

# **POLS 177**

## **Comparative Environmental Politics**

SUMMER SESSION 2026 (JUNE 22 – JULY 31)

### **Course meetings:**

Monday–Thursday, 9:30am–10:35am

Location: ILP 3312

### **Instructor:**

Denis Lomov, lomov@ucsb.edu

Office: Ellison Hall 2815

Office Hours: Mondays, 10:45 AM – 12:45 PM (Ellison Hall 2815)

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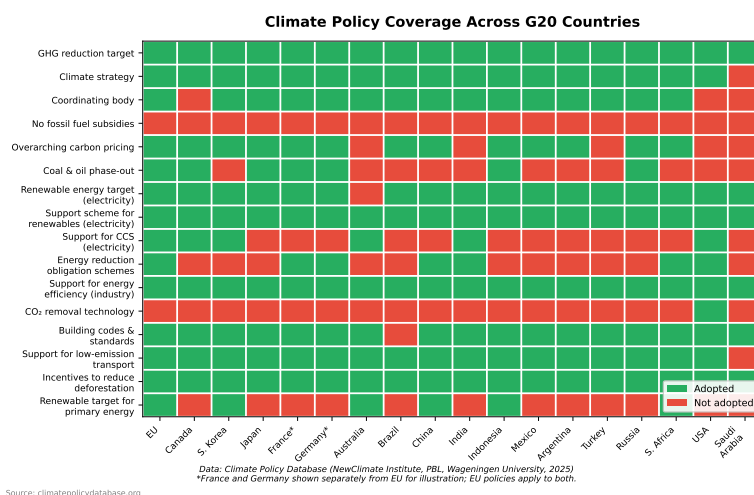
## **Course Description**

Many of the most serious environmental challenges facing humanity today are global in scope, but their effects can be both global and local. Issues like climate change, long-range air pollution, water shortages, ozone layer depletion, and deforestation all transcend borders. Some issues like nuclear waste, heat waves, and wildfires require multilevel governance intervention. Taken together, addressing these environmental threats will involve different regions and governments working together. Yet, many efforts to coordinate global environmental policies remain stunted. For instance, twenty years of global climate negotiations have produced few successes; carbon pollution continues to be dumped into the global atmosphere by countries around the world despite few actions at the international and national levels. Why?

How can one understand differences between countries in the timing and content of their environmental policies? Why do business interests have a stronger say on environmental policymaking in some countries as opposed to others? How does this change policy outcomes? These are all questions asked by comparative environmental politics researchers.

This course will explore the political dimension of environmental policy action and inaction. To this end, we will focus on understanding differences between countries in their domestic politics of the environment. However, we will also use this understanding to shed light on the international politics of the environment. We will discuss how domestic political conditions serve as a critical building block for international environmental negotiations. We will also explore how ideas, interests, and institutions shape national environmental politics. We will evaluate whether current political incentives are sufficient to solve such serious environmental threats as dangerous, human-caused climate change. We also examine different national approaches to climate tech innovation and why some countries prioritize certain solutions over others.

The course is organized in three parts. The first part introduces the theoretical frameworks political scientists use to understand environmental politics, including collective action problems, distributive conflict, and ideational politics. The second part examines what comparative politics can teach us about cross-national differences in environmental politics, including the role of movements, institutions, and economic structures both in democratic and non-democratic contexts. The third part engages with specific policy challenges: energy transition, carbon removal, nuclear policy, and innovation.



Data: Climate Policy Database (NewClimate Institute, PBL, Wageningen University, 2025). [climatepolicydatabase.org](https://climatepolicydatabase.org).

## Requirements

Summer sessions are short and I will do my best to distribute the workload across all 6 weeks equally. This course consists of lectures four days per week, weekly quizzes, a simulation followed by a response paper, one blue-book midterm exam, and a final project that will require an oral presentation evaluated by me and your peers during the last two days of Week 6. This is an *upper-division* course, so active participation, questions, and discussions among students are expected, especially given that the course does not have sections.

