



# **GUIDE FOR STUDENT ADVOCATES**

June 2021



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# 1. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all [SVR members, advisors, and interviewees](#) who contributed to this report.

## 2. The Student Role

College students have a unique role to play as advocates for refugees as they can help address some of the [challenges and obstacles refugees](#) often encounter in their higher education pursuits.

Many of the programs SVR members learned about, such as the [Refugee Student Scholarship Program](#) (RSSP), [Advocates for Refugees in Higher Education](#) (ARHE), [Boise State Refugee Alliance](#) (BSRA), [Refugees to College](#), and the [Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees](#) (PAIR), were founded and/or co-led by student advocates. Drawing from good practices and lessons learned, we provide some tips on how you can follow their lead and leverage your role as students to support refugee-background students.

What you, as student advocates, can take the lead on with support from partners at your university and beyond:

- Write to your university leadership (e.g, deans); encourage them to admit and provide scholarships/tuition waivers to students of refugee-background.
- Shift harmful narratives and create a more welcoming environment through awareness-raising and education.
- Provide peer mentorship and support to prospective and admitted students.
- Grassroots fundraising to supplement your university leadership commitments.

As classmates, roommates, study buddies, and friends of newcomers, you might be interacting with them one-on-one more than anyone else on campus. Additionally, you have influence as students to shape your institutional policies and culture, especially when mobilized. Utilize your collective power as members of a student body!







## 3. Promoting accessibility to higher education

### 3.1. What you can do to help forcibly displaced students currently overseas

**Populations of concern:** Prospective students currently residing in refugee camps, in their first countries of asylum, or internally displaced in their home countries (IDPs). Learn more about the different definitions [here](#).

Here are some ways you can help students overseas overcome obstacles to higher education and advocate for their admission to your university:

● **Write a letter to your dean. Get support and signatures from your fellow classmates and faculty/staff champions you've identified on campus. Explain the importance of expanding education pathways into the U.S., and ask that they extend scholarships or tuition waivers on your campus to refugees overseas.**

Scholarships not only help overseas students overcome some of the financial and visa restrictions to higher education, but they can also provide a complementary pathway for those living in limbo in their first countries of asylum or refugee camps. Scholarships can be a lifeline for displaced students living overseas.

At the forefront of the global movement to provide education pathways is World University Services Canada's (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (SRP), whose network of Canadian students "supports the sponsorship of refugees...to come to Canada, pursue their education, then stay as permanent residents" ([Michelle Manks, Senior Manager, Durable Solutions for Refugees WUSC, interview with SVR Member Marc Caron.](#))

In recent years, a number of countries and organizations around the world have drawn inspiration from the WUSC SRP model. For example, DIMA, a non-profit organization based in Mexico, has successfully expanded education pathways for displaced students overseas to continue their studies in Mexico through its Habesha Project.

Check out SVR member Josiane Matar's interview with DIMA founder Adrian Melendez [here](#).

U.S. university students are successfully advocating for educational pathways for refugee students on their campuses in innovative ways. You can follow the lead of former Columbia University Business School [students like Jad Najjar](#), who, in 2016, approached Dr. Bruce Usher, a professor at the [Tamer Center for Social Enterprise](#) to champion and establish a scholarship for Syrian students. After his students successfully piloted the scholarship through impact investing, Professor Usher partnered with Columbia Global Centers to manage and expand the scholarship. The Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students (CUSDS) currently supports 30 displaced students, from anywhere in the world, who are studying at the university each year.

Learn more about CUSDS in Marc Caron's interview with Paul Hersh of Columbia University Global Centers [here](#).

Habso, SVR member, is a former refugee, she attended St. Cloud university which provides in-state tuition for international students through a scholarship called "St Cloud State University Academic and Cultural Sharing Scholarship" (ACSS). Habso founded the Muina International program to support Somali refugee students to study in the United states. Up-to-date she has supported up to 30 young somali refugees to apply and attend different universities across the US including St Cloud university . She raises funding through students` family members and extended community members in the US and overseas who are willing to sponsor refugee students education.

