocumented Student Program (USP) within the Diversity Initiatives office (UNLV Student Diversity & Social Justice, 2020). Notably, in 2012 UNLV earned Title III and V Minority Serving Institution (MSI) designation, and later in 2015 the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and Asian-American and Native-American, Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) designations (UNLV Student Diversity & Social Justice, 2020).

Undocumented Student Program.

The Undocumented Student Program (USP) was developed in 2019 (Núñez et al., 2019) and aims to assist undocumented students in navigating the university while providing appropriate resources to ensure academic success as well as physical and mental well-being (Undocumented Student Program, n.d.). “Through advocacy for educational equity and by fostering an inclusive and welcoming campus environment, USP is committed to empowering and celebrating undocumented student resilience” (Undocumented Student Program, n.d., para. 1). Furthermore, USP’s “vision is to build partnerships and relationships with students, staff, faculty, administrators, and community members to better serve undocumented communities. UNLV USP honors and recognizes the hard work of undocumented students and their allies in the continued advocacy for thriving communities and equity in higher education” (Undocumented Student Program, n.d., para. 2).

TheDream.US.

In Fall 2022, UNLV, the second partner institution in the state, welcomed its first cohort of TheDream.US scholars (Singh, 2021). TheDream.US is the largest supporter of higher education in the country for immigrant youth, which provides full-ride scholarships to undocumented students and provides support across various domains (TheDream.US, n.d.).

METHODS

How did we obtain this data?

In the Spring 2021 semester, USP collaborated with campus departments and organizations that serve both graduate and undergraduate UNLV students to distribute a brief mixed-methods survey via email, social media, etc. to hear from DACAmented students, undocumented students as well as individuals from mixed-status families directly on their challenges and successes within UNLV. Students were asked to report on the frequency of use for campus resources (e.g., Financial Aid, Writing Center, CAPS). The option to indicate if they were not familiar with a resource was available. Students provided insight on how they receive support at UNLV (e.g., talking to a faculty member). Although 20 responses were collected, 12 students completed more than 50% of the survey, and only 10 completed the survey in its entirety. Given the paucity of research on this population, the results below take into account the responses from the 12 students.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age.

Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old. The mean age was 23.9 and the median was 22.5 years.

Race/Ethnicity.

Two-thirds of students identified as Hispanic or Latinx; however, there was diversity in the responses despite a small number of participants, as some individuals reported being multiracial, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Time at UNLV.

The time spent at UNLV ranged from 1 year to six years; mean 3.2 years; median 3 years.

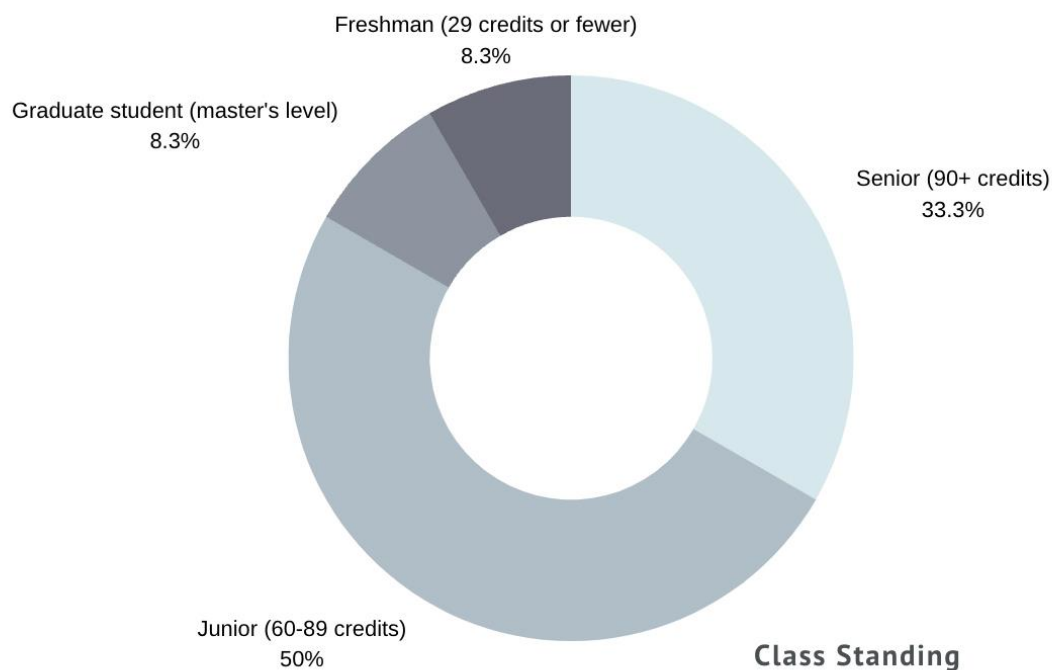
Programs of Study.

Students that completed the survey reported studying accounting, business management, finance, biology, interior architecture, social work, sociology, elementary education, art education, mechanical engineering, ultrasound, and music.

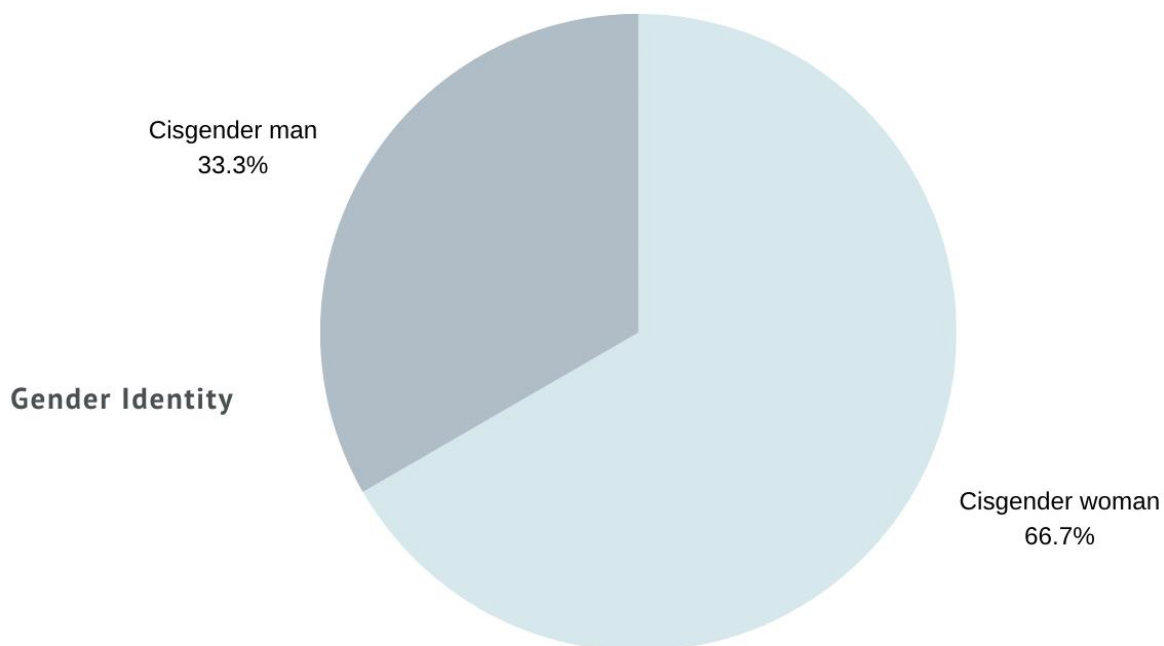
Paying for UNLV.

83.3% of students pay for their education with personal funds/savings/job money; 58.3% of students earned scholarships other than Millennium to assist with the cost of college; half of the students receive help from their families as well as the Millennium scholarship to help pay for their tuition; finally, 41.7% of students reported using the Alternate Need Determination Form.

