

Today, he sees the importance of having someone guiding along the way. And he encourages counselors to “Ask questions. Don’t ignore the issue. Be proactive, and most of all, be open to letting these students know that they are welcome to speak to you. Nothing is more important than an image of acceptance.”

Forgetting Stereotypes

Undocumented immigrants are usually thought to be the ones who have crossed the Mexico-US border illegally, however, the reality is that many of these non-Latino undocumented students have entered the country legally, but fell out of immigration status for different reasons.

Kel, 23, was born in Germany, of Indian nationals, and brought to the US at the age of five. His father brought his family over legally through an employment visa, but last year, his family lost its legal status, and they are currently facing deportation.

Kel mentions that undocumented students are, on the outside, just your average student. There is no way to know that someone is undocumented just by looking at them. It is not just a Latino issue. “The only difference is internally, they’re torn, they’re fighting every day in ways no one can understand, hoping they don’t lose their family, their friends, their home,” says Kel.

It is especially important for counselors who are working with these students to know to put the politics of it aside. As Kemi, points out, it is important to create open dialogue, not one that “criminalizes or dehumanizes the student and the situation.”

As Kel says, “be understanding. Undocumented students just want to be a part of America, they want to settle down, follow their dreams. But unfortunately, a large number of them won’t get the chance. The key is to be there. No matter how you look at it, the kids are the victims. It’s easy to say ‘leave when you’re 18 and then

come back,’ but it’s not that simple. Coming back requires money, requires a ton of time, especially in countries where a lot of people apply for visas. Any counselor knows you don’t blame the victim.”

Success, Despite Struggles

Although for several of these students, coming out to their counselors was a failed attempt, there are some success stories. By and large, however, many undocumented students do feel that they are alone on their path to college. And this is especially the reality of non-Latino undocumented students.

For Irene, Ju, Martin, Kemi, and Kel, the “Latino-issue” stereotype has allowed them to navigate American society without being profiled as undocumented, but it has not come without a price. Because of the backlash that undocumented students face, for many of them, it feels safer not to expose one’s immigration status. But this means, never opening up and asking for help.

Because of this fear, it is important that counselors are more proactive in reaching out to this population by making information readily available and maintaining an environment of open dialogue, where no student feels judged.



As the daughter of Chinese immigrants in Brazil and an immigrant herself in the United States, **BELEZA CHAN** has experienced the struggles and difficulties of newcomers. Chan works towards social justice by teaching at-risk youth in San Francisco, writing about ethnic issues, and organizing students for passage of immigration reform. She is a graduate advisor with Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC).

Telltale Signs: Tips for Identifying Undocumented Students

by **Katharine Gin** (biography on page 20)

Undocumented students do NOT only...

- Come from Mexico or Latin America
- Have strong accents
- Take ESL classes

Undocumented students OFTEN...

- Use passports as their primary form of identification
- Refuse to participate in prestigious programs despite their high academic achievements
- Resist applying for government financial aid even when they’re low-income
- Fail to get driver’s permits even though they’ve passed driver’s education