For tips on how to advocate for scholarships on your campus, see [our Scenario](#)

● **Write or send an email to your university leadership (for example, your dean). Explain the importance of creating more flexible criteria for students from refugee backgrounds. Ask them to be flexible when considering college applications of refugees, who may lack access to their own transcripts, letters of recommendation, or college entrance exam centers.**

As SVR Member Jordan Scanlon learned in her interview with ONE Refugee, scholarships are simply not enough to help students overcome [barriers to higher education](#). Christelle Barakat, SVR member and Fulbright student at UNCG, found that more flexibility and empathy is needed when admitting refugees to college, based on her interviews with [edSeed](#) and [Article 26 Backpack](#) . [Aphrodite Al Zouhouri](#), a Syrian student who received support from Jusoor to continue her studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, recommends that students

encourage university leadership to support displaced students overseas as they navigate a challenging admissions process.

Your university might have concerns about maintaining “standards to meet federal and state regulations, accreditation standards, and institutional policy” (Adams et al., 2019, p. 40).

SVR member and Rutgers-Newark student Rashae Williams, learned about alternatives to standardized testing and assessment of academic credentials, in her [interview with EducationUSA](#). You can encourage your university to work with EducationUSA to find alternatives to traditional admission without hurting the standards of your university [see Rashae Williams’ article on EducationUSA-Syria here]. Similarly, you can tell your university about non-profit organizations such as Syrian Youth Empowerment (SYE), which mentors and matches top Syrian students with universities. Learn more in Lizzie Edwards’ interview [here](#).

There are also innovative tools, such as Article 26 Backpack based at UC-Davis, which allow universities to creatively assess prior academic credentials and acknowledge the tremendous value that students affected by conflict potentially bring to your classroom. Check out SVR member [Christelle Barakat’s interview with Article 26 Backpack](#) guides here and learn how you can advocate for Article 26 Backpack on your campus.

● **Volunteer to help students currently overseas increase their English language ability, prepare for standardized tests, improve their college essays, and apply for scholarships. learn more [here](#).**

There are a number of organizations that provide mentorship to forcibly displaced students that are in need of virtual volunteers. You can get the word out or volunteer with existing initiatives like Syrian Youth Empowerment (SYE), Paper Airplanes, and VIP.Fund’s Peer-to-Peer Program, which provide English tutoring, help students with applications for scholarship applications and essays, or work with universities to waive application fees.

Learn more about the work of these organizations and how you can get involved by checking out [Christelle Barakat’s interview with Bashar Alallawi and Tash Toth of VIP.Fund here](#), [Lizzie Edward’s interview with George Batah, Co-Founder of SYE](#), and [Hang Le’s article about Jusoor’s Academic Mentorship Program](#).

### 3.2. What you can do to help refugees and asylum seekers in your local community

**Populations of concern:** Prospective college students with refugee background who live in your local community, such as resettled refugees, asylees, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), or asylum seekers.

As SVR Member Lizzie Edwards learned in her [interview with IRIS](#), higher education goals and needs of local refugee populations are often overlooked. Here are some ways you can help your local population:

● **Look up your local refugee situation and find out which refugee agencies are nearby.** See [Christina's interview with Diya Abdo](#).

Do a Google Search like, 'refugees resettled in [city, county, or state]' or 'refugee resettlement agencies [city, county, or state]'. You can also look up [U.S. Refugee Admissions Program \(USRAP\) departures](#), and which countries they come from via the [UNHCR Resettlement Data Finder](#). You can find out which states resettle refugees using the Refugee Processing Center's Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System ([WRAPS](#)).

Additionally, be sure to investigate how many [asylum seekers and asylees](#) are in your area. You can use Syracuse University's [TRAC Immigration Database](#) to look up your city's asylum acceptance rates. Learn more about the U.S. asylum system [here](#).

● **Investigate how your local agencies are helping their clients in their educational journeys. Contact these agencies to see if there are ways you or your university can help bridge any gaps.**

After you've done some research about refugee and asylum seeker populations in your area, and on the local agencies that support their integration, contact one of these agencies to learn more about their clients' education needs, how the agency addresses these needs, and how you or your university can help. Typically, resettlement agencies focus on K-12 education for children and immediate employment for adults. However, some help their clients access higher education in tangible ways, often in partnership with local universities and colleges. To learn more about how these agencies support the long-term integration of newcomers through higher education access, check out [Justin Confalone's interview with Journey's End in Buffalo](#), [Lizzie Edward's interview with IRIS](#).



