

Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo's new DREAM Center: Bringing  
Awareness and Increasing Student and Staff Outreach Through Social Media

A Senior Project Presented to  
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## ABSTRACT

The following study investigates how using social media as a platform for Cal Poly's new Dream Center will increase the percentage of outreach and promote awareness among students and staff.

The number of undocumented students on campus continues to grow every year since 2012 when former President, Barak Obama, first introduced DACA. However out of 65,000 undocumented students who graduate high school in the United States, only 10% continue to pursue a higher education, and only 8% of those students actually complete and undergraduate degree.

The purpose of having a dream center is to increase the graduation rates, have a place where undocumented students feel welcomed and free to ask questions, as well as receive additional information on resources available to them.

The first place students are more likely to check is social media as well as the new center's website. Therefore it is important to develop and maintain this platforms up to date. Social media will not only work as a way to bring awareness to campus but it also works as a two-way symmetrical communication, where students can become more active, provide personal feed back and engage more on campus activities designed for them.

This paper addresses the need for the DREAM Center at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and the need to use social media as a form of communication and advertisement.

The importance assisting and investing in our AB 540 students is addressed, and it also addresses the issues that could arise in the near future.

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# Chapter 1

## *Introduction*

### **Statement of the Problem**

When getting to a university like Cal Poly, most students arrive to campus with big dreams and hopes for the future. However for undocumented students, it always has been difficult to pursue theirs. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo has been criticized in the past for the lack of diversity and resources, specially for undocumented students. Not to mention that data shows that 90% of undocumented students are also first generation students, making them the group with the highest dropout and lowest graduation rates. (The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, 2012).

Undocumented students live in the shadows and need a place on campus where they feel safe to ask questions and get the help they need. They need a place on campus where they can go and not feel judged or criticized. Cal Poly opened a resource space for undocumented students called the DREAM center in the spring of 2017. The DREAM center located in the Hillcrest Building (Building 81) at the San Luis Obispo Campus, will crate a safe and welcome space where undocumented students and their supporters can gather in community to receive

the support, information, and resources needed from staff, and “draw on the strength of their peers” (Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo Student Affairs 2017).

## **Background of the Problem**

Undocumented Students tend to have the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rate because of various reasons such as being first generation students to not receiving the support they need, or working multiple jobs while attending school. In California students qualify for AB540, a State Assembly bill passed in 2001, exempting undocumented students from nonresident tuition if they fulfill certain requirements. Undocumented students are also eligible to get state grants, scholarship, and institutional loans (California Student Aid Commission), and while these aid may not cover 100% of all college costs it does play a big role. However many students do not know this or where to find it because they don't know where to go or who to ask.

Cal Poly SLO is not the first University to open up a dream center to serve students' needs, in 2015 California State University North-ridge (CSUN) established a support system with the campus known as the DREAM Project, to smooth the path for undocumented students, who face a myriad of obstacles on their way to earning a college degree. The project came to life through CSUN's student organization Dreams to be Heard, a support group for AB 540 and

undocumented students. CSUN's DREAM Center is today, just two years after it opened, very successful and has actually reflected among its student body. The DREAM Center brought more awareness to the CSUN Campus and Community as well as increased AB540 Graduation rates and decreased. (Generation Progress, CSUN DREAMs 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Today in the United States there are about 800,000 DREAMERS, of which about 70% are college students. The purpose of this project is to increase awareness of the DREAM Center at Cal Poly and to explain the need for the center by using social media as a platform for Public Relations (CitizenPath, College Education for Dreamers 2017).

The main objective for the Center is bring a place where students will feel welcomed and offering students the help they need to focus on being a college student and not their legal status. In the long run by having the Center the percentage of graduating DREAMERS should increase and the dropout rate should decrease. Social media will work as a two way symmetrical communication system between the DREAM Center and the DREAMERS, as a majority of them have social media accounts and its the first place they will go for information.