Students are required to:

1. Complete the required readings before each week's lectures and be prepared to discuss the content of the readings in class.
2. Engage actively in class by attending regularly, taking notes, and contributing to discussions and in-class activities.
3. Take short weekly quizzes (3–5 questions each) on the week's readings and lectures—online through Canvas in Weeks 1–2 and in class in Weeks 4–5.
4. Take the in-class midterm exam in Week 3 (Thursday, July 9), covering Parts I and II of the course.

5. Participate in a climate negotiation simulation during the course. You will represent a country or bloc of nations and negotiate a global climate agreement using the [C-ROADS climate policy simulator](#).
6. *After* the simulation, you will prepare a 3–4 page response paper analyzing the negotiation through the lens of course theories covered in Weeks 1–4 and submit it to Canvas before the end of Week 5. More information will be shared with students in Week 1.
7. Prepare a final project about a policy issue you have learned in this course. The due date is the last day of class, with a status report due in Week 4. You can use whatever medium you like—except for a standard essay (Adapted from Prof. Hakeem Jefferson’s *learn by teaching* assignment at Stanford). Otherwise, here are some ideas, but please feel free to be creative beyond these: you can record a podcast, make a short film, create a photo exhibit or a diorama, draft a series of comics, write a magazine article, or a series of blog posts, a set of poems, design an infographic series, or build an interactive website. Students will present their projects in Week 6 on the last two days of class. Regardless of the medium you choose, I will evaluate all projects using the following criteria:
  - Demonstrates a clear understanding of a comparative environmental politics concept. This can be a policy issue or a theory.
  - Includes a clear problem definition or a question
  - Makes explicit why the concept is important for understanding cross-national environmental outcomes
  - Uses language that is accessible to a broad public audience
  - Demonstrates effort commensurate with a final course project
  - Showcases creativity and imaginative thinking

## Grading

- Final Creative Project: 35% (Project: 20%, Status Report: 5%, Presentation: 10%)
- Midterm Exam (in-class, blue book): 25%
- Weekly Quizzes: 15%
- Simulation & Response Paper: 15%
- Participation (attendance & engagement): 10%

Late assignments will accumulate a penalty of 10% per day, up to a maximum of 4 days. Assignments received more than four days after the deadline will receive a grade of 0. Any requests for extensions should be directed to the instructor in advance of the deadline and will require documentation.

### ***Weekly Quizzes (15%)***

Four short quizzes (3–5 questions each) assess your engagement with the assigned readings and lecture materials. The Week 1 and Week 2 quizzes are completed online through Canvas; the Week 4 and Week 5 quizzes are given in class. Each quiz consists of multiple-choice and short identification questions. No quiz is given in Week 3 (the midterm week) or Week 6.

### ***Midterm Exam (25%)***

An in-person blue-book exam will be held during Week 3. The exam will consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions covering material from Parts I and II of the course.

### ***Simulation & Response Paper (15%)***

You will participate in the *World Climate Simulation*, a role-playing exercise in which you represent a country or bloc of nations (e.g., the United States, the EU, China, India, Other Developed Nations, or Other Developing Nations) negotiating a global climate agreement. Using the [C-ROADS climate policy simulator](#), you will propose emissions reduction pledges, negotiate financial transfers, and observe the real-time climate impacts of collective decisions. Country briefing packets will be distributed in advance so you can prepare your delegation's negotiating position.

After the simulation (Week 4), you will write a 3–4 page response paper analyzing the negotiation dynamics through the lens of course theories. Your paper should address: What strategies did different countries employ? How did the simulation reflect (or diverge from) the theoretical frameworks we have studied: collective action problems, distributive conflict, asset-driven explanations, ideational explanations, or others? The response paper is due at the end of Week 5 (Friday, July 24). A formatting guide for this response paper will be provided during the first week of the quarter.

### ***Final Creative Project (35%)***

The final project grade is broken down as follows:

- **Project (20%)**: The final deliverable. Quality and depth of engagement with comparative environmental politics concepts, creativity, accessibility, and effort.
- **Status Report (5%)**: A one-page planning memo due at the end of Week 4. The memo should describe: (1) the concept or topic you plan to explore, (2) the medium you will use, (3) a brief outline or plan of how you will execute the project, and (4) what sources or course materials you plan to draw on. This is your opportunity to receive feedback before investing significant effort.
- **Presentation (10%)**: During the last two lectures of the course (Wednesday and Thursday of Week 6), you will present your project to the class. Presentations should convey the core argument or insight of your project. This is also an opportunity to receive peer feedback.