*Our hope is that watching the above SVR member interviews will stimulate some ideas about how you can help your local refugee population more equitably access education, as well as possible questions you might ask your local resettlement agencies, such as:*

- Are any of your clients going to college or hoping to go to college? If so, what are some of the barriers your clients face in getting access to or succeeding in higher education?
- What are your clients doing to overcome these obstacles? What strategies does your organization/agency use to help refugees get access, if any?
- To your knowledge, are local universities or colleges aware of these obstacles, and are they addressing these obstacles in any way? If so, how?
- Are there any ways that [I/my university/student organization] can help promote access to higher education for your clients?

After you've connected with your local resettlement agency and talked to people working on the ground, here are other possible ways you can get involved in helping your local refugee community in their pathway to higher education:

### ● **Connect resettled refugees and asylees to financial aid and scholarships.**

Once they have residency, resettled refugees and asylees are eligible for federal financial aid. The Education USA-Syria Advisor, interviewed by SVR member and Rutgers University student Rashae Williams, recommends helping [resettled students and asylees](#) take advantage of federal financial aid.

As Rachell O'Connell of PAIR cautions, resettled refugees and asylees can still face barriers when applying to the FAFSA. She says some of her clients, for instance, are unable to obtain their parents' signatures for the application. [Check out Rashae's interview with Rachel for more information, and how you can help.](#)

### ● **Write a letter or email to your university leadership (e.g., dean, admissions office), getting signatures from fellow classmates and faculty/staff champions. Explain the importance of reducing tuition for your local refugee population, especially asylum seekers. Ask them to waive full or partial tuition, or provide a scholarship.**

SVR Member Iman Siddiq founded the Refugee Student Scholarship Program (RSSP) when she was a student at UC-Irvine, in response to the great financial barriers many refugees in her local community are up against.

RSSP allows any refugee-background students accepted at UC schools to apply. The program's primary focus is on [asylum seekers](#) who do not have access to federal financial aid and must pay out-of-state tuition:

"We launched the first ever Refugee Resource Community for students at UCI with a particular focus on asylum seekers who obviously cannot apply for federal or state financial aid in California. We're trying to consolidate resources for asylum seekers and to help the community of displaced students navigate and fund their higher education." Iman Siddiq ([learn more about what she did in her interview with Olivia Issa, SVR Co-Chair here](#))

● **Encourage your university leadership to remove any citizenship questions from scholarship applications.**

As Sarah Battersby of Triangle Foundation states, the removal of citizenship questions from scholarship applications is especially important for asylum seekers as such questions can deter those with precarious legal status from applying. See Marc Caron's interview with Sarah Battersby [here](#).

● **Join or create an organization that provides resources for prospective students with refugee background who may need support.**

Non-financial barriers pose additional obstacles for local refugee populations seeking access to higher education. You may find that your local resettlement agency lacks the ability to support their clients' higher education goals as doing so goes beyond the scope of their work. [Boise State Refugee Alliance \(BSRA\) founder Dr. Belma Sadikovic](#) recommends joining student organizations on campus that provide resources to refugees to fill this gap. Belma adds, "if such an organization does not exist, make one." She founded BSRA when she was a student at Boise State University in Idaho, based on her own experience as a refugee. She says, "You can find a few other students on campus who are passionate just like you and start small" . "Through that, you can expand, in partnership with faculty, university administration, community organizations, and affected students themselves," she adds.

Learn about other organizations established by student advocates, such as [RSSP](#) (mentioned above), the [Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees \(PAIR\)](#) in Houston, Texas, and [Refugees to College](#) founded at the University of Michigan.