## **Setting for the Study**

This study will be completed with the creation of an Instagram page designed for the DREAM Center at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo as a Senior Project. Creating a social media page as well as conducting research and observations of social medias from DREAM Centers at other Universities like CSUN will also be part of the project. The AB540 Cal Poly students as well as other organizations on campus and the universities' whole body is targeted to in this because they use social media as one of their main form of communication and to spread the word.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were created to develop a representation of the requirements for an effective social media page to create awareness among AB 540 students and the whole Cal Poly Community.

1. What is the need for the DREAM Center at Cal Poly and the need for a social media platform?
2. How do we increase awareness for the DREAM Center's need through social media?
3. How do we increase campus and community involvement in the DREAM Center and what role can social media play in doing this?
4. What strategies are behind using social media?

5. How are these Strategies in comparison to DREAM Centers already established at other universities?
6. How can we reach community members/parents who do not use social media?
7. How can we reach community members/parents who do not speak English?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are presented to the reader to clarify repeating topics of the study and assist in further knowledge of public relations for the DREAM Center.

DREAM ACT: Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act

(Shoichet, 2017)

DREAMER: An individual who is part of the DREAM Act category (Shoichet, 2017)

AB540: Under California law AB 540, certain nonresident students are exempt from paying nonresident supplemental tuition. If granted an AB 540 exemption, individuals will be charged in-state tuition and fees, and not the supplemental tuition charged to nonresidents. (University of California, 2017)

DACA: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It is an American immigration policy established by the Obama administration in June 2012. DACA allows certain illegal immigrants who entered the country as minors to receive a

renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and eligibility for a work permit. ([USCIS.gov](http://USCIS.gov), 2017)

### **Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 includes a background of the study, a purpose of the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 will determine the strategies and tactics in establishing and maintaining a social media page and compare it to other successful social media pages already existing. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 will measure the outcome of the Instagram page. Chapter 5 will summarize the end of the study and include recommendations for future public relations posts and outreach for the Cal Poly's DREAM Center.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

The review of the literature outlines the use of public relations to effectively create an effective social media page (Instagram) to promote and increase awareness of Cal Poly's DREAM Center.

#### **Public Relations for the DREAM Center Through Social Media**

The use of public relations will allow the DREAM Center to connect, communicate, and engage with the audience their message and purpose. Public relations plays a key role for organizations and clubs on campus because it highlights the importance of maintaining and caring for the values we hold as an university and community. The strategies within public relations is to “build a consumer-based outreach program that will creates awareness of a social cause, actively promotes the organization’s support of the cause, and identifies the consumer as key to keeping that support available” (Chetto, 2012 p.7). The center was specifically designed to help AB540 students and making them feel like they have a safe space on campus where they can freely ask questions and receive the help they need to carry a successful college career. These students highly active on social media and are vital participants on spreading the message sent through social media to their parents or their supporters/friends who may not speak the language or have a social media page of their own.

## **Awareness Through Public Relations**

Most people on campus do not understand what AB540 means or the benefits that DACA Grants and doesn't grant to undocumented students. Undocumented students at times feel ashamed of their legal status and do not go get the help they need because they don't feel safe to ask questions. According to a study done by the University of Illinois 9 out of 10 undocumented students are also first generation college students, meaning they cannot even go home and ask their family for help (Mandou, Ashmar. April 2012). Therefore with the PR campaign we have the opportunity to raise awareness through the whole Cal Poly community. It will effectively help others understand what makes an AB540 student and it will help undocumented students go to a place where they feel comfortable and safe to get the help they need, and ultimately give them the same opportunity as everyone else to have a successful college career.

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

This chapter will be used to discuss the methods of data collection containing data sources, collection and presentation of the information, and delimitations of the outreach program.