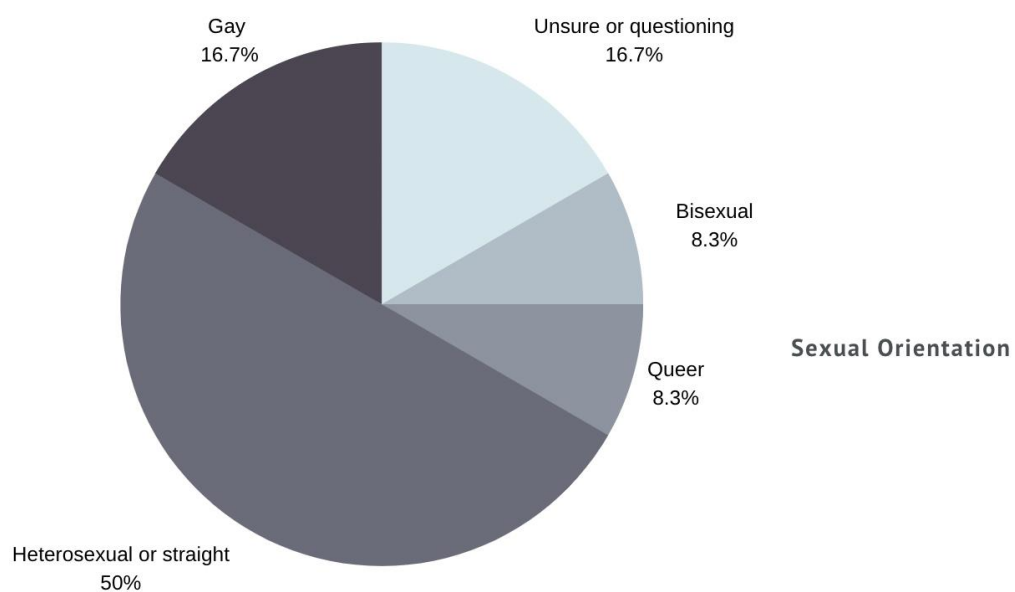
Demographics



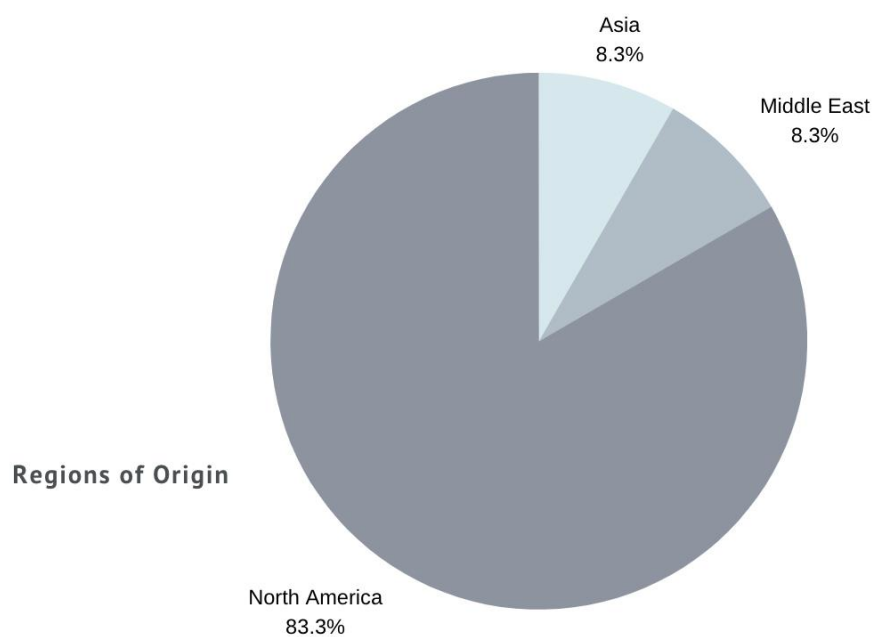
Gender Identity



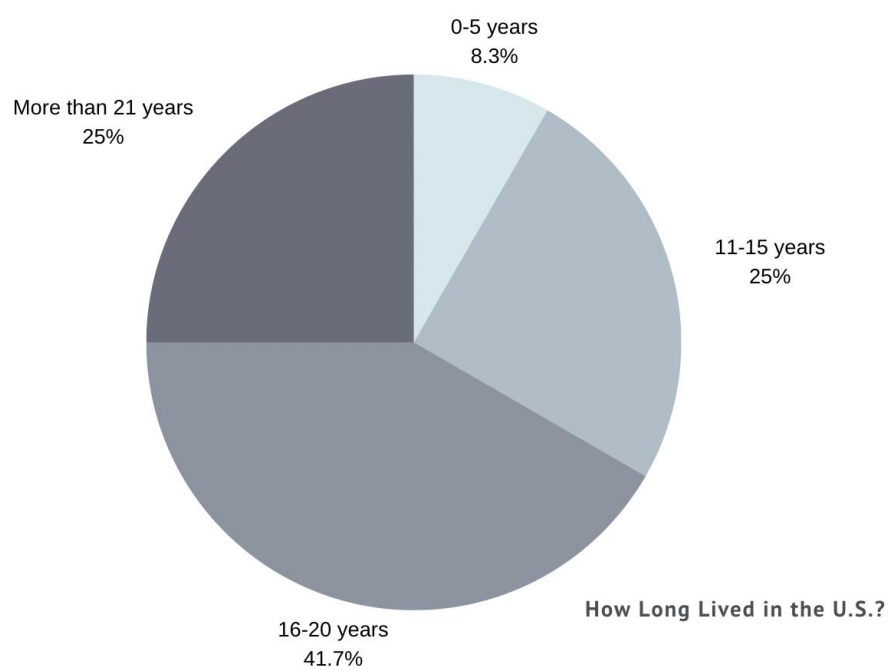
Sexual Orientation



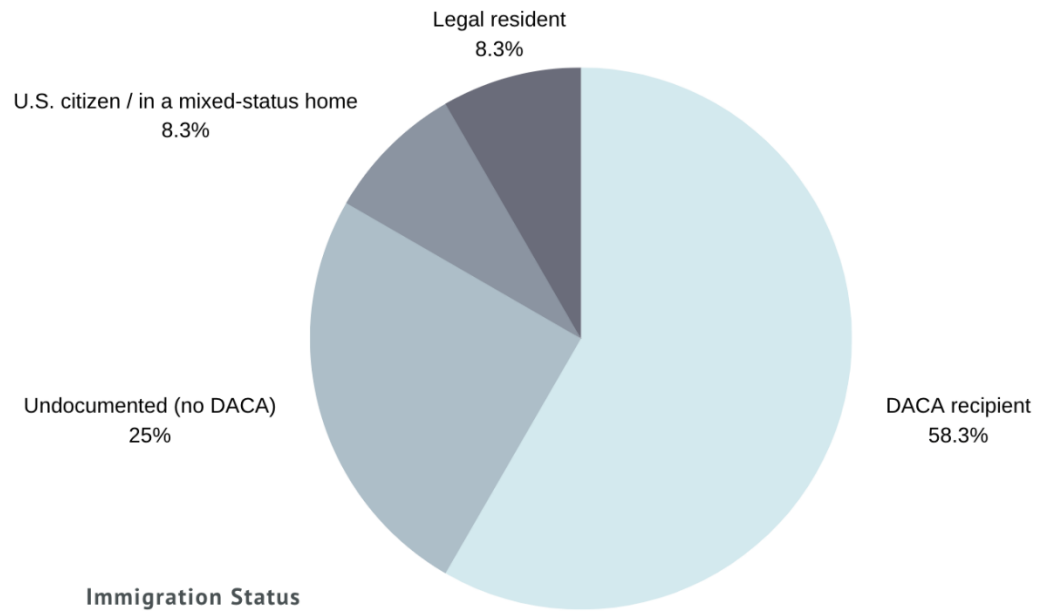
Regions of Origin



How Long Lived in the U.S.?

