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**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE UNWANTED**

by

CLAUDIA ESTELA CHAVEZ MCKAY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
University of San Diego

April 16, 2010

Dissertation Committee:

Kenneth Gonzalez, Ph.D., Chair  
Reyes Quezada, Ed.D., Member  
Rose Linda Martinez, Ed.D., Member



## **Abstract**

According to the U.S. Constitution as construed by the Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982) Supreme Court Case, all children in the United States - from kindergarten through grade twelve - have a right to a free public education regardless of citizenship; however, undocumented students seeking to continue their education beyond high school face multiple barriers. Little is known about the actual experiences of undocumented students who have acquired a university degree. The purpose of this study was to understand the collegiate experiences of undocumented students, specifically the process of persisting through college graduation and their contributions to society post graduation.

This study employed qualitative data methods to explore undocumented students' collegiate experiences. Twenty-one in-depth interviews were conducted. A concept modeling approach (Padilla, 1991) was the method of data analysis used to understand and describe their experiences. The following research questions guided the study: 1) How do undocumented students access U.S. colleges? 2) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist? 3) What factors support their efforts to persist? 4) In what ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society?

The findings of the study revealed that accessing and persisting through college involved several elements of encouragement and discouragement. The elements of encouragement included: college preparatory programs and events, advice from counselors and teachers, private scholarships, family and friends, networking groups, and life improvements. The elements of discouragement consisted of: the predicament of having undocumented status, advice from counselors, the lack of federal funds available

for undocumented students, economic hardships, familial obstacles, and undocumented stigmatism. In addition, the data indicated a number of ways participants contributed to society. For example, upon college graduation all participants choose careers in the helping professions. They became teachers, counselors, advisors, medical doctors, scholars, and administrators. The significance of this study contributed to the knowledge of student persistence in higher education, immigrant student experiences, and state and federal immigration policy.

## DEDICATION

In dedication to the loving memory of Conrada Chavez, my grandmother and matriarch to our family, a strong and amazing immigrant from Chihuahua, Mexico. She finally became a U.S. citizen and had the opportunity to vote for the president in her late eighties. *Abuelita Con* (grandmother) taught me to never give up on my dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for the many blessings that have been bestowed upon me. Second, I am absolutely grateful for my hardworking parents, who sacrificed so much to give me a better life. Through their example, they have instilled my motivation to excel, succeed, and progress in my educational endeavors. In addition, I have become the person I am today because of their guidance and passion for the American dream. Third, I would not have been able to reach my academic goals without the loving support and encouragement of my wonderful husband, John.

With much gratitude, I give a special thank you to my dissertation chair Dr. Kenneth Gonzalez for directing and mentoring me through my educational journey. I offer my appreciation to my dissertation committee: Dr. Reyes Quezada and Dr. Linda Rose Martinez for their assistance. I would also like to acknowledge my uncle Peter Roos, without his determination to help immigrants this dissertation would not have been possible. Lastly, I greatly appreciate all the people who have made this research possible, including those who helped me find my sample, especially those who participated in the interviews and opened their hearts and souls to share their stories, thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

U.S. immigration policies are a national issue. From the cover of Time Magazine (Barlett & Steele, 2004; Thornburgh, 2006; Thornburgh, 2007; Tumulty, 2006; Von Drehle, 2008) to the front pages of The New York Times (Archibold, 2006; Preston, 2009; Swarns, 2006), immigration topics enthrall the national spotlight. Recent and current legislation focuses on tightening borders, limiting or expanding guest worker permits, and alternative citizenship options for undocumented immigrants currently living and working in the United States.

The topic of immigration also has appeared in political campaigns throughout the nation. For example, in the 2008 national elections, it was not uncommon for candidates to use the topic of immigration as a platform for their campaigns. In particular, in the 2008 presidential election, immigration was one of the top topics for discussion, second to the war in Iraq and the economy (Caroll, 2007). Moreover, today immigration remains a central topic of debate in both the Senate and the House of Representatives (Preston, 2009; Preston, 2010, Zeleny, 2009). Currently, Steve Poizner, a candidate for California governor is using illegal immigration as an election issue (Mariucci, 2010).

Legislation focusing on homeland security is imbedded with immigration reform, especially in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> (9-11) terrorist attacks. The 9-11 catastrophes opened up a political window to revisit immigration in order to secure the country against future terrorist acts (Johnson, 2002; Leiken, 2002). Consequently, the number of proposed bills regarding immigration reform has increased significantly.

One bill, House of Representatives 4437, has received unprecedented attention. On December 16, 2005, the Houses of Representatives passed a border security bill titled: Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. House Judiciary Committee Chair Representative, Jim Sensenbrenner, introduced the bill; some refer to it as the Sensenbrenner bill. This bill included the following provisions: jailing any individual for up to five years who aids an undocumented immigrant, allowing immigrants to be detained without review by a judge, allowing state and local law enforcement agencies and officers to enforce immigration laws, following a "guilty-until-proven-innocent" rule for immigrants; and a number of other provisions (HR 4437). As a result of the introduction of the bill, large groups of citizens throughout the nation began to protest.

Never in the history of our nation have there been so many nationwide mass protests, demonstrations, and walkouts regarding immigration. In 2006, a series of immigration protests prompted national and international attention. On March 7, approximately 30,000 individuals protested in Washington D.C. opposing the Sensenbrenner bill. Then, on March 11, an estimated 100,000 people voiced their support for immigrants in the streets of Chicago. Next, on March 25, thousands followed similar protests in cities across the nation. For example, in California, police estimated more than 500,000 people marched in Los Angeles in support of immigrant rights (Ferre et al., 2006; Mariscal, 2006). It is claimed to be amongst one of the largest demonstrations for any cause in recent U.S. history (Prengaman, 2006).

Other marches against the bill occurred on March 25, 2006 within cities such as Phoenix, Dallas, Atlanta, Milwaukee, Charlotte, and Columbus (Mariscal, 2006;

Watanabe & Becerra, 2006). In addition, a number of high school students walked out of class to protest their disagreement with the Sensenbrenner bill (Moran, 2006; Ochoa, 2006). Then on April 10, 2006 hundreds of thousands of people continued to protest in 102 cities and towns across the nation, including the National Mall in Washington D.C., calling this day the "Day of Action for Immigrant Justice" (Swams, 2006; York, 2006). Furthermore, a third wave of large protests escalated on May 1, 2006 when over one million people participated in mass demonstrations across the nation in support of immigrant rights; this day has been referred to as "The Great American Boycott" or "A Day without an Immigrant" (Archibold, 2006). Although the HR4437 bill passed in the House of Representatives by a 239-183 vote, it did not become a law because it did not pass at the Senate level.

Most agree that the current immigration laws need to be reformed, regardless of where they stand in the debate. As a result, immigration rallies and marches continue over this contentious issue. For example, on March 21, 2010 tens of thousands of immigrants and activists filled the Washington Mall demanding immigration reform (Preston, 2010). The ambiguities in the current federal immigration laws only have exacerbated the issue. Consequently, arguments pertaining to whether congress should prelude undocumented immigrants broader rights have captured the nation's attention.

Individuals who are in favor of according undocumented immigrants broader rights support a humanitarian argument. These individuals argue that we must value human dignity and worth, regardless of citizenship. They suggest that immigrants should be allowed to obtain basic needs, including food, clothing, and shelter. Proponents with

this prospective also insist that immigrants be entitled to the human and civil rights of working, earning a living, providing for their families, and accessing an education.

Those who support the rights of immigrants also claim that undocumented immigrants contribute substantially to the U.S. economy. They note "immigration causes a large redistribution of wealth from labor to capital" (Borjas, 1994 p.7). Studies show that undocumented immigrants contribute positively to the economy by paying taxes in their state of residence (Iza & Rouge, 2005), providing inexpensive labor, and opening immigrant businesses (Suarez-Orozco, 1995). In addition, reports indicate that undocumented immigrants pay more in income taxes, local taxes, and Social Security than the cost of public services they use (Borjas, 1995). Although undocumented immigrants pay into unemployment insurance and Social Security through taxes and payroll deductions, they do not receive those benefits (Hayes, 2001). Moreover, a recent study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that immigrants do not take jobs away from U.S. citizens; rather, they occupy low-paying and unskilled jobs that U.S. citizen are unwilling to perform (Kochhar, 2006).

Conversely, those in opposition to undocumented immigration believe that undocumented immigrants should not be accorded broader rights because they have broken the law. They argue that those who have broken immigration laws should not receive broader rights such as health care, education, and the right to work. Those who oppose social services for undocumented immigrants claim that it harms the economic wealth of the nation. These individuals insist that undocumented immigrants are keeping wages of unskilled workers low, preventing wage increases (Martin, 2005). They argue that undocumented immigrants are an economic burden, using medical, educational, and

financial services, costing taxpayers millions of dollars (Hayes, 2001; Martin, 2005). Those in opposition to undocumented immigrant rights insist that natural, social, and public resources are a right for only American citizens. They view the undocumented immigrant population as clearly unwanted.

Regardless of where one stands in the immigration debate, there is the question of what to do with the undocumented children of undocumented immigrants who had no choice to come to this country. Their parents made the decision for them, which led to their undocumented and unwanted status. They were too young to both choose their undocumented status and, as a consequence, be held accountable for illegal actions (Aleinikoff, et al., 2003; Bruno & Kenzi, 2002; Legomsky, 2002). According to the Supreme Court, undocumented children who were brought to the U.S. clandestinely by their parents are not accountable for the unlawful actions of their parents, (457 U.S. 202) but nonetheless they are viewed as unwanted.

In fact, a Supreme Court Case in 1982 titled *Plyler v. Doe* (457 U.S. 202) ruled that all children from kindergarten to grade twelve have a right to a free public education regardless of citizenship. As a consequence, a substantial number of undocumented immigrant students have graduated from U.S. public schools. Although these undocumented students have access to a publicly funded kindergarten through grade twelve education, the law does not guarantee that they have a right to pay in-state tuition rates to continue their education after high school graduation.