#### **Data Sources**

For this study, a social media page will be created for the Cal Poly DREAM Center. It is important for a new center on campus to use social media because it's one thing to reach supporters, but it's another thing to reach the students whom the center is actually serving. While this study won't be reassuring the after math of the social media it will look at the impact social media has had on other DREAM Centers already established. Studies show that 92% of people trust their friends recommendations, and less than 40% of people trust ads. So even if you can get free PSA's from the school's radio station or newspaper, they're not nearly as powerful as getting your supporters to spread the word to their friends via social media (Kerpen, 2015).

## **Participants**

The participants for this study will mostly be composed of the Cal Poly students which are the ones who use Instagram the most and are also our target audience.

## **Data Collection and Data Presentation**

There was no actual physical event for this project, however for the data collection we looked at how effective has social media been for other universities' DREAM Centers. Northeastern Illinois University who created an organization that deals with the struggles that undocumented students from around the world endure daily. Undocumented Resilient and Organized (URO), the club at NEIU, which was founded back in 2012, was intended to shed light on the issue by developing five core values that reflected upon their social media (similar to what we are creating at our new Cal Poly Dream Center);

- \*Building a community of support among undocumented students at NEIU
- \*Creating awareness about issues affecting undocumented students and students of mixed-status families. This includes educating administration, faculty, staff and students but also ourselves.
- \*Mentoring undocumented high school students as they transition to higher education.
- \*Building bridges among other student organizations on and off campus.

\*Expanding financial resources available to undocumented students through, fundraisers, new scholarships, and other incentives.

(Mandou, April 2012)

Universities like Northridge have also used their social media as a resource to reach their audience. And their results have been highly successful, it is easier for them to create events and spread the word through social media (EOP CSUN, 2016). Both Universities have found increasing graduation percentages since creating supporting groups on campus.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to this study based on the amount of time available to conduct this project. The project timeline is assigned to follow the California Polytechnic State University quarter system, which is a ten weeks long for trimester and not enough time to follow the social media page. Extensive research on the subject was limited because there isn't a whole lot written on the subject yet, and most articles about undocumented students focus on illegal immigration and not so much on the impact it has on being a student and the lack of resources at universities.

### **Delimitations**

Due to time there was also delimitations present in this study. With only ten weeks to do the research and being done during summer term, it was difficult contacting

people at the center who would be out of the office for a period of time and to search for very limited information. All the information I needed I mostly had to find on online articles because there wasn't any printed books or newspapers or online journals about undocumented students and their limitations.

## **Chapter 4**

### *Data Analysis*

Chapter 4 will provide explanations to how the strategy was implemented for the public relations plan for creating a social media page designed for students. The data will summarize the outline of the public relation campaign and compare it to results obtained by other universities who have had their social media running longer time than just a summer term.

### **Public Relations Action Plan**

The main strategy for creating a social media page was focused on raising awareness and promoting the center, specially to those that can benefit from what it has to offer. The social media I created was Instagram because, I thought it would be the most effective to share pictures and quick posts. According to an study done by Forbes magazine, while Facebook is a more popular social media it is less popular among college students, 60% of clubs and organizations believe that Instagram is a much faster and effective way to share the location and picture of an event (Friedman, 2016).

## **Tactics and Tools**

The public relations plan for the center's Instagram page implements multiple strategic communication tactics. According to Chetto, who quotes Egan, there are four categories of tactics to build a successful PR plan. Egan tactic categories compose of interpersonal communication, organizational media, news media, and advertising/ promotional media. (Egan, 2011). Creating the Instagram page is just the beginning for the center. By creating one effective social media platform, and getting the word out through other clubs social media, KCPR, and/or mustang news there will be an increase of awareness not only about the social media page but about the center itself. In the near future the social media will be beneficial to the center when they create events for students or want to get the word out about a special announcement.

## **Communication with Publics**

By creating a social media platform it is vital to communicate with the public, since that is what it was created as a form of communication. This social media platform will work as a two way symmetrical way of continuously communicating with its public. Not only will allow the center to spread the word about their events but it will also be able to hear back from its public, answer questions, direct messages, and measure what things are favored by its users based on the likes and

comments. The social media page will also play a major key when the center creates events in future by spreading the word and have previous followers established, just how it has been at other schools like CSUN, University of Utah and University of Illinois.