Final projects are due on **July 30, 12:00 PM**.

### *Participation (10%)*

Because this course has no separate discussion sections, our class meetings are where discussion happens. Your participation grade reflects both attendance and engagement: coming prepared, asking questions, and contributing to in-class discussion and activities. See the Attendance & Participation policy below for how absences affect this grade.

### *Summary of Deadlines*

| Week | Dates        | Deadlines & Assessments                                                                                           |
|------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Jun 22–25    | One quiz (online)                                                                                                 |
| 2    | Jun 29–Jul 2 | One quiz (online)                                                                                                 |
| 3    | Jul 6–9      | Midterm Exam (Thursday, Jul 9)                                                                                    |
| 4    | Jul 13–16    | Global Climate Agreement Simulation (in class, Mon Jul 13); one in-class quiz; Status Report due (Friday, Jul 17) |
| 5    | Jul 20–23    | One in-class quiz; Simulation Response Paper due (Friday, Jul 24)                                                 |
| 6    | Jul 27–31    | Final Creative Project due (Jul 30, 12:00 PM)                                                                     |

### *Grading Scale*

|    |      |       |    |      |       |    |      |       |    |      |       |
|----|------|-------|----|------|-------|----|------|-------|----|------|-------|
| A  | ≥ 93 | (4.0) | B+ | ≥ 87 | (3.3) | C+ | ≥ 77 | (2.3) | D+ | ≥ 67 | (1.3) |
| A– | ≥ 90 | (3.7) | B  | ≥ 83 | (3.0) | C  | ≥ 73 | (2.0) | D  | ≥ 63 | (1.0) |
|    |      |       | B– | ≥ 80 | (2.7) | C– | ≥ 70 | (1.7) | D– | ≥ 60 | (0.7) |

F: below 60 (0.0)

An A+ is awarded at the instructor's discretion to recognize exceptional work that goes well beyond course expectations.

Your letter grade is determined by your exact final course percentage meeting the minimum cutoff for that grade. Percentages are **not rounded** and grades are not curved: for example, an 89.9% is a B+ (not an A–), and a 92.9% is an A–. There will be no borderline cases to negotiate.

### *Grade Appeals*

Grade appeals must be made in writing no sooner than 24 hours after the assignment or exam is returned and no later than 4 days after it is returned. Please provide written justification for your appeal and include the assignment or exam in question. Please keep in mind that an appeal will invoke a review of the full assignment and could result in an even lower grade.

### ***Exam Makeup***

Any foreseeable reason for missing an exam must be reported to the instructor as soon as possible. In the case that you must miss an exam for a legitimate and documented reason, the instructor must be notified *at least a week in advance* and a make-up exam will be provided.

### ***Attendance & Participation***

In this course I expect you to be present and engaged. That means that you need to be here, in class, for the learning to happen. I understand that you may encounter situations where you can't attend class; for this reason, you may miss two meetings without penalty. Each additional absence reduces your 10% participation grade by 2 points (out of 10). If you miss more than five classes, you will have missed the majority of the learning experiences in the course and will be unable to pass.

### **Required Reading Materials**

There are no required books or course readers for this class. Instead, readings will be available for download through the UCSB library system or will be posted to the class Canvas website. Any assigned video or interactive content is freely available at the indicated links. You should complete each week's readings before attending the corresponding lectures.

## Course Outline

All readings for the course can be downloaded from the course Canvas page.