These undocumented high school graduates have limited opportunities in attaining a university degree because of their undocumented status. They endure such problems as: psychological stress from illegally entering the country, which has become



more dangerous due to stricter border surveillance; fear of deportation, which may result in limiting contact to health services; not being allowed to obtain a license to drive, ineligibility to work legally after high school graduation, and lack of access to scholarships and financial aid for postsecondary institutions (Martinez, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In addition, the discourse of allowing undocumented college students to pay in-state tuition rates has developed into a complex issue (Olivas, 1995, 2004).

National and state legislation regarding undocumented students' access to a higher education has been ambiguous. For more than twenty years, state and federal legislation has been inconsistent for undocumented immigrant students seeking pay in-state tuition rates to attend college, especially when determining resident tuition status (Olivas, 1995, 2004, 2009). The federal law titled Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996 made it possible for some students in particular states to pay in-state tuition rates. Specifically, in section 505 of IIRIRA indicates that states can not offer higher education benefits to undocumented students without offering those benefits to U.S. citizens (Olivas, 2004). As a consequence, when IIRIRA is combined with state legislation granting undocumented students to pay resident in-state tuition rates then undocumented students may pay in-state tuition rates.

There are currently ten states that have passed legislation allowing undocumented immigrant students to pay resident in-state tuition rates. The states of Texas (HB1403), California (AB 540), Utah (HB 144), New York (SB 7784), Washington (HB 1079), Oklahoma (SB 596), Illinois (HB 60), Kansas (KAS 76-73), New Mexico (MNSA 1978), and Nebraska (LB 239) have passed these laws (see Table 1.1), whereas other states have

not. In the other states, undocumented immigrant students pay up to three times more in out-of-state tuition rates (Olivas, 1995, 2004, 2009), making college tuition unaffordable for many of these students.

Table 1.1

Legislation Effecting In-State Tuition Rates for Undocumented Students

<b>State</b>	<b>Legislation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Financial Aid</b>
Texas	H.B.1403	2001, 2005	Yes
California	A.B. 540	2001	No
Utah	H.B. 144	2002	No
New York	S.B. 7784	2002	No
Washington	H.B. 1079	2003	No
Oklahoma	S.B. 596	2003	Limited
Illinois	H.B. 60	2003	No
Kansas	K.A.S. 76-73	2004	No
New Mexico	N.M.S.A 1978	2005	Yes
Nebraska	L.B. 239	2006	No

(Olivas, 2004, 2008; Rincon, 2008)

Other states that have formally considered legislation regarding undocumented students and in-state tuition but have not been passed include the following states: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Although in-state tuition rates help undocumented students attend college (Flores, 2009; Kaushal, 2008) and many states have considered augmenting laws, there have been some states that have passed laws forbidding them access to these rates. In addition, since 2001 several versions of a federal bill titled the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act may

grant qualified undocumented immigrant students a possibility to become conditional permanent residents, but it has not become a law.

Undocumented immigrant students have gone through numerous unstable laws and they also have experienced circumstances, which have been out of their control, governing their chances to become college graduates. Although undocumented immigrant children were born outside of the United States, many have lived in the U.S. for a significant portion of their lives and consider themselves Americans (Olivas, 2004; Stevenson, 2004) but they are not. Some do not remember living outside of the U.S., and others do not even know they are undocumented until it is time to apply for college (Olivas, 2004; Stevenson, 2004). Once they discover they are undocumented they face multiple barriers for attending college.

Specifically, undocumented students face disadvantages in gaining access and acquiring a university degree because they lack economic wealth, knowledge, and resources. For example, undocumented children, predominately, come from impoverished families, where at least one parent is also undocumented (Chavez, 1998; Passel & Cohn 2009). In particular, forty percent of them live below the nation's poverty level (Passel, 2005). Many undocumented immigrant students' parents are the poorest and least educated immigrant group in the U.S. (Passel, 2003, 2005). The largest and most disadvantaged group with the highest level of child poverty in the United States is immigrants from Mexico; a study showed an estimate of 32.9 percent in 2000 in comparison to 25.4 percent who come from other Latino immigrant groups (Van Hook, 2003). Most are children of rural agricultural workers; others are children of urban service and manufacturing workers (Green, 2003).

Regardless of undocumented students' lack of economic capital, some have the academic credentials that warrant admission into the top public and private universities of America. An estimated 7,000-13,000 undocumented immigrant students graduate from American high schools each year (Passel, 2003), including high achieving students, student-athletes, students participating in student government, clubs and organizations, and church and service groups (Stevenson, 2004). Some are strong academically and, according to the National Immigration Law Center (2005, February), these undocumented students include: valedictorians, national award winners, honor students, homecoming queens, class presidents, and other student leaders. For example, a group of undocumented high school students received national attention when they won first prize at the Marine Advanced Technology Education Center's Remotely Operated Vehicle Competition in 2004; they defeated other students from across the nation, including engineering students from MIT (Pernick, 2005).

As highly qualified students, undocumented immigrant students have the capacity to contribute positively to the U.S. economy (Alfred, 2003; National Immigration Law Center, 2003 & 2005). Their participation in higher education may result in social mobility, including an increase in income, wages, and the standard of living (Nettles & Perna, 1997). Higher education produces public benefits by reducing crime, advancing technology, and decreasing the amount of expenditures on public assistance (Krop & Vernez, 2000). A Rand Study conducted in 1995 reported that if the U.S. increased the completion rate of eighteen-year-old Latinos/as by just three percentage points, Social Security and Medicare contributions would grow by \$600 million.

Attaining a postsecondary education also creates taxpayers belonging to a higher taxpayers bracket, adding to the U.S. financial system. According to a National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education report, the U.S. workforce may benefit from an increase of persons with higher educational degrees, noting:

[i]f all ethnic groups in Illinois had the same education attainment and earnings as Whites, total personal income in the state would have been 9.1 billion [dollars] higher, and the state would have realized an estimated 3.2 billion [dollars] in additional tax revenue (2000).

In addition, the U.S. is changing from an old economy where physically demanding jobs were required, to a new knowledge-based economy that requires workers with some form of postsecondary education (Atkinson, 2002; Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996).

Although some undocumented immigrant students may positively contribute to the U.S. economy, they encounter multiple barriers in attaining a university degree. For example, legislation forbids undocumented students to receive any type of federal financial aid, grants, and loans to help pay for college (Olivas, 1994, 2004). With the exception of Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico undocumented students cannot receive state financial aid for college tuition (MN 2005; OK 2003; Tex. 2005). In addition, undocumented students can not legally participate in college work-study programs to assist in financing their postsecondary degree. All of these barriers make receiving a higher educational degree problematic for undocumented students after they graduate from high school.

In spite of the difficulties and policies that undocumented students face, they are finding ways to earn degrees in U.S. colleges. However, the current literature is limited in

explaining how members of this group successfully managed to receive a college degree. Furthermore, little is known about how undocumented immigrant college students' impact our society after they graduate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The literature on undocumented students who have completed a higher education is minimal. Most studies regarding undocumented immigrant students primarily focus on legislative and access issues (Olivas, 1995; Padilla, 1989; Rendon 2008; Romero, 2002). Little is known about the actual experiences of this group who persist through college and acquire a higher education degree (Perez, 2009). Studies on persistence or resilience rarely target this special population and few qualitative studies focus on undocumented immigrant student populations. Although it is obvious that undocumented immigrants have difficulties, we know very little about the actual postsecondary experiences of students and would-be students in this group. In addition, research that focuses on the experiences of undocumented immigrant college graduates is lacking.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe the collegiate experiences of undocumented college graduates with two explicit goals: 1) to understand how students, despite their undocumented status, successfully navigated the university environment and negotiated how to acquire a college degree; and 2) to illuminate the contributions of undocumented college graduates to U.S. society.

### **Research Questions**

This study answers the following questions:

- (1) How do undocumented immigrant students access U.S. colleges?

- (2) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist?
- (3) What factors support their efforts to persist?
- (4) In what ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society?

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions stated above, a qualitative research design was employed to capture the collegiate experiences of undocumented students and their contributions, thereafter. A qualitative design was appropriate for studying undocumented students' collegiate experiences because the strength of qualitative research is to uncover and highlight the lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). A concept modeling approach (Padilla, 1991) was used to understand the process of how undocumented students obtained a university degree and illuminate their contributions to society after graduation. The theoretical concepts developed were an interpretation of the data collected from the researcher's perspective (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

### **Validity**

Participants had the opportunity to review and edit their individual transcriptions in order to add, delete, or clarify any portions. This process gave credibility to the findings by giving participants the opportunity to provide feedback (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). This feedback assured that the participant's experiences in the process of obtaining a university degree were recorded correctly.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A number of limitations were found in the sample and data collection methods of this study. First, the sample group consisted of a sensitive population, undocumented

students are vulnerable in the sense of not being legal residents in the U.S.. Second, finding an adequate number of participants for the study was challenging. Third, issues pertaining to undocumented immigrant students may cause some participants to remember traumatic experiences and memories, keeping significant information secret. Fourth, only retrospective accounts and reflections were portrayed, not direct observations. Fifth, subjectivity may be a concern because the researcher was the primary tool of data collection and analysis.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study contributed to the knowledge of student persistence in higher education, immigrant student experiences, and state and federal immigration policy. In particular, this study begins to narrow the gap in the literature where few studies exist highlighting undocumented college graduates' process of persisting through college graduation and their contributions to society post graduation. Consequently, the study benefits universities, similar types of students, and those who make policies that impact these students. In the following chapter, literature relevant to the topic of undocumented students in higher education is presented.



## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

Many studies focus on immigration (Borjas, 1995; Cornelius, 1982; Driscoll, 1999; Massey & Schnabel, 1983), with an abundance of data targeting immigration economic labor force issues (Chiswick, 1979; Portes 1979, 1996, 2001; North & Houstoun, 1976, 1969; Rivera-Batiz, 1999; Chavez, 1992, 1994, 1998). Few studies examine the significance of immigrant students in the public education school system (Conchas, 2001; Filingni, 1997; Portes, 1996; Rumbaut, 1995; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, et al. 2001, Zhou, 1997). For example, a RAND report on How Immigrants Fare in U.S. Education (2000) explained university campuses rarely collect data on immigrant students. Furthermore, the study revealed faculty and staff are unaware of immigrants and do not think of them as a group. Therefore, if there is limited data on immigrant students, than there is less on undocumented immigrant students. Resulting in even fewer studies on undocumented immigrant students in higher education.