Case example: The Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees (PAIR)

PAIR, located in Houston, TX, started in 2006 at Rice University by college students as a tutoring program. According to Rachel O’Connell of PAIR, “They grouped together because they found that there were pretty significant economic and educational needs that weren’t being met by refugee resettlement agencies.” Their main focus: “Through educational mentoring programs, PAIR empowers refugee youth to navigate American society, reach their academic potential and become community leaders.” PAIR is now a 501c3 funded through \$500,000 per year in grants and supported by community partnerships in Houston and various high schools and universities. PAIR has expanded a lot in the past couple years, supporting three school districts for high schools and four for middle schools.

● **Identify key players on your campus. Connect with faculty who might have an interest in or specialized knowledge about refugee situations, such as social work or sociology professors. Build relationships with them.**

It may feel daunting to begin a higher education access initiative or organization. SVR and Advocates for Refugees in Higher Education (ARHE) member Neh Meh urges students who want to start a program on their campus to “work with professors and other students at their university, so that refugees in higher education have a network of people on which they can turn to for guidance and support.” Learn more about ARHE in SVR Member Angela Nguyen’s article [here](#)

Iman Siddiq, SVR member and founder of RSSP, recommends connecting and building relationships with admissions and financial aid offices. She was able to get feedback on the RSSP application and even expanded RSSP to help students at other UC schools because she took the time to nurture these relationships:



*“I started receiving a lot of support from my undergraduate campus’s financial aid and scholarship office. I created a scholarship application, they provided me a ton of feedback on that, they gave me some criteria that I could use to select recipients, they helped me review the applications.”*

*“When the opportunity presented itself the following year, they told me that the undergraduate campus was actually launching a new initiative through which it would be matching scholarship donations.”*

Learn more about Iman’s scholarship, RSSP, in Olivia Issa’s interview [here](#) .





## 4. Creating welcoming campuses

**Populations of concern:** Refugee-background students who entered the U.S. through F-1 or J-1 visas, as well as college students who were resettled through USRAP, asylees, asylum seekers, TPS.

### 4.1 Building a holistic support system

As ONE Refugee Executive Director Raymon Burton emphasizes, universities must go beyond provision of scholarships and build in a holistic support system from the start (check out Jordan Scanlon's article and interview with ONE Refugee [here](#)). Nour Mousa, President of WUSC Local Committee at Huron University (Canada) and WUSC SRP alumni, echoes this recommendation:

*“When you reach the point when you’re able to bring students it’s important to make them aware of the whole situation, what they can get, what kind of support that they can get and what they need to find it for themselves because many students struggle with this after they arrive.” [See [Marc Caron’s interview with Michelle Manks from WUSC](#)]*

SVR member Marc Caron talked to Nour and Michelle Manks (Senior Manager, Durable Solutions for Refugees at WUSC) who said that American university students can build a similar “peer-to-peer support network to help refugees integrate into campus and society.” SVR members and their interviewees note that building a supportive network begins with:

**● Taking stock of and leveraging what already exists on your campus, and also assessing whether or not these resources and services are sensitized to refugee needs.**

There are unique resources and support systems already available on your campus that can be leveraged to support newcomers. As Every Campus a Refugee Founder Dr. Diya Abdo revealed to SVR Member Christina Smith, it is critical to tap into existing services, from libraries and dormitories to immigration law clinics and counseling departments (see her interview with SVR Christina Smith [here](#)).

SVR member Iman Siddiq did so by creating a needs assessment survey for [RSSP](#) students at UCI. Iman learned that, while her university has mental health resources, counselors may not always have training to support students trying to regain a



sense of control and normalcy in the face of lingering conflict-related trauma or the stress of seeking asylum. That's why she and the University of California, Irvine created the Refugee Resource Center for RSSP recipients, through which they are working to connect students to more targeted mental health support services.

## 4.2 Building a welcoming campus culture

In addition to taking stock of, assessing, and leveraging existing systems at your university, 'welcoming' may also require a deeper cultural shift on your campus and in your community. SVR members and advisors have the following advice for shaping campus culture:

● **“A collective sense of community must be strong for a space to feel welcoming” (SVR Member Ava McElhone Yates, based on her interview with Girl Forward, you can watch it [here](#) )**

[Rachel O'Connell from PAIR reinforces Girl Forward's advice](#), adding:

*“It's important for us to have a community feel, to make sure that even when we can't support the students financially (if they're not documented or other legal reasons) that they know 'you're still welcome to come you're welcome here' and help people help the students feel like they belong.”*

Rachel says student advocates can increase “visibility, knowledge and awareness, [which] are important for creating equitable opportunities.” She calls on you to:

● **“Go out of your comfort zone and learn more about refugee communities.”**

Advocacy and awareness-raising begins with education and learning. Rachel recommends learning about the “complexities of the migration and refugee situations on the border and in our country,” and about crises in other countries, such as in Syria and Myanmar.