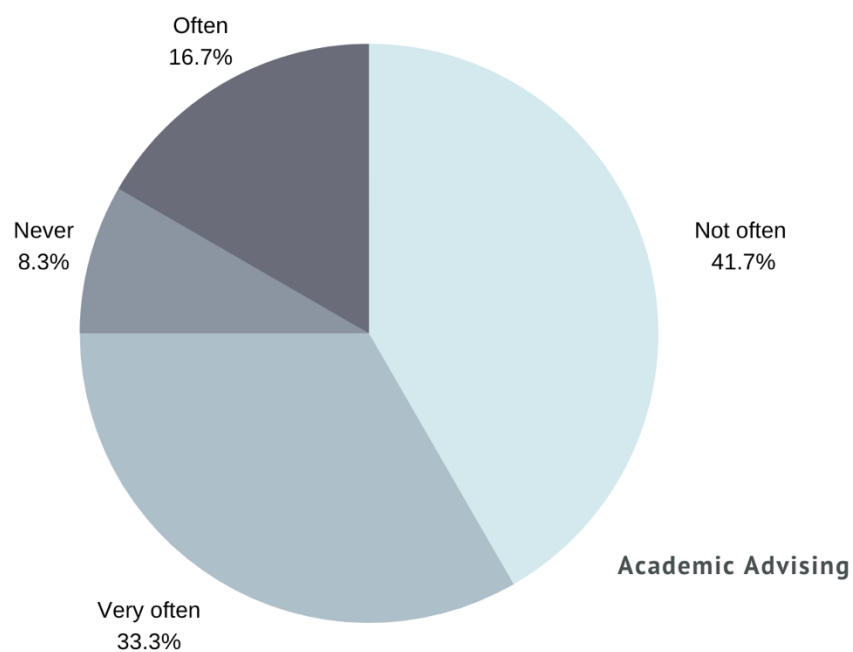


Immigration Status

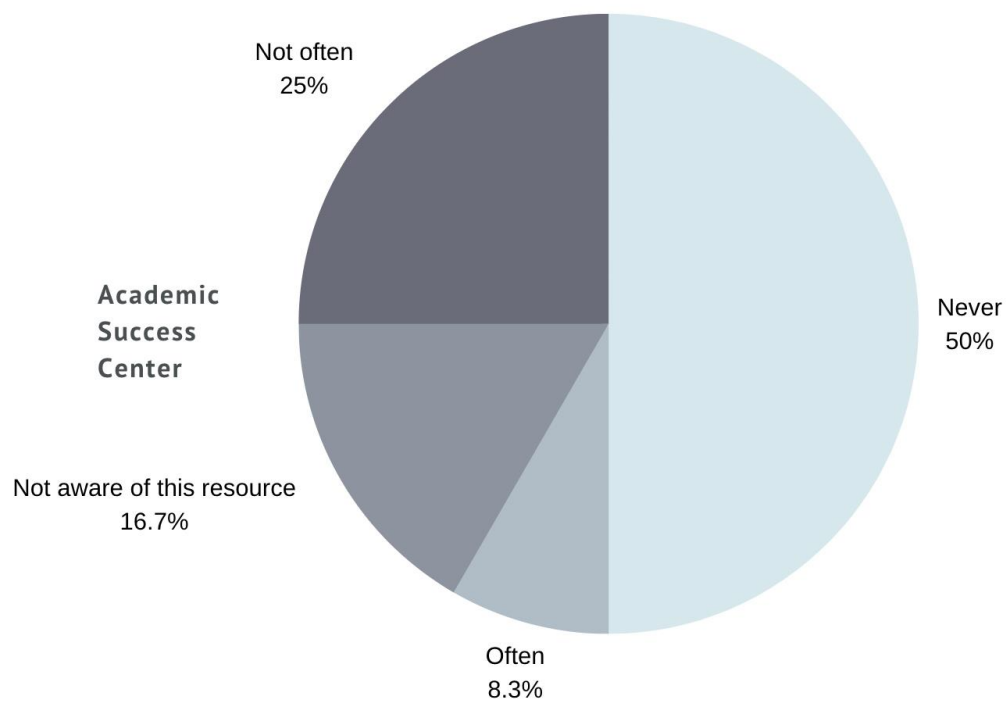


FREQUENCY OF USE: ACADEMIC RESOURCES

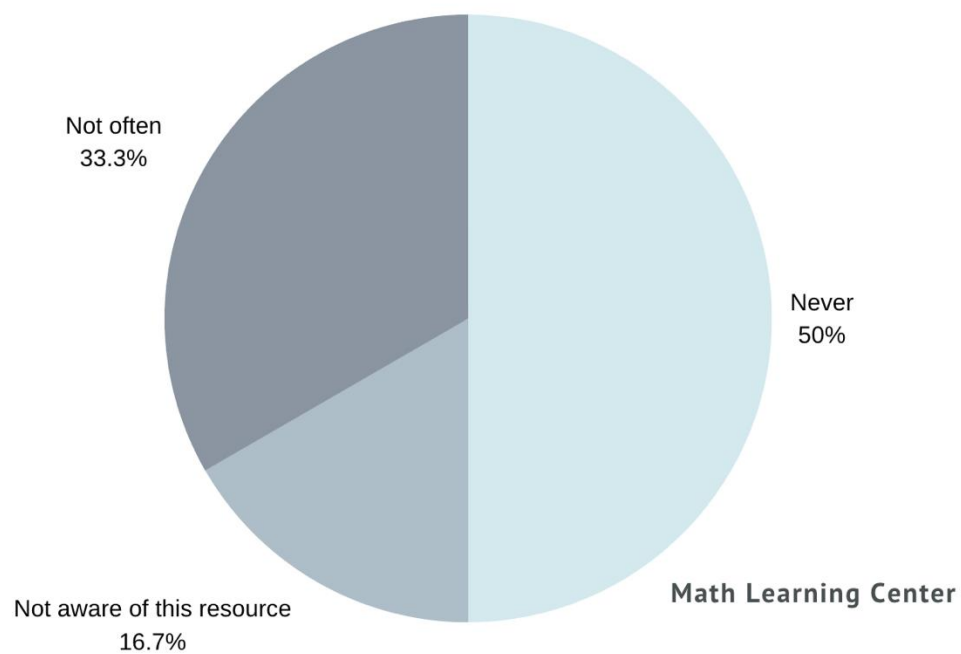
Academic Advising



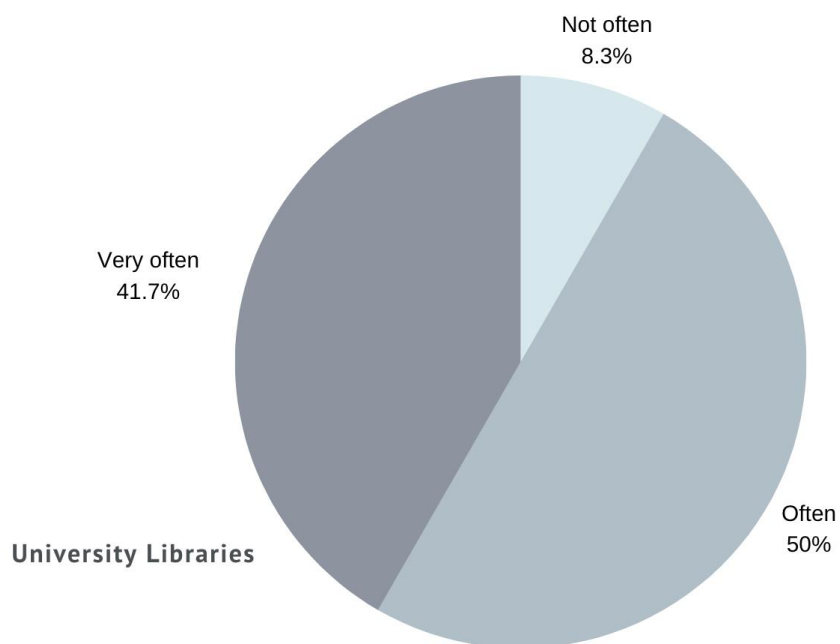
Academic Success Center



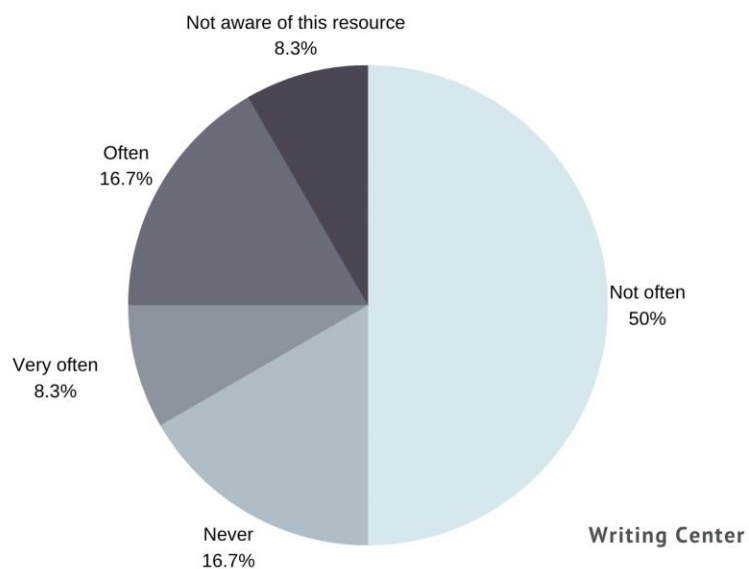
Math Learning Center



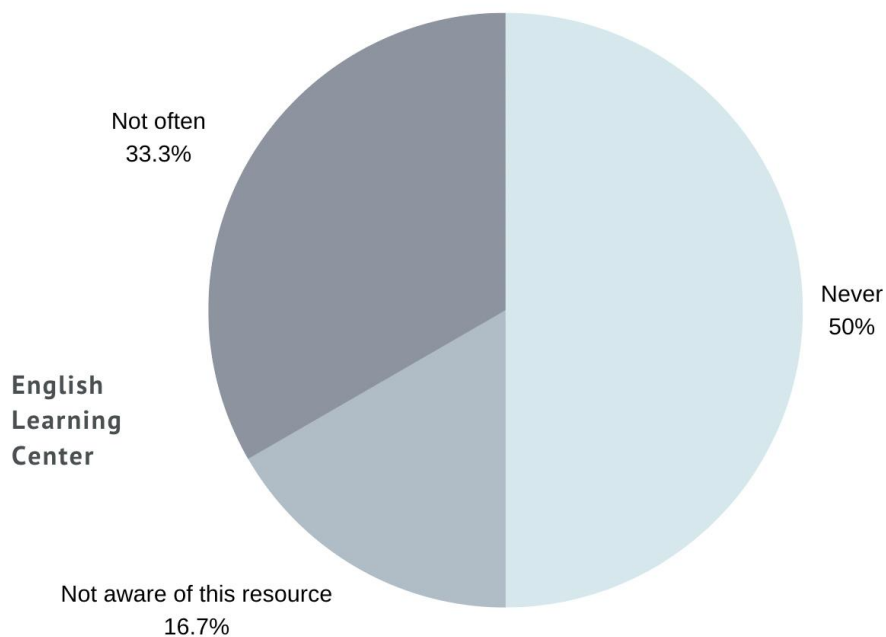