In fact, studies focusing on undocumented students in higher education are primarily administrative law studies, highlighting legislative inconsistencies (Flores, 2007, Olivas, 1995; Padilla, 1989; Rangel, 2001; Romero, 2002) and access into college for this group (Olivas, 2004; Oliverez, 2006; et.al 2007, Perez, 2006, 2009; Salsbury, 2004; Stevenson, 2005). Recently, the topic of undocumented students in higher education has been growing (Corona, 2008; De Leon, 2005). As a consequence, a small number of empirical data exists relating theoretical concepts to undocumented immigrant students' experiences in institutions of higher education (Corona, 2008; De Leon, 2005; Dozier, 1995; Rangel, 2001). Scholarly research on undocumented immigrant Latino/s

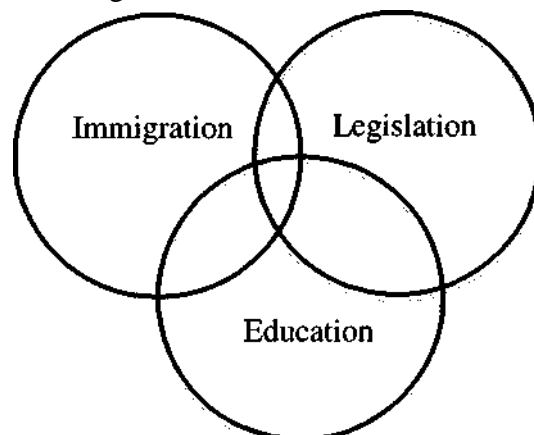
students who have acquired a higher education degree is even more rare. Moreover, the studies on the collegiate experiences of undocumented students, particularly the process of persisting through college graduation and their contributions to society post graduation are practically absent from the literature.

The purpose of the following literature review is to gain a better understanding of undocumented immigrant Latino/a university graduate students. Undocumented immigrant students who have obtained a university degree are a largely unexplored research topic, as stated above. In order to gain a better understanding of undocumented immigrant college graduates, the following literature review focuses on three areas of existing research: immigration, legislation, and education.

The first section illustrates a brief summary of immigration. The second section summarizes laws and scholarly legislative work affecting undocumented immigrant students accessing a university degree. The third section exemplifies factors of educational success for Latino/a students, along with current research on undocumented college students' experiences. Although, each area is presented in a separate section, overlapping between each exist; see Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Literature Review Diagram



The first section titled immigration exemplifies an overview of immigration in general. In addition, it focuses on immigration patterns in the U.S.. Next, it highlights the immigration population, specifically to undocumented immigrant students. Then, this section concludes with data on undocumented immigrant students.

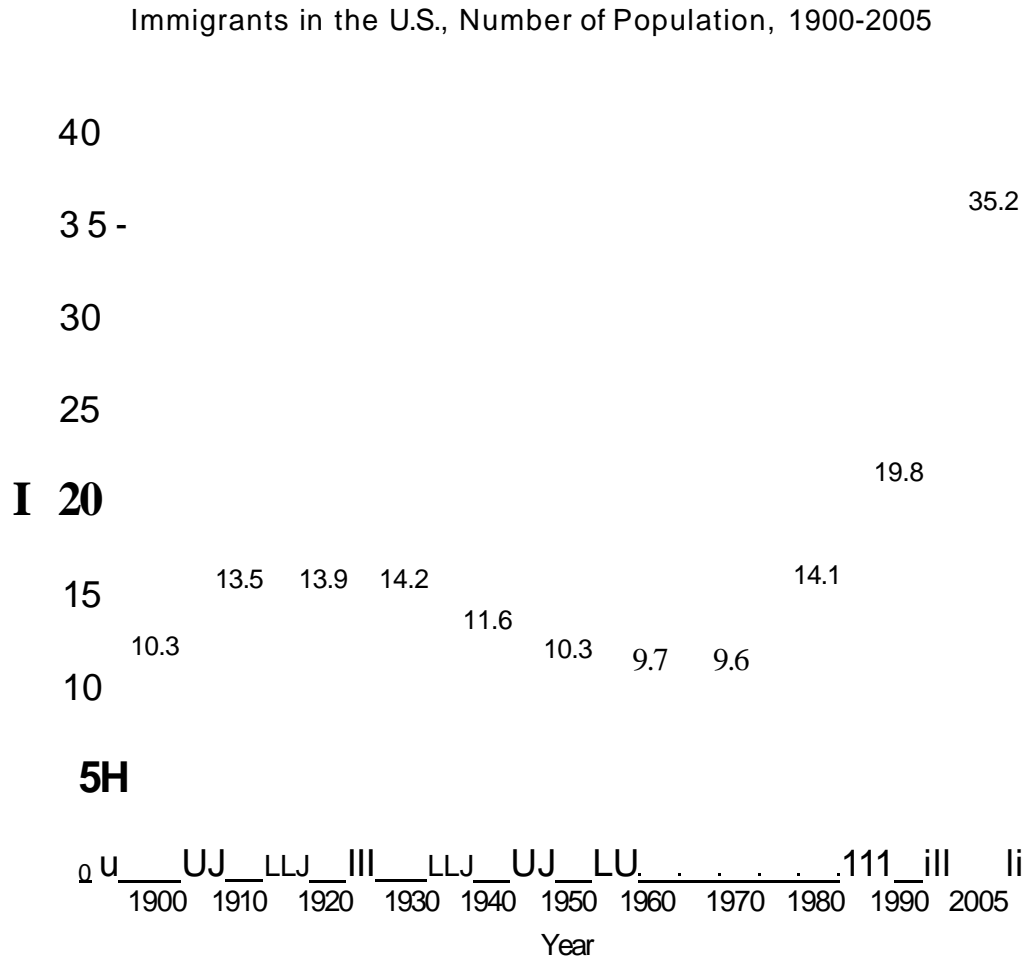
### **Immigration**

Historically, people have been immigrating throughout the globe for centuries, influencing educational, social, cultural, political, and economic change. Today, immigration continues to be a global issue. For example Suarez-Orozco (2001) found the following: Frankfurt's population is compiled of approximately thirty percent of immigrants; Amsterdam's population is predicted to reach fifty percent immigrants by the year 2015; and Leicester, England is expected to be the first European city where "Whites" will be the minority. These immigrants primarily come from third world countries with hopes to improve their lives in a first world country where the economy is more stable (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Moreover, in 2005, there were an estimated 15,300 immigrants from Libya that reached Italy by sea with aspirations of a better life (Dickey, 2005). Immigration around the world continues to be an ongoing process.

In particular, the United States of America, a country historically built by immigrants, attracts a large immigrant population. The U.S. population of immigrants has fluctuated in the past one hundred years. For example, Figure 2.2 shows the immigration numbers from the millions starting from the year 1900 to the year 2000, illustrating the change in numbers of immigrants from 10.3 million in 1900 to 28.4 million in 2000 (Camarota, 2005).

Figure 2.2

U.S. Immigration Numbers by the Millions from 1900-2005



Source: Decennial Census for 1900 to 1990, and Center for Immigration Studies analysis of March 2005 Current Population Survey.

(Camorota, 2005)

Throughout U.S. history, not only has the number of immigrants varied but the ethnicity of immigrants has changed, as well. Everyone in the United States, with the exception of the Native Americans, has been an immigrant or holds immigrant roots. Immigration was basically free and unrestricted until the 1900' s. These early immigrants

were primarily from Europe in contrast to recent immigrants, which come from all continents of the world.

Today, U.S. immigration numbers are rising more than ever. For example, according to the March 2000 Current Population Survey, completed by the Center for Immigration Studies, there were an estimated 28.5 million immigrants in the U. S. This averages out to one in ten residents (Camarota, 2005). The Population Report of March 2003 stated that there were an estimated 33.5 million foreign born, meaning people who were not U.S. citizens at birth (Larson, 2004). These reports show the increase of immigration.

In addition, to the immigration population increase, the diversity of immigrants is also becoming greater. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau 2003 Current Population Report stated there was diversity in the foreign born population: 8.0% from North America, Africa, and Oceania; 13.7% from Europe; 25% from Asia; and 53.3% from Latin America, which includes Mexico and other countries. This 53.3% breaks down to 36.9% Central America, 10.0% Caribbean, and 6.3% South America (Larson, 2004). Currently, the largest group of immigrants in the U.S. comes from Asia and Latin America (Schwartz, 1996; Larson, 2004; Passel & Suro, 2005).

Furthermore, there is a significant number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S.. The term "unauthorized migrant" refers to a person who resides in the United States, but who is not a U.S. citizen, who has not been admitted for permanent residence, and is not in a set of specific authorized temporary statuses permitting longer-term residence and work (Passel, Van Hook, and Bean, 2004). Various labels have been applied to this group of unauthorized migrants, including "undocumented immigrants,"

"illegals," "illegal aliens," and "illegal immigrants." According to some, the term "unauthorized migrant" best encompasses the population because many migrants now enter the country or work using counterfeit documents and thus are not really "undocumented," in the sense that they have documents, but not completely legal documents (Van Hook, Passel, Zhang, and Bean, 2004).

The percentage of undocumented immigrants is growing. There are about 11.9 million unauthorized or undocumented immigrants; although undocumented immigrants come from all over the world, most are Mexican (Passel, 2004; Passel, 2008). In fact, an estimated fifty seven percent of the undocumented immigrants come from Mexico, twenty-three come from other Latin American countries, ten percent are from Asia, and five percent are European, Canadian, and other parts of the globe (Passel, 2004). The highest percentage of undocumented immigrants live in California, about twenty-six percent (Passel, 2004). Twelve percent live in Texas, ten percent in Florida, eight percent in New York, four percent in Illinois, and four percent in New Jersey. Although these states compile the largest percent of undocumented immigrants there are other states representing the most rapid growth of undocumented immigrants since the mid-1990s, which may have surpassed New Jersey; these states are: Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina. (Passel, 2004).

According to researchers, undocumented immigrants come to the U.S. in search of economic stability. For example, the following quote reveals undocumented immigration to the U.S. is mainly caused by financial need, Chavez (1994) states:

Undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans migrate to the United States because of economic hardships and political turmoil in their home countries.