Similarly, [Aphrodite Al Zouhouri, a Syrian student at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada](#) calls on you to:

- **Learn more, read more, and “know more about students from different backgrounds.”**
- **Challenge media stereotypes about refugees as vulnerable.**
- **Create events for students to share their different backgrounds.”**

SVR Member and University of Chicago student Harley Pomper says student advocates must craft different narratives on campuses, in order to make them more inclusive and welcoming to newcomers. Hang adds that there is a need to:

● **Disrupt harmful narratives about refugees and raise awareness about their contributions, hopes, and dreams.**

Correspondingly, Rachel O’Connell of PAIR believes that advocacy work should be empowering and challenge common stereotypes:

*“It’s important for the community to know and understand what our students are doing in an empowering way. So many times, they are defined by their refugee identities and tragic past history, but these students are very empowered and have a lot to offer.”*

According to SVR Member Ava McElhone Yates, one way to shift victimizing narratives toward more empowering ones is to:

● **“Center the lived experience and voices of [refugees].”**

Centering the lived experiences and voices of refugee backgrounds provides opportunities for refugees themselves to alter campus narratives. Aphrodite Al Zouhouri says:

*“I always introduce myself as a refugee student, because part of my mission is to change the stereotype about refugees... that they are vulnerable students, and they don’t have the capability to go to the university, or they are not strong...So I always keep saying, I am here, I am a strong woman, I am a strong Syrian refugee woman.”*

Similarly, Belma Sadicovic, who was resettled to the U.S. from Bosnia as a child, says she also “radically identifies as a refugee” in order to challenge stereotypes and shift existing narratives. SVR Member Anisha Rai writes, Belma’s “radical identification” as a refugee gave her more confidence in her own identity as a refugee. By privileging refugee voices and lived experiences, student advocates can build common messaging, solidarity, and confidence among peers from refugee backgrounds. *Check out Anisha’s interview with Belma [here](#).*

Providing platforms in which students from refugee backgrounds can make their voices heard empowers them to shape institutional policy. For example, according to Ava McElhone Yates, Girl Forward started a Girls Advisory Board in order to

formalize and give refugee voices a platform to influence decision-making at their organization. [Check Ava's interview with Nyota](#). You can follow their lead by creating a refugee advisory board or similar feedback mechanism on your campus or in your student organization.





## 5. Promoting Opportunities for Long Term Integration

You can work with your university to broker solutions for newcomers that could help them long after they graduate from college.

### 5.1 . Helping Refugees with F-1 or J-1 Status

**Populations of Concern:** Refugee-background students or recent graduates who entered the U.S. through F-1 or J-1 visas.

To help refugees who have entered the U.S. through F-1 or J-1 visas access opportunities for long-term integration, you can:

● **Encourage your university to provide comprehensive support on campus, especially for students with precarious legal status.**

SVR Member [Josiane Matar interviewed DIMA Founder Adrian Melendez](#), who emphasizes the importance of being comprehensive when supporting students from refugee backgrounds. This can include finding ways to support students as they seek asylum or temporary protection ,for which students have the right to apply after arrival to the U.S.

Students advocates, such as those at [University of Pennsylvania](#), have campaigned for free legal support for undocumented students on campus. As a result of U.Penn student advocacy, [Penn Law began offering pro bono services for DACA recipients](#).

You can do similar advocacy on behalf of international students at your university who are seeking asylum or TPS. [Here](#) is the letter U.Penn students wrote to their university president, which you can use for inspiration.