University Libraries



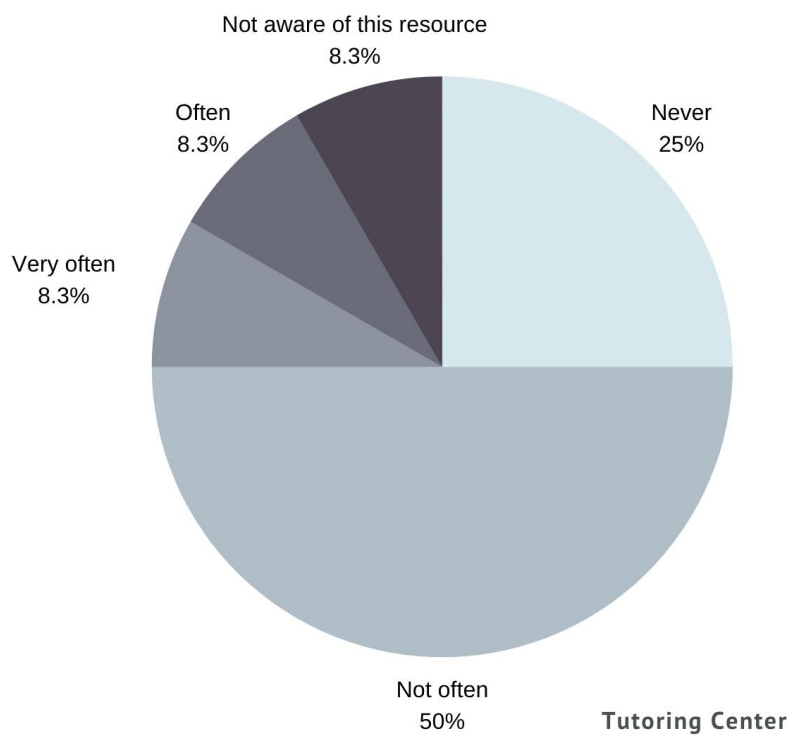
Writing Center



English Learning Center

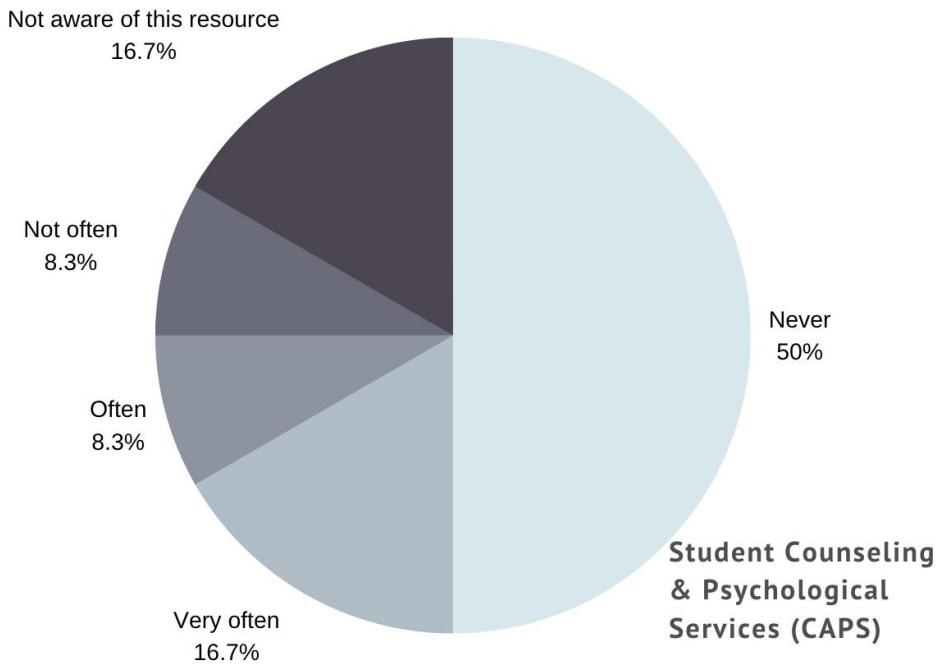


Tutoring Center

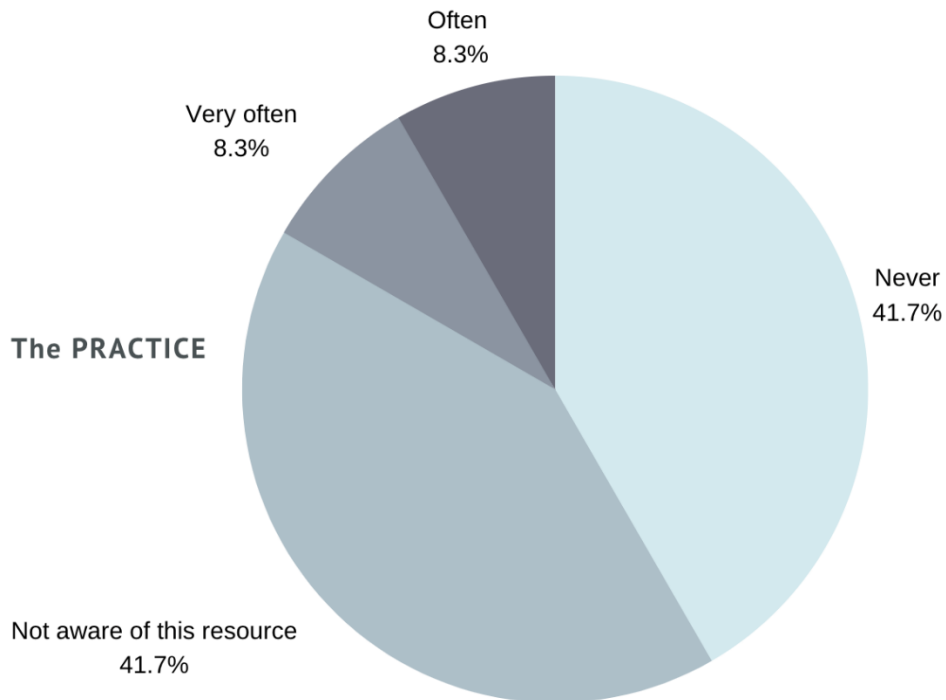


FREQUENCY OF USE: HEALTH & WELLNESS RESOURCES

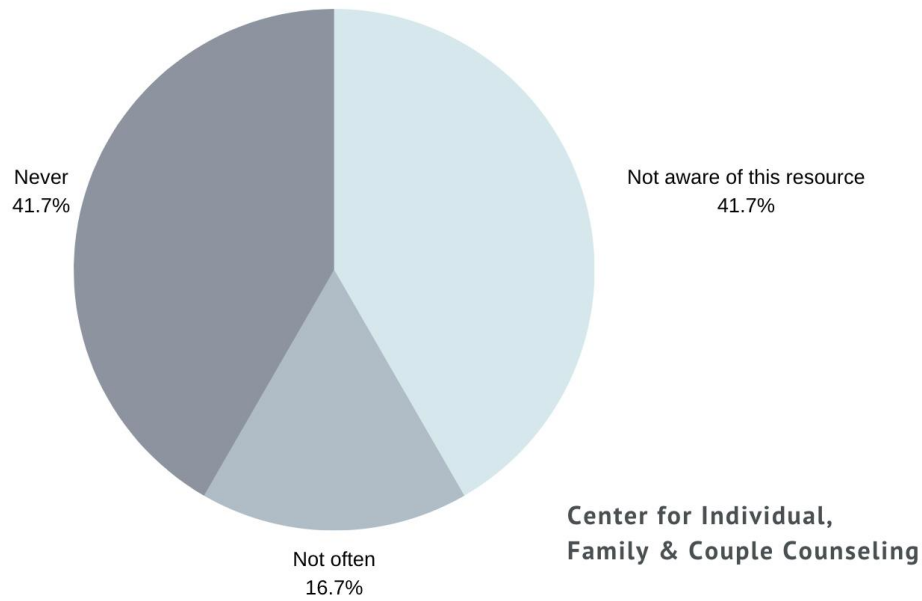
Student Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)