Some come intending to stay permanently in the United States; others are sojourners who intend to return home after a period of time. Although they may have arrived alone, knowing few people, over time undocumented immigrants acquire social and economic ties to the United States, (p.68)

The previous quote helps to explain the reason why immigrants, particularly from Latin America, come to the U.S. and why many choose to stay. Immigrants come to the U.S. due to fiscal problems in their home country, then after a while they develop relationships and monetary stability.

Once undocumented immigrants attain some type of economic security, some bring their families over. As a consequence, about 1.6 million children under eighteen years old are undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (Passel, 2004); this population is increasing (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). As stated in the previous chapter, an estimated 7,000-13,000 undocumented immigrant students graduate from American high schools each year (Passel, 2003), including outstanding students and athletes, participating in student government, clubs and organizations, and church and service groups (Stevenson, 2004).

Knowledge pertaining to immigrants and undocumented immigrants, in general, stating how many immigrants there are and where they come from are plentiful, but we know very little, specifically, about undocumented immigrant students experiences in post-secondary schools. One area in the literature aiding to the knowledge of undocumented immigrant students in higher education are legislation and studies documenting legislation that has assisted or restricted them access into college. The following addresses legislation focusing on undocumented college students.

## **Legislation**

National and state legislation regarding undocumented students' access to a higher education has been ambiguous. For more than twenty years, state and federal legislation has been inconsistent for undocumented immigrant students seeking to attend college, especially state legislation concerning their resident tuition status (Olivas, 1995, 2004). In order to understand undocumented immigrant students in higher education, it is valuable to acknowledge legislation influencing their plights and successes. Legislation, affecting undocumented immigrant students is significant, due to the fact that it shapes the outcome of undocumented immigrant students enrolling and completing university degrees. The following is a brief summary, listed in chronicle order, of legislation from both the state of California and the federal level that directly affected undocumented immigrant student enrollment and tuition rates in higher education. This section of the literature review focuses, primarily, on the state of California, because as stated above, California has the largest population of undocumented immigrants in the country.

### **Legislation Affecting Undocumented Immigrant Students**

There have been several laws governing undocumented students in the pursuit of attending college. In particular, California Assembly Bill 1197, titled The Uniform Residency Law of California was enforced between the years 1974 through 1980. This California law allowed undocumented immigrant students, who were long-term California residents to pay in-state tuition rates to all public colleges and universities. In 1980 the law phased out and was not renewed. As a consequence, undocumented immigrant students were charged out-of-state tuition rates at all California colleges and universities regardless of the years they resided in California.



Another law affecting undocumented students was Plyler v. Doe (1982). The Plyler Supreme Court Case, ruled all children, regardless of their citizenship, have the right to a public education. This federal law reversed the Texas law that prohibited undocumented students access to primary and secondary public schools. In fact, before the Plyler case, Texas was charging undocumented students to attend their schools. According to the head lawyer P.D. Roos (personal communication, July, 2009), the purpose of Plyler v. Doe intended to include undocumented immigrant students in higher education but this specific proposition was unsuccessful in the final court decision.

The next influential law that influenced undocumented immigrant students in higher education was titled Leticia A. v. U.C. Regents and CSU Board of Trustees (1985). This Alameda County Superior Court Case permitted undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates at colleges and universities, who resided in California for at least one year and one day. In addition, undocumented immigrant students, who qualified, were also eligible for Cal Grants, state financial aid.

The following year after Leticia A. in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed. This federal immigration law consisted of: amnesty for undocumented immigrants who could prove residency, forced penalties to those who employed undocumented immigrants, and four million dollars allocated to state and local government for welfare and education programs. As a consequence of this law, millions of undocumented immigrants, including undocumented immigrant students became legal residents.

Next, the Leticia A. ruling was overturned in 1990 by the Bradford v. U.C. Regents Case. As a result to this Los Angeles Superior Court Case, undocumented

students were, once again, charged out-of-state tuition. In addition, they were no longer eligible to receive any type of state financial aid.

Then, California voters passed the ballot initiative Proposition 187 in 1994. This initiative prohibited undocumented immigrants to receive a public education, child welfare, and non-emergency healthcare. In 1995 the United States Supreme Court decided Proposition 187 was unconstitutional. Therefore, Proposition 187 was overturned and not implemented.

In 1996 the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) was passed. This federal law, section 505, does not allow states to provide higher education benefits to undocumented immigrant students without offering the same benefits to U.S. citizens. IIRIRA made it possible for states to pass legislation that allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates.

As a consequence, a California law granting access to undocumented immigrant students in higher education was passed in 2001, titled Assembly Bill 540. This California law allows undocumented immigrant students to pay in-state tuition rates. Student who qualify: must have attended a California high school for at least three or more years, have graduated from a California high school or completed a General Education Diploma, and be enrolled or registered at a college or university in California.

On March 26, 2009, the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act was introduced to both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. This federal bill may grant qualified undocumented immigrant students a possibility to become conditional permanent residence. In order to qualify, students must graduate from U.S. high schools, have good moral character, arrived in the U.S. as

children, and been in the country for at least five years before the bills enactment. Students would gain temporary residence status within a six-year period. In those six years, students must acquire a degree from a higher educational institution or complete at least two years in good standing in a program for a bachelor's degree or served in the uniformed services for at least two years. Several versions of this bill have come and gone through the legislature since 2001, but as to date it has not become a bill.

Evidence in the paragraphs above shows that the U.S. laws governing undocumented immigrant students access to institutions of higher education have been constantly changing, from one year to another. As a result, undocumented students in pursuit of a college degree have been obscure, over the past few decades. The following section lists legislative studies pertaining to undocumented immigrant students.

### **Legislative Studies Regarding Undocumented Immigrant Students**

The following section of the literature review emphasizes legislative scholarly work effecting undocumented students access to institutions of higher education. For example, over a decade ago Michael Olivas (1994): investigated administrative and regulatory laws of residency statutes, agency implementations, and administrator discretions in postsecondary education; summarized a comprehensive examination of the residency system, emphasizing undocumented immigrant students problems with institutional admission practices; and examined how courts have responded to undocumented immigrant students' issues regarding domicile and residence, tracing two judicial themes that stated undocumented students cannot establish residence and the other that entitled them to establish their domicile.

In addition, Olivas (1994) explored the social science of undocumented immigrant students. He briefly described two undocumented students facing financial issues in accessing college by illustrating the complications these students face due to federal legislative ambiguities for undocumented students. Olivas concluded that institutions of higher education are enriched and strengthened by admitting undocumented immigrant students. He stated that undocumented immigrant students have the potential to be productive long-term residence and citizens, contributing to the U.S. economy and polity. In fact, Olivas stated that the U.S. needs this talent pool. However, Olivas found that undocumented immigrant students are an "invisible minority" and recorded their presence in higher education without federal financial support (Olivas, 1994, p. 1083-1084). He wrote:

Even in California where 40% of all undocumented residents are assumed to live, undocumented college students constitute an almost invisible minority of students. The colleges have accustomed themselves to the students' presence, and, since 1985, have administered their enrollment without incident—even though federal financial aid funds are unavailable to this population. (Olivas, 1994, p. 1083-1084)

Olivas (2004) continued to document the current ambiguities found in policies that make it difficult for undocumented students to be enrolled in U.S. postsecondary institutions. He reviewed the events concerning undocumented college students by exploring specific residency issues before Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, IIRIRA and postsecondary residency benefits, and post-September 11 developments.

Although Olivas stated that undocumented students should be given the same rights as citizens regarding college enrollment, residency, and federal funding, they continue to experience difficulties because of the legal inconsistencies found in the current legislation. Olivas concluded that in addition to residency, the Development, Relief, and Education for alien Minors (DREAM) Act is the most important development that has been introduced in federal legislation to address the confusions related to undocumented college students' attempts to obtain a university degree. This act not only repeals a section in IIRARA, which discourages states from offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrant students, but it begins their process to citizenship.

Jessica Salsbury (2004) summarized an updated version of laws, regulations, and policies that affect undocumented immigrant students seeking to enter into the postsecondary public school system. Salsbury explained that undocumented students continue to struggle financially in the U.S. higher education system because they are not granted federal funds and suggested that more efforts need to be done for these students to access a university education. Salsbury concluded that state efforts that support in-state tuition for undocumented students are merely part of the answer. She stated that "[t]he removal of educational barriers for college-bound undocumented youth is not complete without financial aid, work authorization, and immigration relief (2004, p. 459). Salsbury confirmed that increasing access to higher education is the key to providing future opportunities, success, and stability to both undocumented students and the communities in which they live (Salsbury, 2004).

Andrew Stevenson (2005) interviewed students, teachers, counselors and attorneys, from Washington State and Southern Arizona, to give a voice to the current

legislative policies affecting undocumented students. Stevenson argued that undocumented students in the U.S. desperately need changes in the current laws to help them obtain a postsecondary degree. He reviewed specific legislation involving undocumented students in higher education. Stevenson proposed comprehensive solutions to assist undocumented students to achieve a U.S. postsecondary education. Stevenson stated that two acts titled the DREAM Act and the Student Adjustment Act can give students federal legal immigration status and work authorization. In his conclusion, he stated "contemporary inequality is the limited access of undocumented students to postsecondary education despite their unconditional acceptance by the public K-12 school system"(p. 46).

Andre Perry (2004) created a framework of membership to explore if undocumented students should receive financial aid for a postsecondary education. He interviewed twenty-one undocumented immigrant students from four-year and community colleges from the Houston area, seventeen legislators, policymakers and staff members in Texas state government, and seven representatives of various interest groups. By framing the concepts of membership, Perry found that undocumented students who have developed into substantive members should receive in-state tuition. Perry's definition of substantive members included those who are "committed to dividing, exchanging and sharing social goods" (p. 166). His student interviews consisted of substantive members.

Jose Santos (2006) conducted an exploratory analysis using a human capital theoretical lens to examine current federal and state policies affecting undocumented immigrant students access to public postsecondary institutions. Santos found that most

states that have passed laws assisting undocumented student enrollment into higher education do so for the purpose of investing in human capital for the public good. He concluded that increasing the population of undocumented high school graduates progressing to college contributes to the economic and social good of society.