### 5.2. Helping Local Refugee Populations

Populations of concern: College students or recent graduates with refugee background who live in your local community, such as resettled refugees, asylees, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), or asylum seekers. (While refugee students with F-1/J-1 visas can also be considered asylum seekers if they apply for asylum, we consider them as a separate category.)

## What you can do to help your local refugee community:

### ● Help newcomers get their prior credentials recognized.

Refugees 2 College, which was founded by students at University of Michigan, serves as a model for how students can be mobilized to mentor newcomers to get their prior credentials recognized and chart a career path in their new country. R2C works in partnership with Education Credential Evaluators (ECE) Aid in Milwaukee. Primarily, R2C helps newcomers in the U.S., but more recently began helping students overseas through their virtual platform.

Learn more about R2C in Christina Smith's interview with Founder David Kemper [here](#).

### ● Help your peers build their social and professional networks.

As David Kemper tells Christina Smith, newcomers may lack the professional and social capital needed to obtain a job post-graduation. To help them build their professional network, you can ask your peers from refugee backgrounds about their interests, introduce them to colleagues where you intern, or share opportunities with them. You can also organize networking events for newcomer students, following the lead of [ONE Refugee](#).

### ● Compile and share opportunities for internships.

Following [Iman Siddiq's action](#), you can also seek out and share information on internships on or off-campus that do not ask citizenship questions on internship applications, in consideration of those in the process of seeking asylum.

You can also go into your local community and inquire whether or not employers are willing to provide paid internships to those from refugee backgrounds, given that they are more likely to deal with financial burdens. You can also try brokering partnerships between potential employers and your university or local resettlement agency.

### ● Advocate for your university leadership to provide pro bono legal support to students in vulnerable situations (asylum seekers, TPS).

Look to students at [University of Pennsylvania](#) (above), who encouraged their university leadership to provide free legal support for undocumented students on campus. Similar advocacy can be done for students seeking asylum or temporary protection.

## 6. Scenario

**Scenario:** You want your university or college to provide a scholarship for refugee-background students. What steps do you need to take to get started?

### Guiding questions:

- Who are the potential recipients of your scholarship, and how can you help address various challenges they might face in applying to college?
- How can you get buy-in for your initiative from university leadership, faculty, and other students?
- Who on your campus can you identify to help you champion this initiative? Who on and off your campus can you partner with?
- What unique value does your campus bring? What are the existing resources, facilities, and support systems that can be leveraged to support newcomers in applying to the scholarship, as well as after they have been awarded one?
- Are existing resources, facilities, and support systems on your campus sensitized to needs of refugee-background students? Does the dining hall remain open during breaks? Are mental health counselors on your campus sensitized to students who may be dealing with conflict-related trauma or stressors related to seeking asylum?
- Who can you partner with on or off campus to fill any gaps or build capacity? (E.g., local refugee resettlement agencies that can share resources or provide training at your university or college)

● **Identify your target recipient(s) and conduct an initial needs assessment.** Take stock and identify resources on your campus and community: survey your campus and community.

● **Calculate the costs that would need to be covered by a scholarship** (e.g., tuition, housing, dining, health care, class materials). Based on her research and experience, SVR Member Olivia Issa calls on you to think through what funding options may be available on your campus, such as existing grants.

● **Focus on the mutual benefits for students, faculty, and your community.** “We think



it's important to focus on the positive aspects of what they have overcome and how quickly they learned and where they're going and their hopes and dreams." learn more from Rachel O'Connell, PAIR, [here](#).

● **Center the narratives, voices, and lived experiences of refugee-background students in your campaign.** Sharing her experience with raising funds for RSSP, Iman Siddiq tells fellow SVR Member Olivia Issa:

*We actually invited prospective applicants [to a gala]. And they came and met donors and told them their stories. Each table had conversations with these students. When do you get to go to a fundraising dinner where you actually get to meet the beneficiaries? It was a really beautiful event. And it was great for awareness. Don't underestimate awareness. That's the first step towards action.*

● **Tie these narratives and benefits into your university or college's mission and values:** look up your university's mission statement and find a way to connect the goals of the program you hope to start to the mission of the university. [See Olivia's article about Salve Regina.](#)

As Olivia Issa states in her article about Salve Regina, "this meant focusing on the school's religious roots and dedication to social justice." Columbia University, on the other hand, focused on ["bringing the world to the university and the university to the world"](#)

● **Identify and build relationships with key stakeholders or "champions" on your campus who can help you negotiate with university leadership:** Follow Iman Siddiq's lead. She built a relationship with her Admissions Office during the process of starting RSSP. When the timing was right, they offered to match donations at UC-Irvine, enabling her to use the funds she raised to support students at other UC schools. Learn more about Iman's process [here](#).