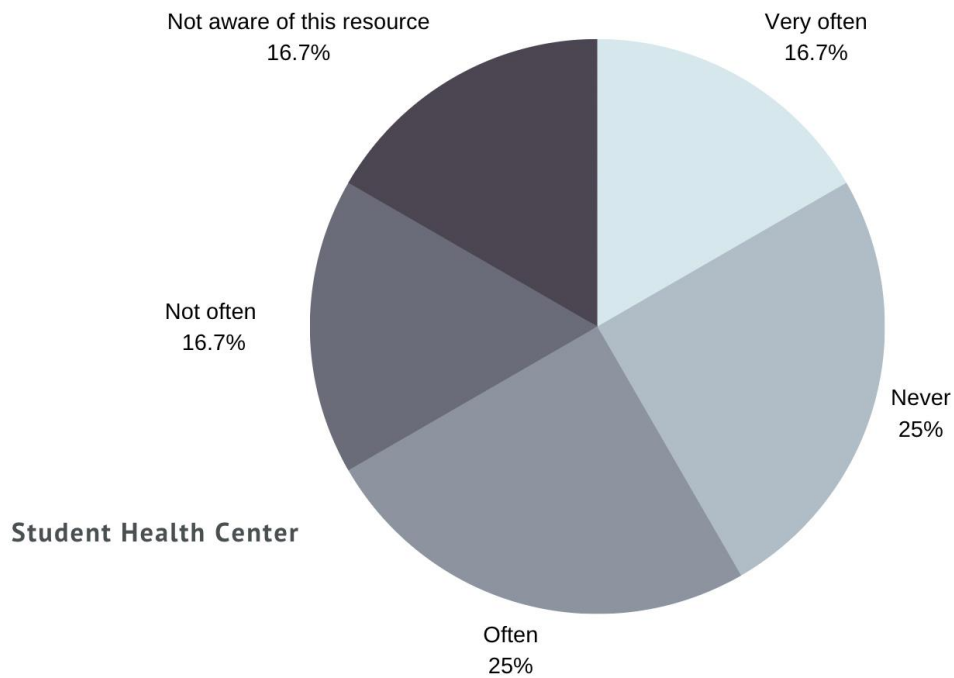
The PRACTICE



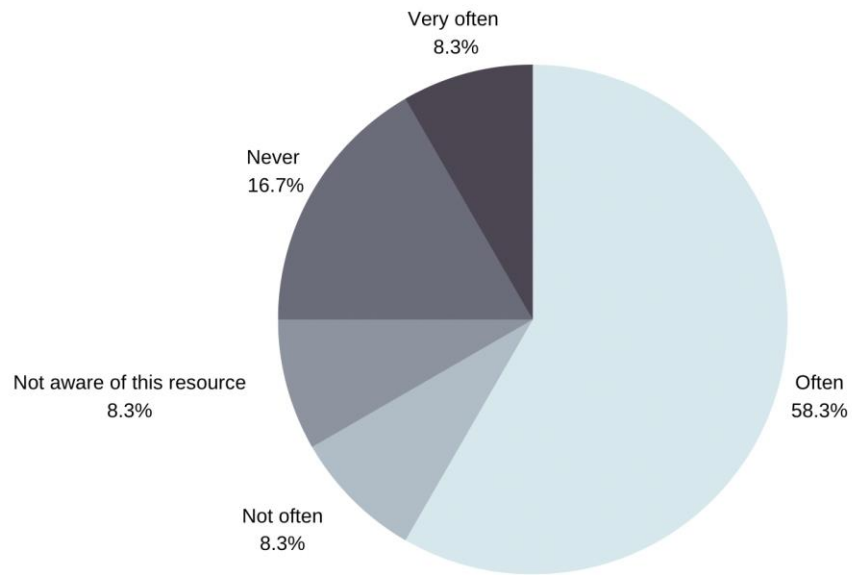
Center for Individual, Family & Couple Counseling



Student Health Center



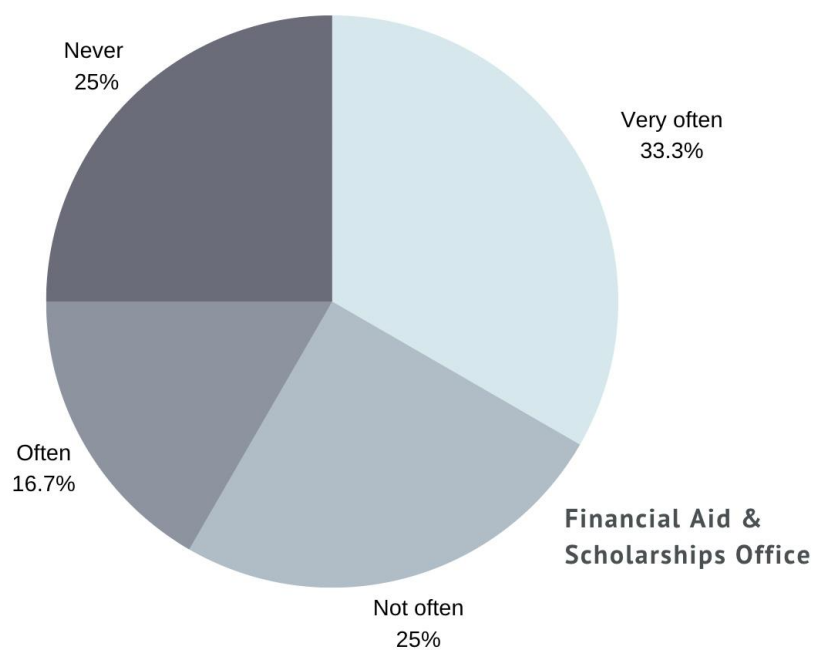
Campus Recreational Services



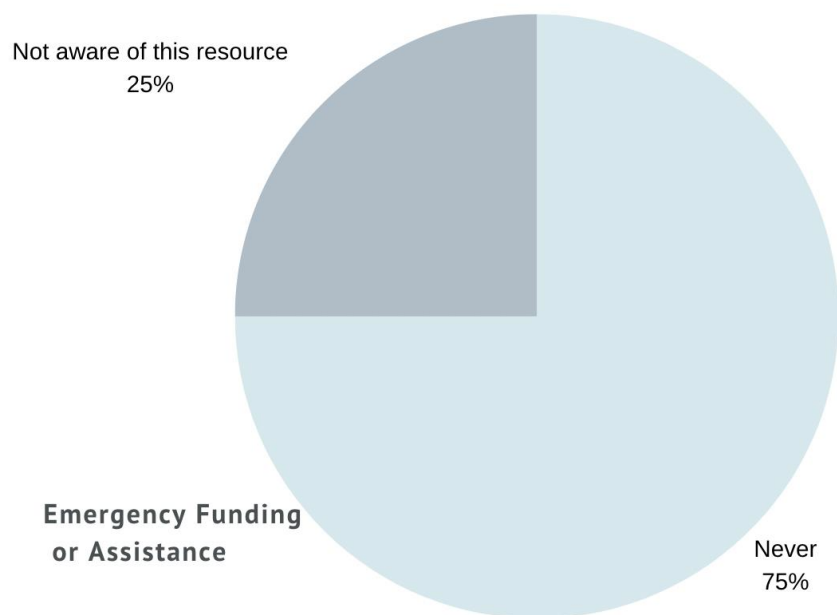
Campus Recreational Services

FREQUENCY OF USE: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Financial Aid & Scholarships Office