### Part I: Theoretical Frameworks

#### Week 1 (June 22–25): Environmental Problems as Political Problems

##### Topics:

1. Introduction & Course Overview
2. Environmental Problems as Political Problems
3. Environmental Politics as a Collective Action Problem
4. Environmental Politics as a Distributive Conflict Problem

##### Readings:

- Paul Steinberg and Stacy VanDeveer. 2012. “Comparative environmental politics in a global world.” Chapter 1 in Steinberg and VanDeveer, eds. *Comparative Environmental Politics: Theory, Practice, Prospects*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp. 3–28.
- Michael Ross. 2025. “[The new political economy of climate change.](#)” *World Politics* 77(1): 155–165 only.
- Garrett Hardin. 1968. “[The tragedy of the commons.](#)” *Science* 162(3859): 1243–1248.
- Elinor Ostrom. 2009. “Collective action and the commons: What have we learned?” Lecture delivered at Cornell University, 17 September. <http://www.cornell.edu/video/elinor-ostrom-collective-action-and-the-commons>
- Matto Mildenberger. 2019. “[The tragedy of the Tragedy of the Commons.](#)” *Scientific American*, April 23.
- *A Matter of Degrees* (podcast), Episode 1: “Give up your climate guilt.” <https://www.degreespod.com/episodes/episode-01>
- PBS *Frontline*. 2022. *The Power of Big Oil*, Part I: “Denial.” <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/the-power-of-big-oil/>
- Optional: Southern Poverty Law Center. “Garrett Hardin.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/garrett-hardin>

## Week 2 (June 29–July 2): Advocacy, Ideas, Effects, and Movements

### Topics:

5. Problem Definitions and Advocacy
6. Turning Climate Effects into Policy Solutions
7. Environmental Politics as an Ideational Conflict
8. Comparative Origins of Environmental Movements

### Readings:

- James Scott. 1998. “Nature and space.” Chapter 1 in *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Harrison Tasoff. 2025. “Heat exposure in California schools prompts multi-campus research project.” *The Current* (UC Santa Barbara), 6 May. <https://news.ucsb.edu/2025/021858/heat-exposure-california-schools-prompts-multi-campus-research-project>
- Parrish Bergquist, Matto Mildemberger, and Leah C. Stokes. 2020. “Combining climate, economic, and social policy builds public support for climate action in the US.” *Environmental Research Letters* 15(5): 054019.
- Sanya Carley and David Konisky. 2020. “The justice and equity implications of the clean energy transition.” *Nature Energy* 5: 569–577.
- Miranda Schreurs. 2002. “The birth of environmental movements and programs.” Chapter 2 in *Environmental Politics in Japan, Germany, and the United States*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kate O’Neill. 2012. “The comparative study of environmental movements.” Chapter 5 in Steinberg and VanDeveer, eds. *Comparative Environmental Politics*. MIT Press. pp. 115–142.

## Part II: Comparative Perspectives

### Week 3 (July 6–9): Political Institutions

### Topics:

9. Institutions and Environmental Policy
10. Electoral Systems and Green Parties
11. Federalism, Separation of Powers, and Veto Points

### MIDTERM EXAM (in class) – Thursday, July 9

### Readings:



- Matto Mildemberger. 2020. *Carbon Captured: How Business and Labor Control Climate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Chapter 1.
- Lyle Scruggs. 2003. “Pluralism, corporatism and environmental performance.” Chapter 5 in *Sustaining Abundance*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 122–161.
- Jared J. Finnegan. 2022. “[Institutions, climate change, and the foundations of long-term policymaking](#).” *Comparative Political Studies* 55(7): 1198–1235.
- David Vogel. 1993. “Representing diffuse interests in environmental policymaking.” In R. Kent Weaver and Bert Rockman, eds., *Do Institutions Matter?* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. pp. 237–271.
- Lyle Scruggs. 2003. “Political institutions.” Chapter 6 in *Sustaining Abundance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Excerpts from Matthew Crenson. 1971. *The Un-politics of Air Pollution: A Study of Non-Decisionmaking in the Cities*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

#### **Week 4 (July 13–16): Comparative Cases and the Energy Transition**

##### Topics:

12. **Global Climate Agreement Simulation (in class) – Monday, July 13**
13. Global climate cooperation
14. Environmental Politics in Democratic Countries
15. Environmental Politics in Authoritarian Countries