● **Get support from your fellow classmates and faculty and demonstrate that support:** identify which faculty, staff, or student organizations on your campus might be interested in supporting you as you negotiate with university leadership.

● **Make the ask:** present your request to someone within the school administration, ideally a Dean or faculty department chair, and ask that they take your request to a meeting with their colleagues. Olivia Issa says, "This is particularly important if you hope to get [tuition waivers](#); Deans are the people who could make this happen."

- **Emphasize the practicality and viability of starting a program for refugees:** [According to Dr. Diya Abdo, founder of ECAR at Guilford College](#), “challenges are ideological, not practical. The work is easy to do- we already do all of these things on college campuses. This work is community engagement, and not a partisan political issue” .
- **Offer to help raise funds for wrap around support such as books, dining, transportation:** We believe it is your university’s responsibility to offer a scholarship, but you can supplement their potential commitments by raising funds for additional expenses. You can do so through crowdfunding, or by applying for external grants. (Your offer to supplement university commitments can even help you negotiate with university administrators when you are ready to approach them with your proposal to launch a scholarship.)
- **Hold your university accountable to keep student needs and strengths at the center of the program:** while getting ‘buy-in’ is essential, “schools often provide scholarships out of a desire for diversity...If the focus is on diversity, then the students aren’t going to be the focus and aren’t going to get the resources and the support that they need” (Raymon Burton, One Refugee). As students, you might be interacting with newcomer students more than anyone else on your campus. You are uniquely positioned to check in with and watch out for one another.
- **“Start small then scale up”:** Grace Atkinson of Jusoor advises SVR Member Hang Le, “don’t try and go in with a program with 550 mentors and mentees first out.” She says it’s important to start small, then scale up after a success pilot. Ideally, this should be done in partnership with faculty champions, fellow students, and experienced organizations on or off campus. This is what Columbia University students did after successfully piloting their scholarships for Syrians. Now, [this scholarship is a campus-wide initiative, targeting 30 students, domestically and abroad, per year.](#)
- **Weather the uncertainties, remember your why, and don’t give up.** In sharing her experience advocating for a scholarship on her campus, Iman Siddiq tells fellow SVR Member Olivia Issa:

*Don’t underestimate yourself as a college student. You can have much more of an impact than you believe. Even if all seems lost, even if you feel like there’s no hope, there’s always a way [to start a scholarship]. For me, that was crowdfunding. The number one way is to get the university to do it...If not, try to see if the students can collectively support it. But*

*worst case, crowdfunding has a lot of benefits too because we were able to bring the whole community together.*

● **Join SVR**, whose network of student leaders across the country can offer you a safe space as you embark on starting a scholarship or mentorship initiative for refugees or connect with you people who've been down this road before, who want to support you. We're in this together.

## 6. References & Recommended Resources

1. You can access all of the above referenced and other interviews and articles by SVR members [here](#)
2. [Columbia University Tamer Center for Social Enterprise](#)
3. [Inclusive Admissions Policies for Displaced and Vulnerable Students](#).(AACRAO).
4. Syracuse University's [TRAC Immigration Database](#)
5. [“Undergrad and grad students join forces to call for pro bono legal representation for DACA recipients.”](#) (See U.Penn student letter [here](#).)
6. [U.S. Refugee Admissions Program \(USRAP\) departures](#)
7. [UNHCR Resettlement Data Finder](#)
8. [University Engagement Toolkit](#): How Campuses are Helping Refugees
9. The U.S. asylum system – learn more [here](#).
- 10.[What's the Different Between a Scholarship and a Tuition Waiver?](#)
- 11.[WRAPS](#): Refugee Processing Center's Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System