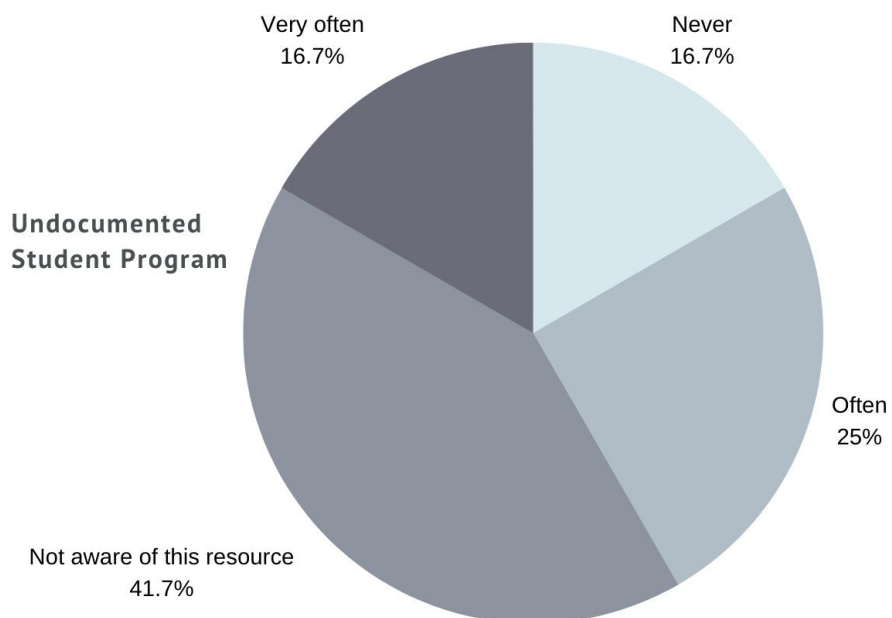


Emergency Funding or Assistance

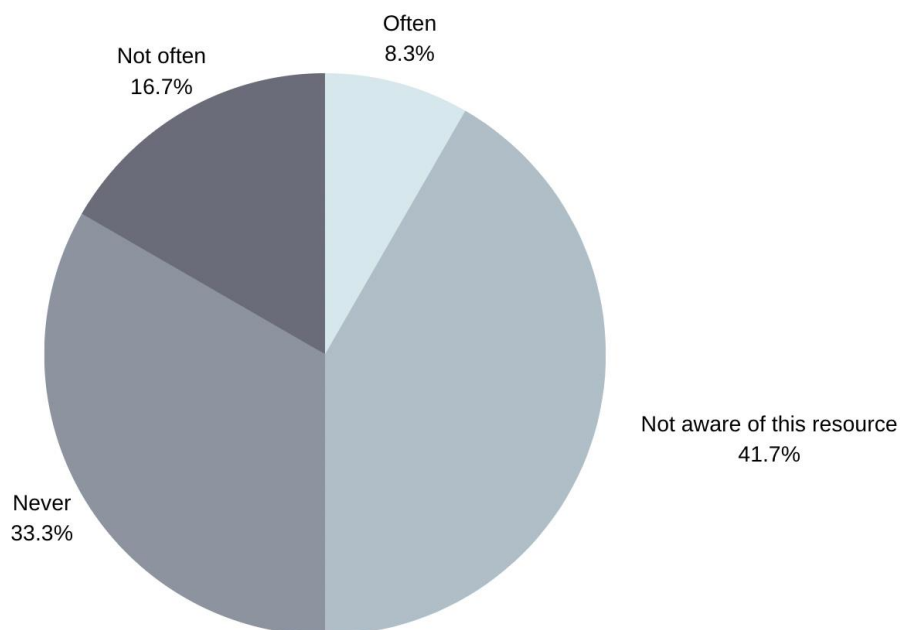


FREQUENCY OF USE: ADVOCACY RESOURCES

Undocumented Student Program

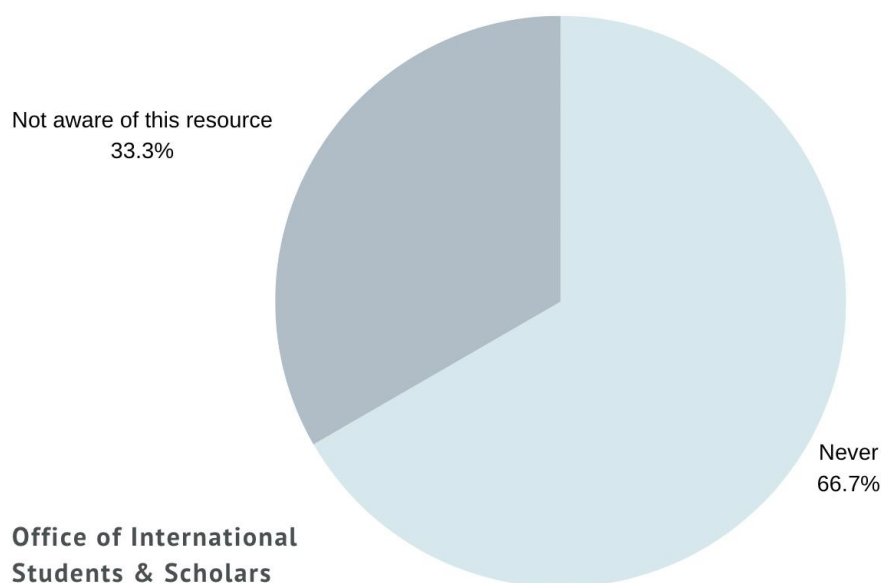


The Intersection: Academic Multicultural Resource Center

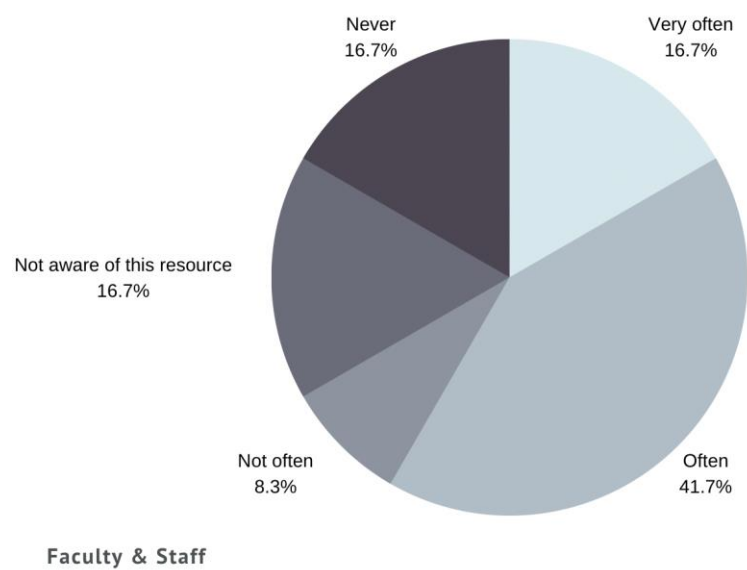


The Intersection: Academic Multicultural Resource Center

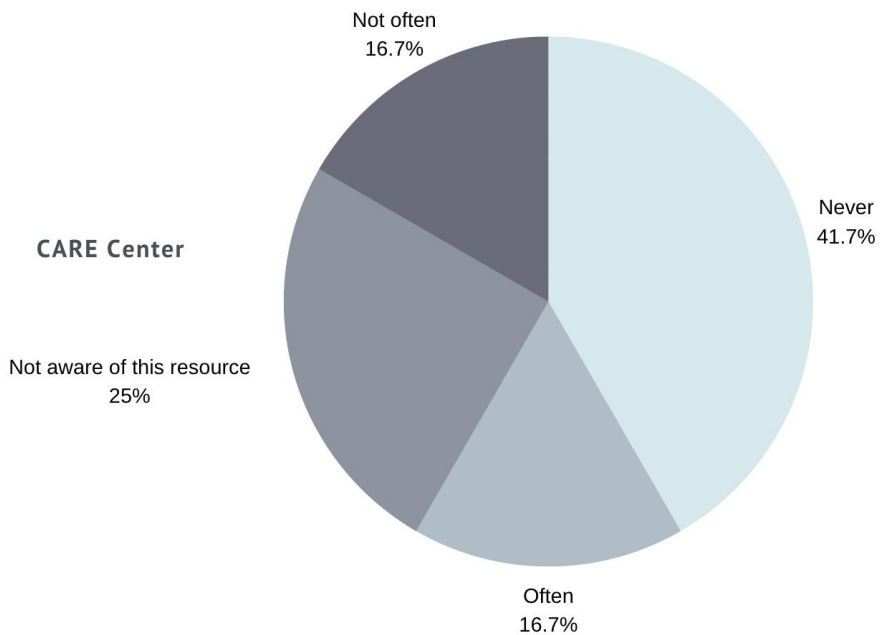
Office of International Students & Scholars



