

Cal Poly students juggle school and local immigrant advocacy work

Central Coast immigrant advocacy group, 805 UndocuFund, gained over 700 volunteers — a portion of those Cal Poly students



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An engineering student woke up to his phone buzzing one Wednesday morning.

The text message he saw sent him quickly out the door and over to the San Luis Obispo County Jail.

Federal immigration agents, he was told, were planning to detain someone.

Around the time he and other volunteers for the Central Coast immigrant advocacy group 805 UndocuFund got to the jail to document what was going on, the person was already in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Some ICE agents at the scene

began to threaten the group of volunteers with pepper spray, the agents hands resting on their guns, the fifth year said.

“And then I went home,” he said. “I made breakfast, and I went to class.”

This lifestyle is not uncommon for the fifth-year mechanical engineering student at Cal Poly, who spoke under the condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation from the federal government and future employers due to his activism.

More than a year into President Donald Trump’s mass deportation campaign, 805 UndocuFund gained over 700 volunteers in the Central Coast — a portion of those Cal Poly students — who provide everything from legal observation of ICE activity to financial relief for affected families, according to Cesar Vasquez,

rapid response coordinator for the non-profit organization. Student volunteers juggle the responsibilities of school and their volunteer work — which in most cases puts them at risk of harm or even death following recent events in Minneapolis. Most volunteers take the risk due to a strong commitment to the community and supporting those who are affected by the immigration policy in the country.

Alongside the engineering student, Mustang News interviewed three other Cal Poly student volunteers for 805 UndocuFund under the same condition of anonymity. They are also all friends outside of the organization.

But their work as volunteers typically ranks highest in priority. “I want to further my education, but

I feel like these people’s lives are immediately at risk, and I am the only one in a position to step in,” the engineering student said.

805 UNDOCUFUND SEES AN UPTICK IN RAPID RESPONSE VOLUNTEERS

The rapid response network for 805 UndocuFund works with over 700 volunteers who document ICE activity, provide education on individual rights and assist people affected by immigration enforcement.

As of Saturday, Feb. 7, 69 people have been detained by federal immigration agents in San Luis Obispo, according to data collected by 805 UndocuFund since January 2025.

In San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, nearly 1,580

people have been detained since Trump took office, 805 UndocuFund data showed.

Volunteers for the non-profit organization give what they can when they can, and trust that others in the network help to fill any gaps, said a female architecture student volunteer interviewed by Mustang News.

When thinking about how she juggles school and the organization, the fifth year sees it like any other extracurricular students would take on at Cal Poly.

“A lot of full-time students are a part of clubs on campus, and that takes up a lot of time,” she said. “This is what that is for us.”

Vasquez, the rapid response coordinator, said since he had been hired in the fall, the volunteer base has grown almost triple the size it was



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The group walks through the jail parking lot holding an informational sign..

before he joined the organization. He has been advocating and organizing for multiple causes since he was 12, but immigrant rights have always been personal for him.

He said most of the Cal Poly students he sees at the university are white, but the ones who volunteer for his team use their “privilege to fight against the system and to support the communities.”

Vasquez said some students use their expertise in engineering and computer science to help the organization with coding and looking through inmate release data under the county Sheriff’s Office to know who may be at risk of being detained by immigration agents.

“They’ve brought a lot of manpower, you know, but they’ve also brought a lot of their expertise that they’re learning in class,” Vasquez said.

He has held rapid response training on Cal Poly’s campus to encourage others to help volunteer for 805 UndocuFund.

“Realizing just how much activity was really happening within like 10 minutes of Cal Poly was definitely sort of something that’s helped me encourage more people to join,” said a female engineering management master’s student and volunteer Mustang News interviewed.

She has been volunteering for 805 UndocuFund since the beginning of 2025. At Cal Poly, the master’s student said she feels a sense of isolation between students and the broader community in San Luis Obispo, but tries to make people aware of how close immigration enforcement has been near campus.

‘IT’S NOT ABOUT ME, IT’S ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE’

The engineering management student believes her care for the community and those being affected by the current immigration policy is

an inseparable motivation from any other reason behind the volunteer work, and her friends in the organization would agree.

