



**Elgin Community College
Wellness Services**

The Breakdown ~ A Guide for Undocumented Students

A Guide for Undocumented Students

- Vinny Cascio: Welcome to The Breakdown with your wellness professionals here at Elgin Community College. I'm Vinny Cascio.
- Angela Ogburn: I'm Angela Ogburn. In this podcast, we have a very special guest with us today.
- Vinny: That's right. We have one of our incredible academic advisors, Rodrigo Lopez. He's going to share some information with us about a special population we have here on campus, our undocumented students.
- Rodrigo Lopez: Hello everyone and thank you for having me. I'm actually very excited to be here today and share some information about our undocumented students here at Elgin Community College.
- Angela: Thanks again for being here. Actually that's exactly what we're looking for, some general information. So, we've got questions: Who is an undocumented student? How do our undocumented students pay for college? What are some myths about being an undocumented student? So, can you help us out? Tell us a little bit more?
- Rodrigo: Absolutely. Those are all very great question and to start off, undocumented students are no different than any other student here on campus. They're a part of student life, they're mentoring, they're in the honor society, they're athletes. Basically, they're here to be able to achieve a college education, a higher education - whether that's through our career technical programming or transferring off to a four-year education and completing a bachelor's degree. However, they do face several obstacles and challenges: mainly being able to pay for college, their college education. I think in relation to that, because the term of undocumented, what really should be known is that, because they don't hold valid authorization to be able to apply for FAFSA – that's the financial aid application - they don't receive federal or state aid, any sort of assistance from the government to help them pay for their college. Because of that, undocumented students face many, many hardships in being able to complete their education.
- What we are really trying to do is being able to increase the general awareness and knowledge about common resources here in the institution, whether that's specific individuals in the financial aid office or the scholarship office - or even academic advising and career services - to help students be able to go ahead and make the right decisions that are going to help them someday complete their college education. Like you said, as far as the myths that are associated with this population, there are many. But I think in relation to the financial aid piece, that is actually one of them. Many people believe that undocumented



students have access to some sort of federal or state aid, and that's not true. I think these are things that we have been able to go ahead and work in many, many settings whether it's here in the institution or in partnership with other community sources outside.

Vinny: Now, going along with that myths concept, how do our undocumented students gain access to education?

Rodrigo: Absolutely. Like you said, that's actually another myth that exists. Many people believe that - including undocumented students - which I hope, if you're listening, you can know that you have equal access to be able to gain admission to college; whether that's community college or a public university or a private university. All you have to do is follow the same exact process that any other student would. As long as you meet the academic criteria to be able to gain admission, then you should have no problem in being able to start your education at the institution that you desire. Going back to the financial aid piece: because they don't receive any sort of assistance, most likely the best choice for undocumented students is to start their education at a community college because the tuition is less than what they would pay at a university.

Vinny: Right. Now, we're such a friendly campus here, is there a way for students to identify individuals on campus that they can talk to about their status?

Rodrigo: Absolutely. Like I mentioned before, we're working very hard to be able to go ahead and continue to spread the awareness and relate up-to-date policy and knowledge and tools and resources to members in our institution, whether that's faculty, administrators, or staff. One of the things that we've been able to go ahead and start instituting is this logo of a butterfly that reads "Dreamers Welcome." Thanks in part to Favianna Rodriguez who is the artist out of California who created it. It's a symbol that illustrates a safe space. It also illustrates that the individual has some general knowledge on how to assist a student as it pertains to their department and so you might find this inside of student services, student life, or a faculty member's office. We encourage students to look for these signs, and if they see them, just realize that it is okay to be able to approach these individuals and ask for assistance and really helping them complete their education.

Angela: Right. Once you start looking for those signs, you can really see them all over campus. So that's really great information, thank you so much Rodrigo for being here. For more information on this topic, come chat with us in Wellness Services. We're located in B120 and we're open for you Monday through Friday. Take care, guys. I'm Angela Ogburn.

Vinny: I'm Vinny Cascio.

Together: And we're your wellness professionals.