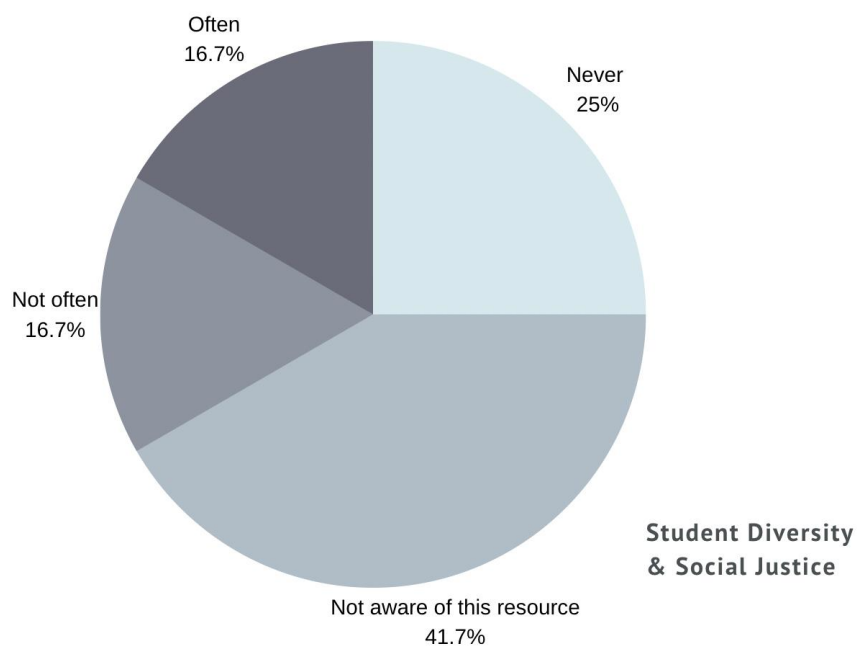
Faculty & Staff



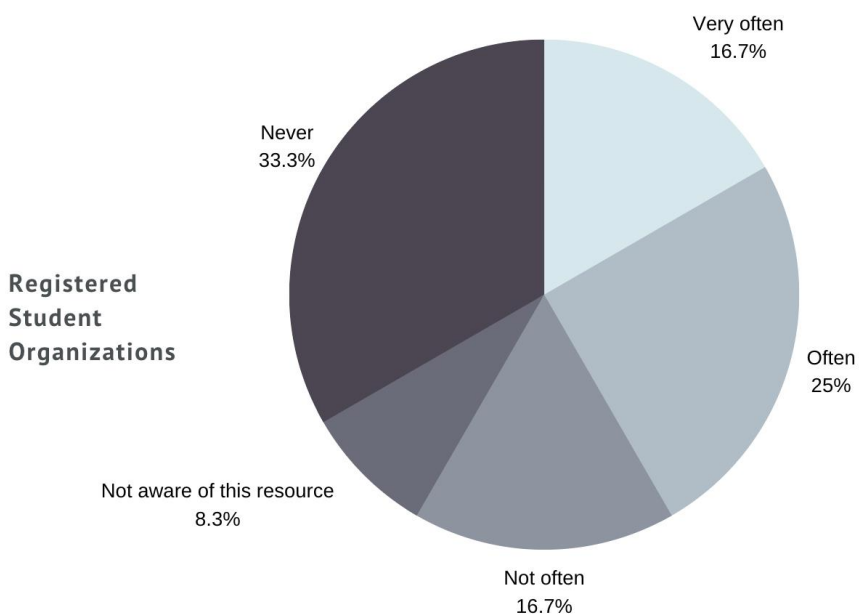
CARE Center



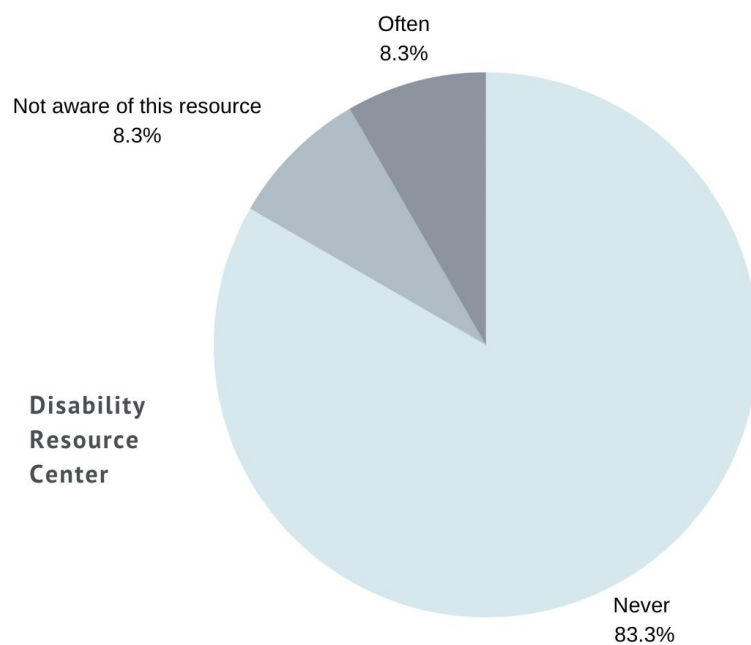
Student Diversity & Social Justice



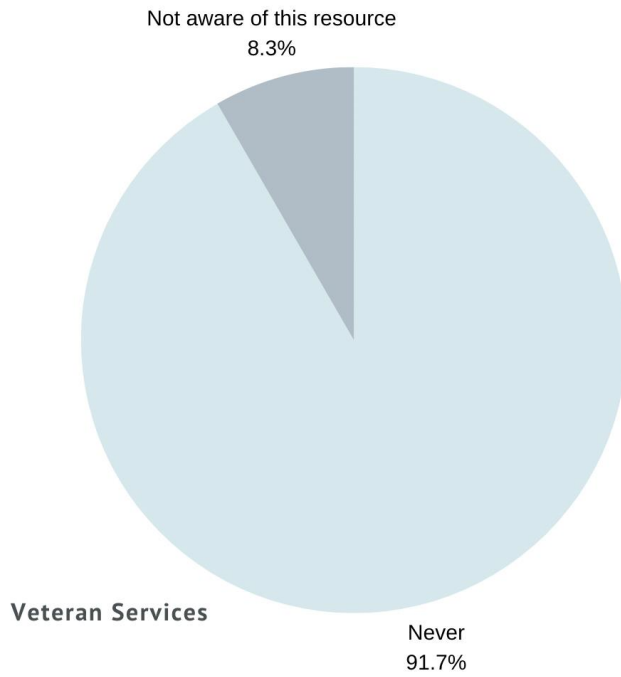
Registered Student Organizations



Disability Resource Center

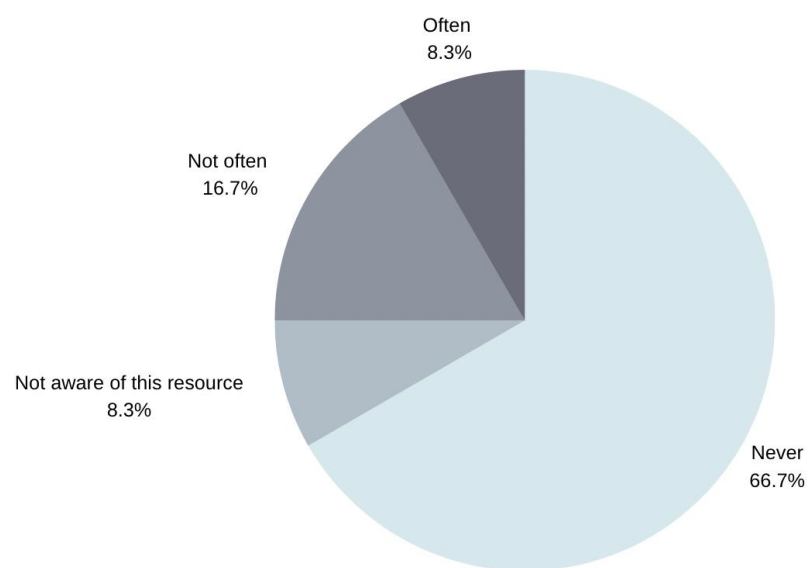


Veteran Services



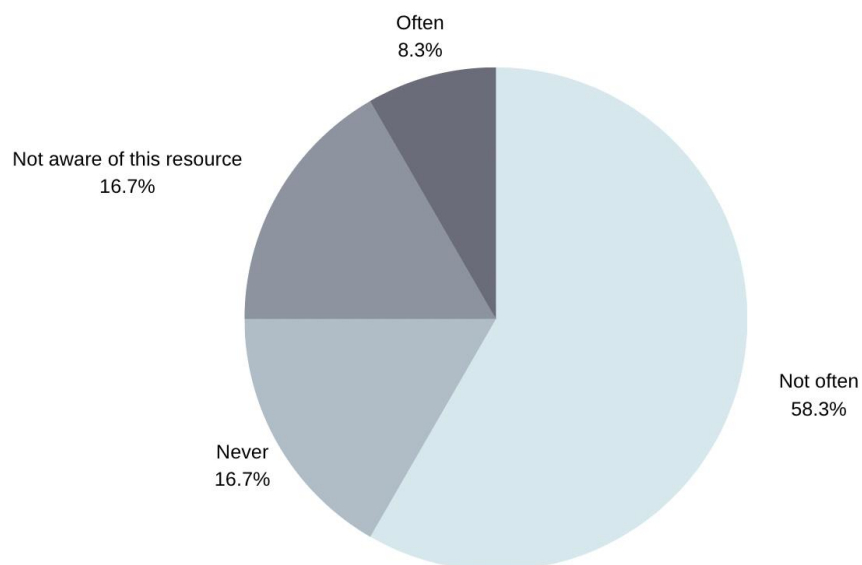
FREQUENCY OF USE: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Transfer Student Program



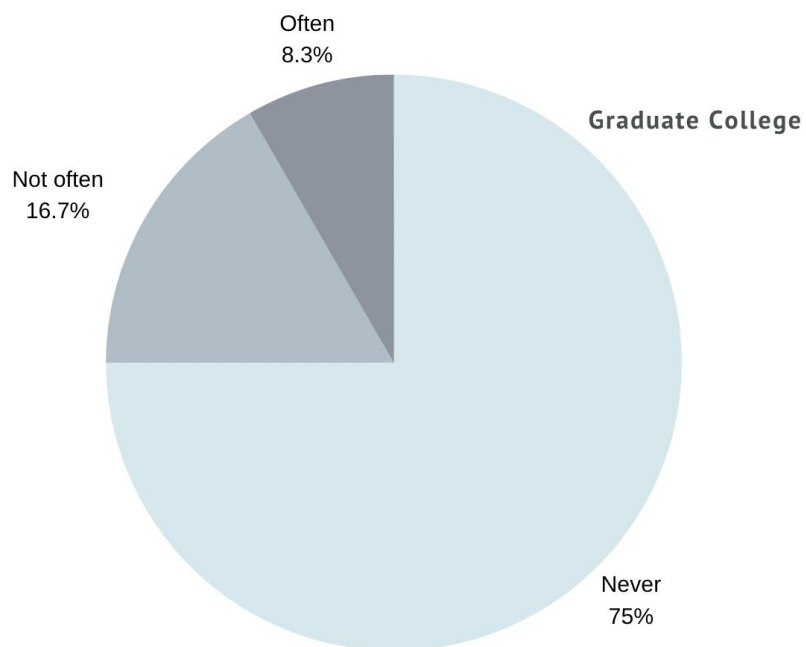
Transfer Student Program

Undergraduate Admissions

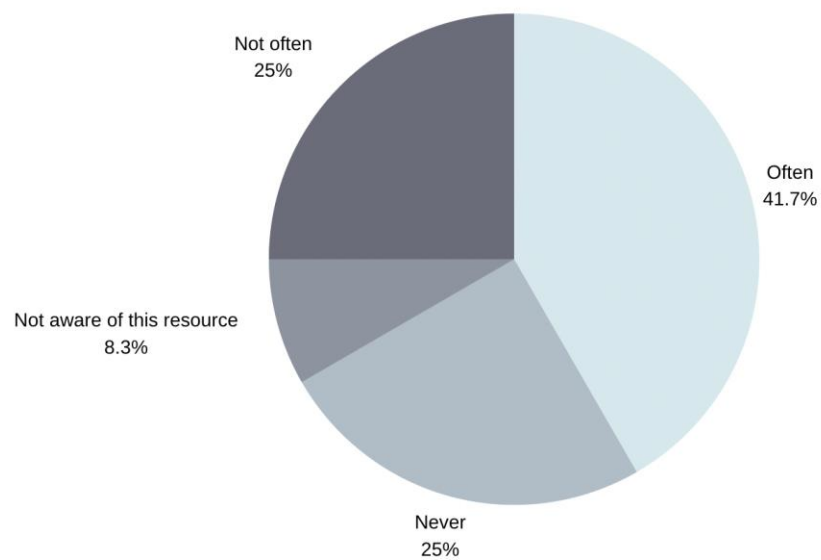


Undergraduate Admissions

Graduate College

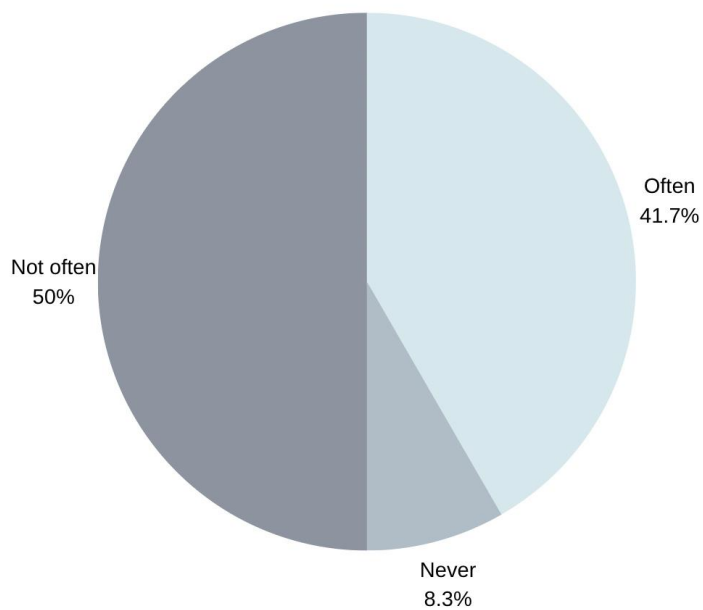


Career Services



Career Services

Office of the Registrar



Office of the Registrar

OTHER RESOURCES

When provided the option to identify other resources not listed above, computer labs that are not housed in the library, the student union, practice rooms from the School of Fine Arts, and Residential Assistants were mentioned.