Mari Vawn Tinney (2003) conducted an ethnographic research report on undocumented immigrant students affected by House Bill (HB) 144, Utah state law. This legislation allows undocumented immigrant students to pay in-state tuition. Tinney found that although the bill was passed, many institutions were unclear about the current legislation. By interviewing state education officials, college enrollment/admission staff and officials, parents, and educators, she created a guide booklet to help high school guidance counselors, parents, students, religious leaders, college recruiters, admission and registration staff, state government officials and legislators, and all others who are consulted by students to understand HB 144. She focused her study on the legislative issues of access for undocumented students seeking to enter Utah's higher education system. Tinney found that although an undocumented student pays in-state tuition in Utah, they do not qualify to receive federal financial aid and many institutions are unaware of these new regulations.

Maria Sanders (2006) conducted a case study exploring the political and social factors from North Carolina's House Bill 1183. A bill introduced in 2005 to extend resident-tuition rates to undocumented immigrant students aspiring to go to college. This study investigated the bill by document analysis and interviewing state legislators, other government officials, journalists, and organizational leaders. Sanders concluded that the defeat of HB 1183 was due to a combination of factors that included the following: social

and economic concerns, demographics of the state, time and context of the introduction of the bill, media, public's response, and the lack of planning found in advocacy coalitions.

Radha Roy Biswas (2005) wrote a policy brief about the DREAM Act focusing on the access to community college for undocumented immigrant students. He interviewed state officials, state higher education authorities, and community college leaders from California, Florida, Kansas, North Carolina, New Mexico, Texas and Virginia. Biswas found that all these states have had an influx of immigrants and their legislation regarding undocumented community college students admittance is inconsistent at institutions within the same state. For example, the state of Virginia has legally prohibited the admission of undocumented students, but the discretion of local institutions may admit them. In addition, Virginia state law forbids undocumented students to pay in-state tuition fees, increasing tuition rates to almost five thousand dollars. However, Northern Virginia Community College has recently instituted privately funded scholarships to help undocumented students pay out-of-state tuition rates. Moreover, Santa Ana Community College in California also has created scholarships that include undocumented students, while other colleges, in that state, do not provide any type of funding.

Stella Flores (2007) explored the impact of tuition policies intended for undocumented students. In particular, she found that in-state tuition discounts increased the college-enrollment rates of college-age students who are undocumented Latino/a immigrants. This quantitative study first focused on Texas, resulting with strong evidence that the state's tuition legislation increased college-enrollment rates. Furthermore, Flores



found that the influence of tuition discounts significant at a national level for those states that have passed laws allowing students to pay in-state tuition rates. This study is significant to the literature review, emphasizing undocumented immigration legislation and the effects of higher educational enrollment rates. Therefore, it includes topics combining: immigration, legislation, and education.

Mira Kim (2006) also wrote a policy analysis report exploring legislation that is currently under consideration by Congress titled the DREAM Act. Kim concluded that this act would help undocumented students gain access to higher education and have a positive impact on the United States society.

Alejandra Rincon (2008) wrote a policy analysis focusing on federal legislative issues affecting undocumented immigrant high school graduates entering the university system with regard to paying in-state tuition fees and receiving financial aid. Rincon's book, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education*, highlights historical and legal facts affecting undocumented people. Her writings target educational access in Texas for undocumented college students. She summarized legislation regarding in-state tuition policies, as well as national initiatives and student advocacy for undocumented students in higher education. In summary, Rincon suggested that the existing immigration policies do not respond to the current changing demographics, but there is still hope for change.

Janet Lopez (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of five undocumented immigrant Mexican high school students and six of their teachers. This Critical Race and Latino/a Race theory framework study revealed the affects of race to current North Carolina immigration legislation prohibiting undocumented immigrants to pay in-state

tuition fees. The data indicated these laws constrained undocumented students to access institutions of higher education.

The information previously summarized illustrates a significant contribution of research to the field of higher education regarding undocumented immigrant students. It explained the ambiguities found in policies targeting undocumented immigrant students in higher education, but it focuses heavily on legislation issues upon entering into the U.S. higher education system. Although the literature explains that many legislative policies have been established affecting undocumented college students, little is known about how these policies have shaped students' experiences in the process of acquiring a university diploma. Only a few of these studies use a theoretical framework, helping to theoretically understand undocumented students. Few studies have explained how undocumented students' experiences have influenced their access into a university (Coronado, 2008; Rangel, 2001; De Leon, 2006). Within these studies, undocumented immigrant students' successes in obtaining a university degree are practically unknown.

Since undocumented immigrant students who have obtained a university degree are a largely unexplored research topic, the next section of the literature review consists of educational research. In order to gain a better understanding of undocumented Latino/a immigrant college graduates, it is necessary to investigate what the literature states regarding Latino/a student college achievement. Therefore, the following section features elements found in the home and school that influence Latino/a academic success.

### **Education**

This section of the literature review emphasizes education. Studies emphasizing both immigrants and education, in general, are scarce. In particular, research regarding

Latino/a undocumented immigrants in higher education is a new topic. Therefore, the following section of the literature review constitutes three distinct sections. The first section targets research that is specific to Latino/a academic achievement. The second section, briefly gives an overview of studies focusing on undocumented immigrant students attending post-secondary institutions. The third section, lists literature emphasizing undocumented college students' experiences.

### **Latino/a Student Achievement: Factors Existing in the Home and the School Affecting College Success**

It is necessary to review Latino/a student achievement to understand the complexities of undocumented immigrant students' educational attainment. In particular, it is significant to investigate factors existing in the home and school, which affect Latino/a college attainment. Although undocumented immigrant students are not specifically accounted in this literature, Latino/a undocumented immigrant students in higher education are a sub-group within the larger Latino/a minority group. The following factors from the home and the school, affecting Latino/a educational progress measured through acquiring a university degree, will be used as a lens to inquire about Latino/a undocumented immigrant students.

Numerous studies focus on Latinos/as, with a preponderance of data targeting academic failures. Few studies examine the successes of Latinos/as, resulting in even fewer studies on Latino/a student achievement. The current literature is limited in addressing how Latinos/as successfully navigate through the educational system. Latino/a students are a significant group to examine because they are not only the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. (Camorota, 2005; Passel, 2005; Passel & Suro,

2005), but they are also considered one of the most disadvantaged groups in higher education, in terms of degree attainment and college participation (Fry, 2002; Fry, 2004; Harvey, 2001; Oliverez, 2005a; Passel & Fix, 2004; Protopsaltis, 2005). The disadvantage is largely rooted in the home and the school. This section of the literature review explores how multiple factors established in the home and the school influence Latino/a students to attain a university degree.

Researchers identify the home and the school as important factors in facilitating and constraining students to receive a college diploma. They state that student relationships with numerous individuals such as parents, siblings, peers and adults, at home and at school, are influential for students in three different ways: the decision to go to college (McDonough, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999), their predisposition to prepare for a university (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), and their success in graduating from an institution of higher education. Many factors that influence Latino/a academic achievement predominately exist in the home.

### **The home**

The home plays an important role in influencing Latino/a students' educational outcomes. Some scholars have found that familial support helps Latino/a students' academic achievement (Hurtado et al., 1997; Lapsley et al., 1990). Current studies emphasize family background (Solberg et al., 1994; Solberg & Villarreal, 1997), language proficiency (Portes & MacLeod, 1999), and social economic status (Olivas, 1985) as factors in the collegial success of Latino/a students.

***Family background factors.*** Family background factors facilitate or constrain educational outcomes. Researchers have found that parental aspirations for their students'

academic success (Fuligni, Tseng, Lam, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1995), parental involvement in their child's education (Lee and Bowen, 2006), and sibling mentoring (Attinasi, 1989) affect academic success. These factors help explain differences in students' academic performance. The following elaborates on: parent aspirations, parent involvement, and sibling mentoring.

Parents' educational aspirations for encouraging their students to obtain a university degree sometimes fall short due to the parents' own limited education. It is common for parents and students to lack information as to what type of education is needed to realize their aspirations (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004), constraining their ability to attend a university and receive a college diploma. Studies show that Latino/a parents often have unrealistically high expectations for their students' education (Fuligni, 1997; Rumbaut, 1997) and these expectations often do not match students' educational attainment (Kao & Thompson, 2003). However, one study shows Latino/a students who were encouraged by their parents, at an early age, to attend college actually achieved their academic goals (Attinasi, 1989).

Parental involvement in childrens' lives result in positive outcomes and increases the likelihood of students attending college. For instance, a number of researchers have identified parent involvement positively impacts their child's educational performance (Barnard, 2004, Fan & Chen, 2001; Feurestein, 2000; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen & Sekino, 2004), especially for Latino/a students navigating through college (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Jeynes, 2003). Many types and forms of parent involvement have been found to be beneficial for student success, such as

attending school meetings, parent-teacher conferences, volunteer opportunities, special school programs, pageants, and academic and extra-curricular activities.

Parental involvement opportunities are not only associated with school, but also are present in the home. These may include discussing school work and the school day with students, assisting their child with homework, creating routines at home to facilitate school activities, and becoming familiar with student academic interests (Lee and Bowen, 2006). A landmark qualitative study conducted during the 1970s interviewed 45 Latino/as who completed a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. degree and found that strong emotional support from mothers was a significant factor facilitating students' success (Gandara, 1982). In addition, research has shown maternal monitoring of students' educational activities correlate with academic motivation among Latino/a families (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996).

A quantitative study conducted by Perna and Titus (2005) investigated parent involvement within different ethnic groups and found a relationship between parent involvement and college enrollment for Latino/a students. Surveying a population sample of 9,810 high school graduates from 1,006 schools, Perna and Titus found that more parental involvement led to higher student enrollment in a 2 or 4-year college in the fall after graduating from high school. In their study, parent involvement factors were measured by the amount of times a parent acted to acquire information about college, obtain knowledge about academic requirements, and initiate contact to the school about educational issues or behavioral problems. Perna and Titus suggest that allocating resources to support parental involvement is an effective approach for programs designed to increase the college enrollment of underrepresented groups. Thus, parent involvement is another factor that facilitates students' educational achievement.