#### **STATUS REPORT DUE – Friday, July 17**

##### Readings:

- David G. Victor and Robert O. Keohane. 2016. “[Cooperation and discord in global climate policy](#).” *Nature Climate Change* 6(6): 570–575.
- Andreas Goldthau, Kirsten Westphal, Morgan Bazilian, and Michael Bradshaw. 2019. “[How the energy transition will reshape geopolitics](#).” *Nature* 569: 29–31.
- Jana von Stein. 2022. “[Democracy, autocracy, and everything in between: How domestic institutions affect environmental protection](#).” *British Journal of Political Science* 52(1): 339–357.
- Paasha Mahdavi. 2020. *Power Grab: Political Survival through Extractive Resource Nationalization*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

## Part III: Contemporary Challenges

### Week 5 (July 20–23): Comparative Energy Policy and Innovation

#### Topics:

16. Comparative Energy Policy
17. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)
18. Comparative Cases: Nuclear Energy in Europe & Asia
19. Climate Innovation in Comparative Perspective

### SIMULATION RESPONSE PAPER DUE – Friday, July 24

#### Readings:

- Johannes Urpelainen and Llewelyn Hughes. 2015. “[Interests, institutions, and climate policy: Explaining the choice of policy instruments for the energy sector.](#)” *Environmental Science & Policy* 54: 52–63.
- Lars H. Gulbrandsen, Jørgen Wettestad, and Tor Håkon Jackson Inderberg. 2024. “[Exploring paths and innovation in Norwegian carbon capture and storage policy.](#)” *Environmental Policy and Governance* 34(2): 125–136.
- Jessica R. Lovering, Arthur Yip, and Ted Nordhaus. 2016. “[Historical construction costs of global nuclear power reactors.](#)” *Energy Policy* 91: 371–382.
- Bettina B. F. Wittneben. 2012. “[The impact of the Fukushima nuclear accident on European energy policy.](#)” *Environmental Science & Policy* 15(1): 1–3. (optional)
- Jonas Meckling, Clara Galeazzi, Esther Shears, et al. 2022. “[Energy innovation funding and institutions in major economies.](#)” *Nature Energy* 7: 876–885.
- Gregory Nemet. 2019. Excerpts from [How Solar Energy Became Cheap: A Model for Low-Carbon Innovation](#). New York: Routledge.

### Week 6 (July 27–31): The Future of Environmental Politics

#### Topics:

20. In-class presentations
21. Environmental Politics, Democracy, & the Future
22. In-class presentations
23. Wrap-Up or What Did We Learn?

## FINAL CREATIVE PROJECTS DUE – Thursday, July 30, 12:00 PM

### Readings:

- Marina Povitkina. 2018. “[The limits of democracy in tackling climate change.](#)” *Environmental Politics* 27(3): 411–432.
- Leah C. Stokes. 2020. “A field guide for transformation.” In Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson, eds., *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*. New York: One World.

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*Note: This schedule is subject to change. Any modifications will be announced in class and posted to Canvas at least one week in advance.*

## Academic Resource Center / Disability Support

If you have special learning needs, it is your responsibility to notify the instructor as soon as possible during the *first* week of the course. Students registered with the Disabled Students Program (DSP) should present their accommodation letters early in the session. For more information, go to <https://dsp.ext-prod.sa.ucsb.edu/>

## Academic Integrity

### *Ethical Writing (including plagiarism, generative AI, and misuse of sources)*

I expect that the work you submit in this course will represent your work. You can use generative AI to help you brainstorm or to polish your writing surfaces (e.g., make sure your commas are in the right place) if you would like to. If you do use generative AI, please indicate that you have done so when you submit your writing so that I am aware of this. If you use another person’s words or ideas and forget to cite them, that is misuse of sources, and I will discuss that with you. If you intentionally use another person’s words or ideas and do not cite them, that is plagiarism—and a violation of UCSB’s Academic Code of Conduct that can have serious consequences for your academic record. If you use generative AI and do not indicate that you have done so, that is unethical use of generative AI and will be treated accordingly.

### *Academic integrity — plagiarism (and not plagiarism)*

Universities are places dedicated to the production of knowledge by people. This happens when people (like you!) bring your ideas together with others. It’s important, though, to observe the conventions (formal and informal rules) associated with knowledge production in this process. This is especially true when it comes to creating the kind of written work you will produce in this class. It’s critical to use sources honestly, to indicate when you are drawing on materials from others. There are two concepts important to understand in conjunction with this idea.