MOST HELPFUL RESOURCES ON CAMPUS

***“The resources that are flexible to a student’s schedule are most helpful.
Individualized solutions are often better than mass resources as well.”***

The following themes were identified in what made a resource most helpful:

- Availability & flexibility of resources
- Resources that prioritize mental health
- The most common was ***understanding of what it is like to be an undocumented student and being able to provide tailored solutions***

LEAST HELPFUL RESOURCES ON CAMPUS

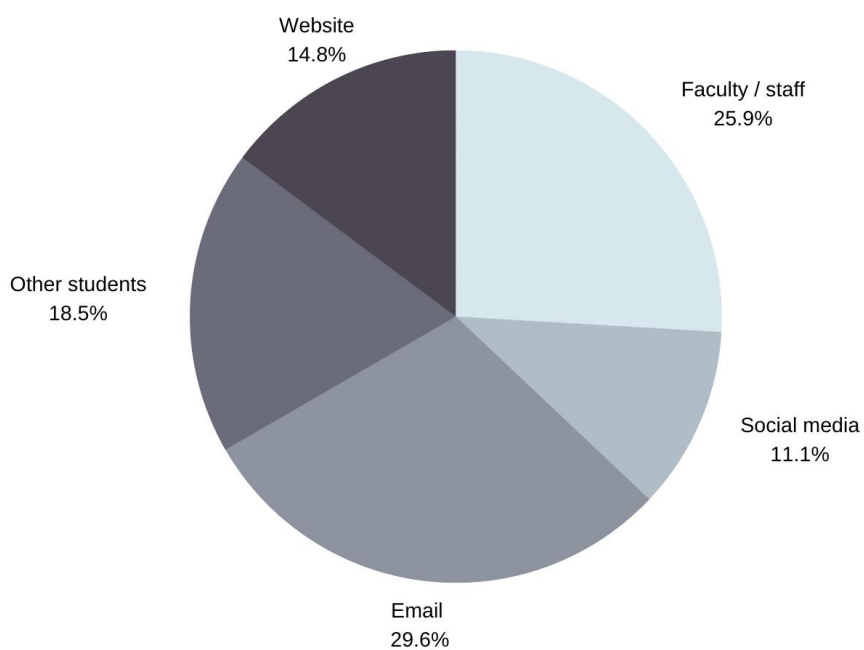
“All resources seem helpful, I just wish there was more emphasis on helping DACA [and undocumented] students for each of those resources.”

On the other hand, the most common theme that students identified in resources that were least helpful was:

- Lack of training and/or knowledge of faculty/staff of specific situations that undocumented students may encounter in a higher education institution
- Long wait times for certain resources and seeking off-campus services was also noted

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

How do students learn about campus resources?



How do students learn about campus resources?

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNLV

How can UNLV improve its support for undocumented students?

The following qualitative themes were identified in improving support for undocumented students:

- More flexibility in class times for certain fields (e.g., STEM) to accommodate for working students
- Addressing the confusion of institutional processes (e.g., funding opportunities for undocumented students)
- More outreach efforts for this population
- Improving knowledge and training of faculty/staff to interact with undocumented students
- More visibility and recognition of existing UndocuAlly members and resources

*“I think ways that UNLV can support
DACA/undocumented students
would be by providing more resources
and making regular staff members (advisors, etc.)
be more understanding of the circumstances
that us students experience to not feel judged.”*

BARRIERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What are current barriers to your academic journey?

The most common theme identified in academic barriers was **financial and cost barriers**, which is consistent with prior research.

Núñez and colleagues (2019) found that access to financial aid and tuition costs are significant barriers for undocumented students at UNLV.

“Money to pay for college, understanding that there is limited aid for my medical school path, ignorant professors and colleagues, and the fear of my legal status being outed.”

Other barriers mentioned included:

- Lack of knowledge/training of faculty/staff on the undocumented student experience
- Fear surrounding one’s immigration status
- Competing priority challenges with remote/web-based learning during COVID-19

STUDENTS' PERSONAL STRENGTHS

“‘El querer es poder.’ It means where there’s a will, there’s a way. If I receive an ignorant comment, if I get turned down from things over my legal status, or if I struggle to find classes, I find a way to pick myself up and keep going. Getting my degree has been like participating in a race with weights tied to my ankles. I’m still in the race, and I’m focused on the finish line, but I’m slower to get there.”

Historically, there has been an emphasis on a deficits perspective rather than focusing on a person’s strengths (e.g., coping in the face of adversity, resiliency; Norman, 2000). One example of how a strengths perspective can be beneficial was demonstrated in a qualitative study conducted by Núñez and colleagues (2019).

A strengths perspective can inspire other members of the community, promote healing, and serve as an interactive learning environment (Immigrants Rising, n.d.-d).

This is echoed by one of the values of Immigrants Rising, an organization dedicated to helping undocumented immigrants on a variety of aspects (e.g., education), by noting:

“Undocumented young people inspire entire communities. Individual successes increase understanding, change policies, and open up access and opportunity for all” (Immigrants Rising, n.d.-d, para. 6).

“I am very determined and headstrong. Even though this journey has not been easy, I’ve become a very resourceful person who strives for success because I want to achieve my goal of obtaining a college degree. I don’t give up easily.”

“I am willing to work the most toward my degree because I am the first member of my family to even attend to college and it’s become a personal goal.”

Recurring themes that were identified for personal strengths included:

- Resilience
- Determination
- Perseverance

Other themes mentioned:

- Support systems
- Access to experiential learning components & benefits because of DACA
- Open-mindedness
- Humility
- Resourcefulness

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Campus-wide UndocuAlly trainings for faculty and staff. Student workers and graduate assistants should also be eligible to participate.
2. Inclusion of a syllabus statement regarding undocumented student support, which can be found on the Undocumented Student Program's website, for students to know that they may approach their instructor with questions and concerns.
3. Other signage that indicates to students they are in a safe space to discuss their learning histories of being an undocumented student.
4. For every campus resource to have an "Undocu Specialist" or liaison that can assist undocumented students with their needs. This will ensure consistent communication each and every time. At minimum, front desk staff should have knowledge on where to refer a student to receive individualized help. Ideally, there would be a dedicated center for these students as previously advocated by the UNLV student participants interviewed by Núñez and colleagues (2019).
5. More visibility and clarity on what resources are available to undocumented students (e.g., Alternate Need Determination Form). One example of how this could be achieved is by having a section or module at New Student Orientation that addresses and acknowledges the needs of undocumented students.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This internal needs assessment was cross-sectional, relied on self-report items (i.e., both quantitative and qualitative), and only a small number of students participated. Thus, findings may not be representative of the entire undocumented student population at UNLV.

Although this population is hard to reach, the survey was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that may provide an additional explanation for the small number of participants given that we relied on social media, email, newsletters, and word of mouth for recruitment efforts.

Future assessments should be longitudinal in nature, have a larger sample size, and be offered in languages other than English. While English Learning students may have some proficiency in the English language to complete their studies at UNLV, these individuals may be systematically different from those that choose to complete the survey in English.

While efforts were made to be as inclusive and culturally sensitive as possible while designing this assessment, answer choices may have been unclear to some individuals (e.g., there was a discrepancy in one student's immigration status answer compared to how this student payed for university or not having an SSN but indicating to be DACAmented).

In addition, future surveys should provide compensation as this may incentivize more students to participate. Moreover, there should be an opportunity for individuals to provide their contact information at the end of the survey if they wish to participate in a qualitative interview. This would allow for more in-depth questions and elucidate the experiences in higher education of these students. Finally, the use of qualitative interviews could help with internal validity and generalizability of the findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This internal needs assessment would not have been possible without the support of:

- Dr. Nicholas Barr,
- Toni Chance,
- Kamisha Johnson,
- Rimi Marwah,
- Alejandro Rios,
- Undocu Taskforce,
- Campus partners that helped distribute this survey,
- *All* student participants

THANK YOU!

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REFERENCES

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<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/dream-act-overview>

Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center. (n.d.). [Las Vegas 287\(g\) program.](#)

<https://arribalasvegas.org/campaigns/take-ice-out-of-police/las-vegas-metropolitan-police-department/>

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