Parents are not the only ones in the home who influence a student's choice to go to college and his or her ability to succeed; siblings and other relatives also play a role in the process of providing knowledge about higher education (Attinasi, 1989, Gonzalez, et al, 2003). Attinasi (1989) found Latino/as in college have learned about college-going behaviors through a concept termed "fraternal modeling." Fraternal modeling occurs when a student observes or receives information about college, usually from a sibling or other family member who has had some experience with getting into, attending, or navigating the college campus. Learning about being a college student through observations and conversations either encouraged or discouraged students to attend college (Attinasi, 1989). Through fraternal modeling, students learned about different college experiences and expectations, helping them to decide if college was a tangible desire (Attinasi, 1989). Older siblings acted as role models and assisted their younger siblings in the process of completing a bachelor's degree (Attinasi, 1989; Gonzalez et al., 2001).

Family background factors such as the parents' and student's aspirations, parent involvement, and siblings' prior knowledge about college are important predictors for a student's educational outcome, but they do not explain all discrepancies for academic success or failure. Other factors are interrelated; in particular, a student's language proficiency can be another factor, which shapes his or her academic achievement.

***Language proficiency factors.*** Students' language proficiency level has a strong correlation to their level of success in school. Although studies show that English proficiency is closely connected to educational achievement (Garcia-Vasquez, Lopez, Ward, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998), some research

emphasizes becoming bilingual can be more helpful for students seeking to attend college. For example, a qualitative study conducted in the 1990s interviewed 50 Latino/as who completed a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. degree and revealed that they maintained their native language and acquired English (Gandara, 1994, 1995).

Studies indicate Latino/a students who become bilingual gain an advantage over those who learn English too quickly or those who never learn English at all. For example, rapid linguistic absorption is associated with a loss of parental language proficiency (Portes & Schauffler, 1994; Rumbaut, 1995), which inhibits communication between students and parents educational ambitions (Worthy, 2006). On the other hand, Spanish-dominant speaking students and their parents may feel reluctant to make contact with authorities, including teachers and counselors (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) stifling educational progress and communication between the home and school. When parents are reluctant to communicate with educators, educational attainment may be constrained. Therefore, students who are bilingual can or can not become more successful, than those who are monolingual.

Students who are bilingual can reach higher levels of academic achievement. Studies state that students who are bilingual seem to acquire more educational and adaptive outcomes, (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Portes & Hao, 1998; Portes & Hao, 2002; Portes & Schauffler, 1994; Rumberger & Larson, 1998) realistic educational expectations and aspirations (Portes & Hao, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; St. Hilaire, 2002), lower dropout rates (Feliciano, 2001; Zhou, 1997), higher ethnic self-identification and academic success (Zhou, 1997), than those Latino/a students who only speak English or only speak Spanish (Portes &



Schauffler, 1994; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). As a result, students who become bilingual may have a greater advantage because they can receive information about college in two languages, from both the home and the school.

Even though language proficiency correlates positively with educational student expectations (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998), it does not guarantee educational success (Rumbaut, 1995), especially for students from disadvantaged family backgrounds (Warren, 1996) such as Latino/a students. Other factors also promote or limit a student to acquire a university degree; for example, economic issues also influence Latino/a student achievement.

*Social economic status factors.* The lack of economic capital affects Latino/a students seeking to attain a university degree. In particular, students who come from impoverished families face disadvantages in obtaining a university degree because of the location of where they live. In addition, Latino/as also lack economic wealth, knowledge, and resources.

A student's lack of economic wealth affects their aspirations to go to college. For instance, many Latino/a students' parents are the poorest and least educated in the country (Passel, 2003, 2005). In fact, the largest and most disadvantaged group, with the highest level of child poverty in the United States comes from Mexico. A study conducted in the year 2000 estimated 32.9% of child poverty comes from Mexico in comparison to 25.4% who comes from other Latino/a countries (Van Hook, 2003).

Generally, low-income Latino/as have little choice of where to live. Consequently, they tend to live in inner-city neighborhoods, referred to as barrios or ghettos (Portes, 1996). Often times, students do not even know anyone who has ever

attended college living in these areas. In addition, students can be attracted to peers occupied with violence and involved in criminal acts (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The temptations for students to spend time with others involved in delinquent behaviors may constrain their aspirations to attend college.

Students' and their families' lack of knowledge regarding the financing of college is another factor constraining them to attain a university degree. Since a majority of Latino/a students come from working class families, college tuition seems not only unaffordable, but also intangible (Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). Usually, parents are not aware of university costs or the financial resources available to help their children to attend college (Gandara, 1995, 1998; Olivas, 1981, 1985, 1995; Olivas et al., 2004; Rendon, 2002). Many families, especially lower income and those with parents who did not attend college, do not understand the complexity of financing the cost of a college education (Olivas, 1985; Olivas, 2004) and are unsure about application requirements and financial aid options (Gandara, 1994, 1998; Olivas, 1985; Olivas, 2004; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). Moreover, research indicates that many low-income and minority students do not have adequate access to relevant and timely information about college finances (Olivas, 1985; Olivas et al., 2004; Perna, 2004).

In spite of the economic difficulties, Latino/a families who learn about the economic resources available and take a proactive stance in their choice for obtaining economic resources are able to help their children progress through college. Families who acquire knowledge about college prices, financial aid resources such as federal, state and institutional programs, grants, loans, and other support services help increase college enrollment for Latino/a students (Gandara, Mejorado, Molina, 1998; Olivas, 1985;

Rendon, 2002; Solorzano & Omelas, 2002). Some Latino/a families and students who become skilled at attaining information about economic resources find financial assistance through private organizations and philanthropies to assist in financing their way through college (Olivas, 1981; 1985). Furthermore, students who find out about and participate in college work-study opportunities improve the likelihood of remaining in school (Olivas, 1985). Taking a proactive stance in looking for financial resources and assistance for economically disadvantaged students is necessary for navigating through college graduation.

### **The School**

Although numerous factors influencing Latino/a student achievement exist in the home, other factors are also present in the school. Schools, just like families, also facilitate or constrain Latino/a students' educational achievement. Researchers have studied peers in school, academic preparation and school programs, teacher attitudes and teachers' certification affect students' opportunity of obtaining a university degree.

*Peers in school.* Peers in school are an influential factor in explaining Latino/a student achievement. Research indicates that students learned a great deal of knowledge about navigating through college from their peers (Attinasi, 1989; Gonzalez et al., 2003). This is especially true in desegregated schools where students have the opportunity to gain information about the college-going process from their peers (Gandara, 1994, 1995; Gandara et. al, 2004). Peers influence students' attitudes and behaviors, self-perception, educational aspirations and academic behaviors, along with individual school engagement and attainment (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). At times, peers in school directly encourage students to attend college and guide them toward graduation.

Even though peers represent a significant factor in student achievement, they also influence students negatively. For example, peers can influence students to be involved in gang related activities, especially in underachieving schools found in urban areas where college is not promoted (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The influence of peers can be either positive or negative, but they are not the only factor found in school, affecting students' decision to receive a university degree, academic preparation and school program factors have can also be influential.

*Academic preparation and school program factors.* The level of academic preparation is another factor that affects Latino/a students to succeed in college. Often, researchers who have investigated the college process find a number of factors influence educational attainment. Preparation influences students entering and succeeding in college. According to research, students who receive information about college requirements are more apt to enroll in college (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Flint, 1993; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Studies confirm gaining knowledge about the college setting and atmosphere are beneficial factors to succeeding academically. A study conducted by Padilla, Gonzalez, and Trevino (1997) focused on successful minority students in college. This qualitative study included focus-group interviews with 35 ethnic minority students. Padilla et al. concluded that learning about the college campus environment was an essential factor for helping students to be prepared, successful, and persistent toward graduation.

In addition, participating in college-bound preparatory activities also assist students to become prepared for college. Students who participate in college-prep

curriculum courses, graduate from high school and apply to postsecondary institutions (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Lopez, & Dunbar 1995; Hughes, 2003; Rendon, 2002; Teranishi, Allen & Solorzano, 2004). Research also shows that lower involvement in college preparatory activities is directly related to lower enrollment rates into college (Caldera, Robitschek, Frame, & Pannel, 2003; Hughes, 2003; Oliva & Nora, 2004; Nora, 2004; Rendon, 2002). Therefore, being academically prepared and participating in college preparatory activities facilitates students in the process of attending college. In addition, school programming factors assist student outcomes.

*School programming factors.* School programs facilitate students toward the road of obtaining a college degree. For instance, many school programs have been designed to prepare students for college. These programs have empowered a number of at risk students to become aware, prepared, and eventually graduate from institutions of higher education. In fact, many school programs exist to increase minority and low-income student enrollment in universities. Some of these programs include: Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA), Project Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (GRAD), Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), Puente Project, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) (Gandara, et al. 1998; Gandara & Bail, 2001; Perna, 2000; Rendon, 2002). In general, programs work with middle school, high school, and some community college students to get them prepared for college and ensure they enroll into universities (Rendon, 2002).

Although some school programs facilitate in the process of students getting into college, some of these programs do not assure students will stay enrolled and obtain a degree. According to studies, institutions of higher education directly influence the

success of minority students (Cooper, et al. 1995; Olivas, 2004; Nettles & Perna, 1997; Rendon, 2002). Postsecondary institutions, that adequately develop programs and services to ensure equitable opportunities, help increase minority enrollment (Cuadraz, 2002; Hughes, 2003; Miville, Koonce, Darlington, & Whitlock, 2000; Oliva, 2004; Olivas, 1985; Teranishi, Allen & Solorzano, 2004). Consequently, other programs have been developed in colleges to facilitate student retention and completion rates. Some of these programs include learning communities, such as Freshman Year Experience, bridging programs, mentoring, and tutoring opportunities, which have been known to facilitate Latino/as in the process of attaining a university degree (Burgis, 2000).

However, other factors exist with school programs that constrain Latino/as to reach their educational goals. At times, many schools seem to place Latino/as or limited English speakers in lower level programs or tracks. In particular, tracking can prevent the development of effective teacher-student relationships, especially if teachers do not want to deal with the needs of Latino/a students (Katz, 1999). Tracking also results in low student minority enrollment in college track classes and an over enrollment of minority students in special education classes (Valencia, 2002). Furthermore, the California Department of Education estimates only 20% of Latino/as are enrolled in gifted and talented education (GATE) classes (California Department of Education, 2001). According to research, GATE programs facilitate students to get into elite universities (Gonzalez et al. 2003).