“I should not really be interviewed, but someone needs to be saying something,” said a male architecture student volunteer. “It’s not about me, it’s about other people.”

Most of the student volunteers



“We’re not really doing this because we find it fun or that it’s fulfilling. We’re doing this because it has to be done.”

Architecture 5th Year

Mustang News spoke to joined 805 UndocuFund in September last year after hearing about ICE activity in Southern California.

During the nationwide shutdown against ICE on Friday, Jan. 30, many San Luis Obispo County businesses donated portions of their proceeds to 805 UndocuFund. Some of those businesses included Field Day Coffee and Kismet Fitness, among others the organization shared on their Instagram.

On Tuesday, Jan. 27, the San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors hosted a special forum regarding the Sheriff’s Office cooperation with ICE as it pertained to releasing inmates to the federal agency throughout last

year. Dozens of people spoke during the public comment section of the forum, including Vasquez who hoped to make people aware of the power they have in their community.

Vasquez and the other volunteers said at the end of last year, someone from 805 UndocuFund had a gun pulled on him by an ICE agent while legally observing.

After Christmas last year, ICE agents reportedly raided multiple cities across the Central Coast, including San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, Lompoc, Nipomo, Paso Robles and Santa Barbara, The SLO Tribune previously reported.

Hearing about the events that were transpiring, the male and female engineering students cut their winter breaks at home short to drive back into the area and volunteer for 805 UndocuFund, with some days lasting from around 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.

“We’re not really doing this because we find it fun or that it’s fulfilling,” the male architecture fifth year said. “We’re doing this because it has to be done.”

Following the fatal shooting of Renee Good by an ICE agent in January, the fifth year said he was frustrated at how little people spoke about what Good was fighting for than the interaction between her and the federal agent.

“Renee Good and her death is inseparable from the deaths and kidnappings of all these other people,” the male architecture fifth year said.

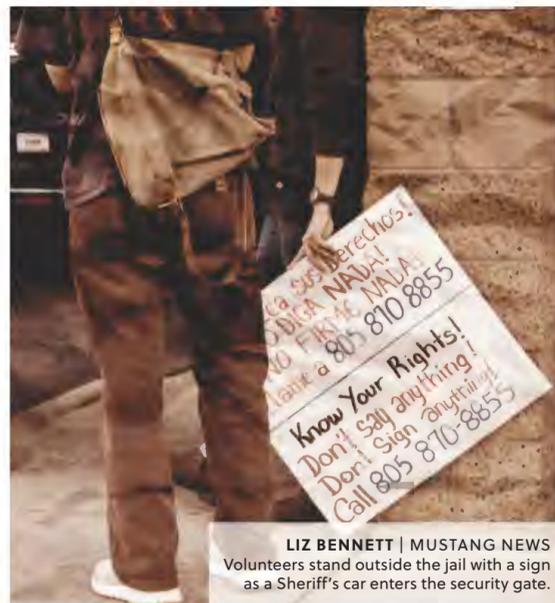
The male engineering student agreed that while he sees Good as a “friend in this fight,” she “is not the fight.”

STUDENT VOLUNTEERS PLAN FOR THE FUTURE AFTER GRADUATION

Each student volunteer carries their own supplies needed in the



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A volunteer holds up an informational card written in Spanish.



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Volunteers stand outside the jail with a sign as a Sheriff’s car enters the security gate.

event that they choose to respond to an alert of ICE activity at a given area.

Supplies include first aid kits, face masks, water, extra jackets, snacks and toothbrushes, to name a few. The volunteers prepare for anything, never knowing how long their support will be needed during a confrontation with federal immigration enforcement.

As they each begin to start thinking about graduation, some are unsure what that means for their volunteer work with 805 UndocuFund.

The male engineering student plans to continue doing anything to help advocate for immigrant

rights, keeping his career separate from his personal beliefs. Others are trying to incorporate what they plan to do after graduating with similar activism.

But volunteers like the female architecture student see no end in sight yet for their pursuit of stopping federal immigration agencies from continuing to roll out their enforcement in and around San Luis Obispo, and hope to continue sending out their message.

“I do not see this slowing down anytime soon,” she said.