## Chapter 5

### *Discussions and Recommendations*

#### **Summary**

Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo's new DREAM Center: Bringing Awareness and Increasing Student and Staff Outreach Through Social Media, was developed by a four year journalism student at the university who saw the need for social media to a new center on campus. The Cal Poly senior understood the importance of having a DREAM Center on campus having multiple friends and colleagues who were DREAMERS and struggled daily to look for help and answers. However it also came to her attention that most people she came across had no clue nor cared about this issue or the center itself. She partnered up with the new DREAM Center on campus where she created a social media page for them and did some research on the benefits it would bring to the universities' student body.

#### **Findings**

Through doing research and finding more about resources for undocumented students, it was shown that the need for a DREAM Center is highly needed. For starters there is not very much information about the DREAMERS or very much statistics about how they rank at their schools. It is also very difficult to find out

where they can find financial aid and how they can get it. There are records showing undocumented students have the highest dropout rate and lowest undergrad rate but there is no survey that explaining why. However it was noticed that at schools where there was a DREAM Center or a group on campus designated to help DREAMERS, there was an successful academic increase from these students.

The Center on campus is very new but if maintain it will really reflect its progress on its student population. Cal Poly prides itself of being a place of inclusion and acceptance and having a center designed specifically for undocumented students is a huge progress. In the future the center plans on creating events, workshops, bring public speakers and online promotions designed for AB540 students and using social media will play a major key in the success of each event.

Because of the limitations that prevented the following of the campaign, it is too soon to measure the success of the page and how resourceful it will be in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Immigration is a huge topic in our country today, weather or not we agree or disagree with government policies on immigration there is no secret that it is our

job as an university and community to assist all of our students needs and that includes our AB540 students, whom with hard work and dedication have earned a spot in the universities across the country. For Cal Poly San Luis Obispo it was vital to create a social media page that worked as a platform to “to educate and build awareness so that neither students nor employees feel threatened by the situation or each other” (Mendoza, 2015). The center mirrored after the LGBTQ Safe Zone concept, the belief is that undocumented students also deserve a safe inclusive zone and how the LGBTQ community also used social media as a platform for awareness and inclusivity.

College students are the main demographics who use Instagrams as a means of communication and by sending out messages and posting DREAM news or events on the social network site, the participants will be able to sufficiently spread the digital word about the campaign and become a part and active members of the center.

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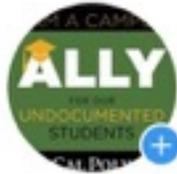
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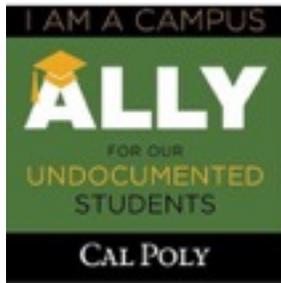
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DREAM Center Cal Poly SLO



Dear DREAM Center,

My name is Brenda Garcia, I am a senior at Cal Poly, studying Journalism and Public Relations. The reason I am sending you this email today is because for my senior project I have decided to write on the importance of having a DREAM Center at the university and how using social media as a platform will increase the percentage of outreach and promote awareness among students and staff for the center.

I noticed that since the center is fairly new to campus it does not have social media yet, and I was hoping I could perhaps open up an Instagram page as part of my project as well. I would create the Instagram profile, get it going and growing, with your approval before posting it, and at the end of my project hand it to you to continue posting in the future.

Hello Brenda,

Thank you for your email. I am very excited for the opportunity to assist you in completing your vision for your senior project. I would like to meet you in person to chat about the possibility to collaborate. Please let me know your availability. Thank you!

Best regards,

**Katherine Zevallos Pastor, M.S.**

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