In general, schools in low poverty locations with a high percentage of minorities have limited access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses. For example, Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) collected high school enrollment from a school district in California

servicing a large population of Latino/a students and 13 high schools within that district to examine access and availability of AP classes. They found that schools with high levels of poverty and minorities had the fewest number of AP courses available. In addition, the results concluded that students who do not have access to AP programs are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes time to apply for university admissions.

Moreover, Yun and Moreno (2006) researched California public high schools characteristics by collecting data concerning student ethnicity to explore access and equality from nine different clusters. They also found schools with the lowest percent of AP courses resulted in schools with high levels of poverty, minority enrollment, and students learning English as a second language. Therefore, tracking Latino/a students into remedial tracks and the lack of AP courses are factors constraining them from attending college because they do not receive the adequate education needed to be prepared and be successful in college.

*Teacher factors.* In addition to school programming, teachers also influence the educational outcome of a number of students. Some teachers have positively impacted the lives of minority students, inspiring and preparing them to attend college and attain a university degree. Scholars have documented that teachers, especially in high school, have become role models and mentors to assist in the progress of Latino/a students graduating from institutions of higher education (Attinasi, 1989; Gonzalez, et al. 2003; Rendon, 2002).

For example, one study conducted by Battle and Cuellar (2006) found some teachers took extra time to work one-on-one after school in tutoring, translating, preparing college applications, and even paying for college application fees. This type of

attention and support facilitated Latino/a students to attend and receive a college diploma. Some successful Latino/a college graduates, who have been interviewed for specific studies, have mentioned that teachers made a positive difference in their lives and inspired them to obtain a university degree (Attinasi, 1989; Battle & Cuellar, 2006; Gonzalez, et al. 2003; Rendon, 2002).

On the other hand, teachers' negative attitudes affect educational outcomes, especially when hostility toward Latino/as exists. For example, in California, Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell (2000) found teachers who resisted the introduction of policies and programs aimed at supporting low literacy Latino/a adolescents. Their findings show some Latino/as are underserved and overlooked because of teacher attitudes. Furthermore, teachers' negative race and class perceptions lead students to take inadequate courses, (Kao & Thompson, 2003) constraining students' opportunities to be prepared for college or complete college entrance requirements.

The number of qualified teachers also affects student outcomes. For example, the lack of certified bilingual teachers found in the K-12 school system might marginalize students who are limited in English speaking proficiency (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000). English language learners need support services, such as English as Second Language and bilingual education courses; these support services assist students' educational outcomes (Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001). In addition, some teachers are assigned to teach classes they are not proficient in at schools where high levels of Latino/a students may attend. Teachers play a crucial role in Latino/a students' educational outcomes and the lack of qualified teachers is a factor constraining students' education.



Evidence from multiple disciplines show that several factors found in the home and the school facilitate or constrain students to attain a higher education diploma. While the home and the school are separate entities, they correlate in a number of ways and influence a variety of student outcomes. This part of the literature review illustrates how minority students develop relationships in the home and the school, which could or could not provide the necessary resources, guidance, and opportunities toward a college degree. Although parents, siblings, peers, school programs, and teachers in the home and in the school have been shown to facilitate Latino/a students' to obtain a higher education they, merely, represent a few factors. Other factors that were not addressed in this review include the influence of school leadership and administration, policy issues, college guidance counselors, and community members and organizations, funding distribution, and charter schools.

Many researchers and policymakers have studied under-represented ethnic minority groups in institutions of higher education. The purpose for these studies has been to increase the number of ethnic minorities in higher education. In spite of the development of research, programs, and policies, minorities continue to be under-represented, especially Latino/a students. Therefore, more studies explaining how Latino/a students have successfully progressed through the educational pipeline are needed. In particular, studies illuminating undocumented Latino/a immigrant student achievement are required. Furthermore, the literature focusing on undocumented Latino/a college graduates' experiences of perseverance is even scarcer. The following section addresses literature that pertains to undocumented students attending post-secondary institutions.

## Undocumented College Students

Studies focusing on Latino/a academic achievement are scant and the absence of undocumented Latino/a college students is evident. Few studies exist that emphasize undocumented college students. The following studies found in this literature review highlights research that specifically focuses on undocumented college students. For example, a study by Rita Simon and Margo De Ley (1984) focused on immigrant economic labor force issues. These researchers conducted a survey of 110 documented and 467 undocumented Mexican women that participated in the Los Angeles workforce. Simon and De Ley compared and contrasted employment issues regarding individual's immigration and undocumented status. In their study, they found that only 1.6 percent of the undocumented women surveyed acquired three to four years of schooling in the university.

In addition, Maryann Gray, Georges Vernez, and Elizabeth Rolph (1996) conducted a study by using quantitative and qualitative methods. Their study defined immigrants as those who were foreign born, with legal status ranging from undocumented to naturalized citizens. These researchers explored the difference between native-born Americans and foreign-born immigrants' participation in postsecondary education by using the 1990 Census data and the High School and Beyond national survey dataset. They found that immigrants are achieving access to postsecondary education. In fact, Gray et al. stated that immigrant students who were enrolled in U.S high schools as sophomores were as likely as native-born students to graduate from high school, were better prepared to pursue a higher education, and held higher academic aspirations.

Furthermore, Gray et al. (1996) also investigated how colleges and universities were responding to the rising number of immigration by conducting 14 case studies from diverse institutions around the country, including California, Chicago, New York/New Jersey, and South Florida. Five of the institutions were Ph.D.-level research universities, four were master's-level comprehension universities, and five were community colleges. An average of 15 interviews with administrators, faculty, and student service staff were conducted at each location. Gray, et al. found that immigrants were not an identified population on the nation's campuses, administrators believed that immigrant students performed better than native-born students, language skills were reported as the most significant problem shared by immigrants, and special support services for immigrants were not valued. A significant finding was admissions and financial aid requirements were poorly understood, especially those, which impact the enrollment of undocumented students seeking to attend and obtain a postsecondary degree.

The research listed above adds to the literature in diverse ways. In particular, Rita Simon and Margo De Ley's study indicated that there were a small percentage of undocumented women that actually participated in higher education. Furthermore, Maryann Gray, Georges Vernez, and Elizabeth Rolph's (1996) work indicated that undocumented students had strong hopes for attending post secondary schools. Moreover, Gray et al. (1996) concluded that universities were lacking appropriate information for assisting undocumented college students. Although the literature clearly states informative data regarding undocumented students it does not mention anything about undocumented student experiences in their pursuit to complete a college degree. The

following section explores data that specifically directs undocumented students' experiences in college.

### **Undocumented Immigrant Students' Educational Experiences**

Studies that explore undocumented immigrant students' experiences of access into U.S. institutions of higher education are sparse. These few studies represent a limited amount of information on how undocumented immigrant students actually acquire a university degree. Although the current literature is limited in exploring undocumented immigrant students' experiences in accessing admission to postsecondary institutions, recent publications on this topic are developing.

For example, a recent UCLA publication, *Underground Ungrads* (2008), reveals true stories of undocumented immigrant students' pursuits of acquiring a higher education. In this book, undocumented immigrants share their experiences of coming to the U.S. and struggling to complete degrees from UCLA. This publication includes ten different accounts from students' experiences regarding undocumented immigrant student issues, which include: legislative barriers, family issues, financial difficulties, and political activism. This publication serves as advocacy for making federal changes to the current laws to assist undocumented students in college. Since most of the authors are still enrolled in college or are recent graduates, little is known about their contributions to society post graduation.

Sandra Bygrave Dozier (1993) and (1995) conducted a study profiling 146 undocumented immigrant students from City University of New York (CUNY) community college. This research included one hundred forty six students' from the Caribbean, Asia, and South America academic records. Data indicated that student

choose CUNY because it was less expensive and their undocumented status was not a concern for enrollment. In addition, Dozier found undocumented immigrant community college students experienced the following emotional needs: fear of deportation, loneliness, and depression. Dozier suggested more undocumented immigrant studies and services are needed to assist with the diverse needs of this group. Although Dozier offers an account of undocumented student collegial experiences, nothing is known about their successes after graduation.

Esther Hugo (2001) explained about a dual enrollment program between feeder high schools and a community college in the Los Angeles area gave ninth, tenth, and twelfth grade students an opportunity to take college-level courses, after school at their own high school campus. Students earned college units, accessed academic capital, and prepared for college, prior to enrolling into a postsecondary institution. Hugo stated that all students, including undocumented students were treated as residents and were not charged for fees or tuition.

Hugo (2001) indicated that undocumented immigrant students had an opportunity to experience their postsecondary training before their immigration status became an issue. This article contributes a snapshot of what undocumented students experience in the beginning of their college careers, specifically when students are still enrolled as high school students. Even though this literature offers insight to students' exposure to some college courses, nothing is known about the actual experiences of students when they are already enrolled in a four-year university, nonetheless after graduation.

Leisy Janet Abrego (2006) compared and contrasted documented and undocumented Latino/a students between the ages of fifteen and twenty-two. In this

ethnographic study Abrego found that undocumented students' status lead to lack of educational motivation and a decrease in high school graduation in comparison to documented students. The data indicated that laws and regulations prohibiting undocumented students from receiving financial aid hindered their enrollment to selective universities. Abrego add to the literature of undocumented students by presenting undocumented student experiences in college. As a result to focusing on such a young age level graduation stories of success are unrevealed.

Yolanda Rangel (2001) also highlighted undocumented immigrant students' experiences. She conducted a phenomenology study, interviewing six undocumented female immigrant college students who were studying at a community college, California State University, or University of California institution. Three different areas of each student's life from their home, school, and college experiences were collected in the data. She explored the resources available to these students and the obstacles they encountered as they transitioned from high school to the university. Rangel found that familial support was a significant factor in influencing undocumented students to do well academically, especially during their formable and early school years. Even though Rangel describes the factors that help undocumented students progress through college, we do not learn about their post-graduate experiences.

Sylvia De Leon (2005) conducted a study highlighting the experiences of undocumented immigrant students. She interviewed ten Mexican male undocumented college freshmen currently enrolled in Texan postsecondary institutions. At the time of the research, three attended a University of Texas System, two attended Texas State University San Marcos, and five attended a community college. De Leon centered her

study on students' resiliency experiences before and during their time in postsecondary institutions. She created a developmental model of immigrant resiliency by collecting retrospective accounts, student supports, and barriers they encountered while attending postsecondary institutions. Although De Leon captures the true experiences of undocumented college student resiliency, little is known about what students do after graduation.