First is **plagiarism**, which is a violation of academic integrity and UCSB policies. Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately passes off another's words or ideas without acknowledging their source. In other words, plagiarism means appropriating resources and *not* citing them. For example, turning in another's work as your own is plagiarism. Plagiarized assignments (including copying of a friend's homework) will receive a grade of 0 and may result in additional disciplinary action. You can view the university's policy on the [Office of Student Conduct website](#).

Second is **misuse of sources**, occasions when a writer does not properly cite a source, misuses quotations, includes too much of an original source in a paraphrase or summary, or commits similar unintentional violations of academic protocol. If you misuse sources, I will work with you on appropriately incorporating and/or citing the sources. Note that some audiences/instructors will consider misuse of sources to be plagiarism; for this reason, it is extremely important for you to identify the conventions associated with source use and citations in any class.

## Intellectual Property – Course Materials

All course materials (class lectures and discussions, handouts, examinations, web materials) and the intellectual content of the course itself are protected by United States Federal Copyright Law and the California Civil Code. UC Policy 102.23 expressly prohibits students (and all other persons) from recording lectures or discussions and from distributing or selling course materials without the prior written permission of the instructor. (See <http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/2710530/PACAOS-100>.) Students are permitted to make notes solely for their own private educational use. Exceptions to accommodate students with disabilities may be granted with appropriate documentation.

## Mandatory Reporting

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on this campus. I want to ensure that students feel they can speak to me, but I also want students to be informed that I have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as an instructor. I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on UCSB's campus or in the community. A result of my mandated report will be that students will receive outreach and resources from the campus Title IX office. Students may speak to someone confidentially by contacting CARE, Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education at the 24/7 advocacy line at (805) 893-4613 or visit them in person at the Student Resource Building.

## Human Matters

### *Food Security and CalFresh*

If you are facing any challenges securing food or housing, and believe this may affect your performance in the class, you are urged to meet with a Food Security and CalFresh Advocate,

who is aware of the broad variety of resources that UCSB has to offer (see their drop-in hours at [food.ucsb.edu](http://food.ucsb.edu)). You are also urged to contact the professor or teaching assistant if you are comfortable doing so. Please visit [food.ucsb.edu](http://food.ucsb.edu) for additional resources including CalFresh, the AS Food Bank, and more.

### ***Mental Health***

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationships, depression, and cultural differences can interfere with the ability of students to succeed and thrive. If you are experiencing any difficulties meeting class requirements, or any difficulties in your personal life, please contact UCSB Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) at (805) 893-4411 or visit [caps.sa.ucsb.edu](http://caps.sa.ucsb.edu).

### ***Sexual Harassment & Violence***

UCSB does not tolerate sexual harassment or sexual violence, which is prohibited by University policy and state and federal law. The Title IX Compliance and Sexual Harassment Policy Compliance Office (TIX/SHPC) provides assistance in preventing, resolving, and investigating complaints of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and gender discrimination. For more information, visit <https://oeosh.ucsb.edu/titleix/>.

### ***Non-Discrimination Policy***

All students have the right to learn and participate in a classroom environment free of intimidation, harassment, and discrimination based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, religious or political beliefs and affiliations. I will address any related issues that surface immediately; please help me to cultivate a positive classroom environment by communicating any concerns that you have.

### ***Students Who Are Undocumented and from Mixed-Status Families***

You are welcome in this class, and I am here to support you and your growth. If at any point your or your family members' immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific criteria, you may request confidential accommodations. I value your contributions and want you to feel safe engaging in this class.

With support and resources, students who are undocumented and/or from mixed-status families can thrive in higher education. At UCSB, there is an Undocumented Student Services (USS) department that can help with advising, free immigration legal services, scholarship information, and other on- and off-campus resources. Their services are safe and confidential. For more information, go to <https://uss.sa.ucsb.edu/>. You can also reach them at [sa-eopundocustudentservi@ucsb.edu](mailto:sa-eopundocustudentservi@ucsb.edu), (805) 893-5609, and find them on the 2nd floor of the Student Resource Building (inside the EOP suite).