Paz Oliveréz (2006) conducted a qualitative study, which included ten undocumented high school students seeking to access institutions of higher education. She used a "social capital framework" (Bourdieu, 1977) to acknowledge undocumented students' challenges with preparing, applying, seeking funding, and making decisions about college. Some of these challenges include, lack of: academic preparation and rigor; financial support; and information about the application process. Oliveréz also examined the role of legislative policies that shape undocumented students' college aspirations and choices to attend college.

In addition, Oliveréz (2006) disclosed the support networks, which assisted undocumented students to acquire information about college. Furthermore, Oliveréz explains undocumented students financial situation once enrolled in their first semester of college. Although Oliveréz brings the reality of undocumented college high school and college student experiences to the literature, nothing is known about students' successes of college graduation. In other words, Oliveréz targets primarily college access issues, student experiences of progressing through college are lacking and their experiences after graduation are unknown.

Heidi Coronado (2008) study focused on the resiliency of undocumented immigrant university students. In this qualitative study, she interviewed seventeen undocumented immigrant students enrolled at a university. Coronado revealed undocumented immigrant student collegial stressors and successes. She found that undocumented immigrant students suffered from: separation from family, financial difficulties, and fear of deportation. In addition, Coronado disclosed that family values, mentors, and a high maturity and motivation level as factors that contributed to their success. Although Coronado mentions undocumented university students serve the community by volunteering and make a difference, she does not explain in which ways. We don't know what types of volunteering participants were involved with and what they are doing to make a difference. Although Coronado states undocumented immigrant students make contributions to society it is unclear, in this study, how these contributions are made.

William Perez, Roberta Espinoza, Karina Ramos, and Heidi M. Coronado (2009) conducted a quantitative study examining the academic resilience of undocumented immigrant Latino students. There were one hundred and ten participants from high school, community college, and universities that participated in the study. In this study researchers used psychological and academic resilience theories to frame their study. Perez, et. al. (2009) found that resilient undocumented students have more educational success compared to students lacking personal and environment resources. As a consequence, the data indicated that personal and environmental resources helped the educational merits of students, as well. In addition, researchers found that giftedness, knowing the worth of an education, getting involved in extracurricular activities, and



volunteering contributed to school success. While Perez, et. al (2009) offer an abundance of descriptive statistics about undocumented students, little is known about specific experiences from this group and their own understanding and practical knowledge of personal and environmental resources.

William Perez (2009) conducted a study highlighting undocumented immigrant students' experiences of pursuing the American dream. In this study, the American dream is otherwise known as completing a university degree. This qualitative study included accounts from four high school students, four community college students, four university students, and four college graduate students. All twenty participants in the study offered a rich descriptive narration of their educational and personal experiences with being undocumented students. Perez provides endearing stories portraying high levels of psychological resilience and perseverance from undocumented students. He states that immigration laws are broken, inconsistent, and contradictory. Notwithstanding the fact that Perez devotes his most of his book the actual experience of undocumented students in college, only a slight glimpse of former undocumented college graduates are presented. Only four out of the twenty participants fall under this category and more information about actual contributions is needed. Many participants describe future contributions to society they would like to make, but few existing contributions are noted.

Susana Maria Mufioz (2008) conducted a study collecting five in-depth interviews from undocumented immigrant women from a small rural community, in the Rocky Mountain Region. This qualitative study used a borderland theoretical framework and Chicana feminist epistemological (Delgado-Bernal, 1998) techniques to examine factors related to college persistence. In addition, braids of multiple identities perspective was

utilized to assist in creating the following six themes found in the data: (a) support and challenges from their home system; (b) unraveling the notions of dual socialization; (c) micro aggressions against newcomers; (d) learning and unlearning from the language acquisition process; (e) dilemmas, stressors, and motivation associated with undocumented status; and (f) creating successful academic spaces and social networks in college. In spite of the rich information presented about undocumented women, especially their involvement in civil service, their specific societal contributions are unmentioned.

### **Conclusion**

The current studies focusing on access issues for undocumented students, merely give a glimpse of the actual experiences of undocumented students already in higher education. Little is known about what these students have gone through after they have entered the university. With the exception of some recent dissertation studies, undocumented students' plights after enrollment in the university are unmentioned. Nothing is known about how undocumented immigrant students persisted toward acquiring a university degree or what they are doing after graduating from an institution of higher education.

The current research rarely addresses the experiences of how undocumented immigrant students successfully navigate through the educational system. It is practically silent in explaining how undocumented immigrant students' higher educational degrees have been influential to our communities and the U.S. society as a whole. Studies that focus on undocumented students that have graduated from a university are even more scant. More studies are needed to understand the complex issues concerning

undocumented students' experiences inside the higher education system and what has resulted from undocumented immigrant students acquiring their degrees. As stated previously, scholarly work on undocumented students is scarce but growing. The literature pertaining to undocumented college graduates is lacking, we literally know very little about their actual contributions to society. Therefore, a study highlighting undocumented university graduates plights and successes, along with how our society benefits from their endurance is needed. The following chapter will explain the methodology used in this study illuminating the collegiate experiences of undocumented students, particularly in the process of persisting through college graduation and their contributions to society post graduation.

## CHAPTER 3

### Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the collegiate experiences of undocumented college graduates with two explicit goals: 1) to understand how students, despite their undocumented status, successfully navigated the university environment and negotiated how to acquire a college degree; and 2) to illuminate the contributions of undocumented college graduates to U.S. society.

This study answers the following four questions:

- (1.) How do undocumented immigrant students access U.S. public colleges and universities?
- (2.) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist?
- (3.) What factors support their efforts to persist?
- (4.) In what ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society?

In order to answer the research questions stated above, a qualitative research design was employed to capture the collegiate experiences of undocumented immigrant students and their contributions, thereafter. As stated in chapter one, little is known about how undocumented students who actually succeeded and acquired a university degree were able to manage this very difficult process and what contributions they have made to society after obtaining a university degree. This study reveals an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in the process of acquiring a university degree.

Qualitative studies are conducted for studying phenomena that are not well understood due to the lack of research and theory (Creswell, 1994; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin,

1990). A qualitative design was appropriate for studying undocumented students' collegiate experiences because the strength of qualitative research is to uncover and highlight the lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

A concept modeling approach was the methodological tradition of this study (Padilla, 1991). A concept modeling approach is similar to grounded theory because it employs the process of generating theory from the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) by using a "constant comparative method" (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). In short, the researcher defines specific concepts from an interview and relates or compares and contrasts them to other interviews creating categories and subcategories to explain a specific situation through a visual model made by a computer (Padilla, 1991).

Guba and Lincoln state, "Inductive analysis...begins not with theories or hypotheses but with the data themselves, from which theoretical categories and relational propositions may be arrived at by inductive reasoning processes" (p. 333). A concept modeling approach was used to understand the process of how undocumented immigrant students obtained a university degree by gathering information about their collegiate experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The theoretical concepts developed are an interpretation of the data collected from the researcher's perspective (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling, criterion-based technique combined with snowballing was utilized to select participants for this study (Patton, 1987). Purposeful sampling is the selection of participants and a specific site on the basis of particular established criteria, providing the researcher with significant information (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998,

2002; Patton, 1987). Twenty-one former undocumented college graduates volunteered to be interviewed for the study, sixteen females and five males. In order to participate for this study participants needed to satisfy the following four criteria for this study; this criteria includes a person who: (a) lives in the U.S. but who was born outside of the U.S. and brought to this country as a child between the ages of zero to sixteen years old, (b) attended U.S. secondary schools, (c) is a Latina or Latino (preferably from Mexico or Central America) who has graduated from a public university in California, and (d) is a child of undocumented immigrants and has been undocumented during, at least part, his/her college experience but has obtained some type of legal authorization to be in the U.S.. The latter criterion was included so that participation in this study, in no way put the student in legal jeopardy of being deported.

The criteria selection for participants was chosen for several reasons. First, little is known about the experiences of undocumented students who graduated from college and the process they went through to obtain a higher education degree. Second, the children that were brought to the U.S, did not choose their undocumented status, but face a number of barriers in acquiring a university degree due to their undocumented status. Third, the largest group of undocumented immigrant children in the United States comes from Latin American countries and a large percentage of them live in California (Passel, 2004). Forth, this study focused on public institutions versus private because private institutions have the ability to grant complete four-year scholarships for undocumented immigrant students, whereas public colleges do not. Finally, Latina/o enrollment in postsecondary education does not match with their population growth rate and they are highly underrepresented on university campus' across the nation, especially regarding

degree attainment of post-secondary degrees (Hurado & Kaminmura, 2003; Minorities in Higher Education, 1999-2000, Nation Center of Educational Statistics, 1996; National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, 1999; Nora, 2003).

Snowballing, otherwise known as the chain referral technique was utilized after each interview was conducted. For example, participants were asked if they knew of any other potential participants for the study. If a participant knew of a potential participant, he or she gave the researcher's information to them.

Key persons helped identify prospective participants. Information about the study and the background characteristics of participants being sought were communicated through phone calls, electronic mail, letters, and in person to immigration lawyers, organizations dealing with undocumented immigrant students and Latina/o issues (LULAC, League of United Latin Americans Citizens, NILC, National Immigration Law Center, National Council de la Raza, MAN A, a National Latina Organization), and other immigration or Latina/o social community networking circles (see Appendix A for a copy of the letter looking for participants). The people from the above organizations or groups who respond provided the prospective participants with the researcher's contact information and selection criteria for the study. Those who were willing to participate in the study and met the selection criteria contacted the researcher.

The researcher made arrangements, at the convenience of the potential participant, to meet with each interested person. Information about the study and the informed consent form was reviewed to each participant. After an explanation was provided and all participants' questions were answered, the researcher had the participant sign the consent form, if the person was still willing to participate.

Each participant was fully aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary, during the initial contact. This point was reinforced orally and in writing when the researcher met with individuals who express initial interest. After, a potential participant indicated interest in volunteering in the study, the participant and the researcher met at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The researcher met participants at many different locations, which include: public libraries, local university campuses, work places, private offices, and participants' homes. At this meeting, the participant was given a consent form that reiterates the fact that participation is completely voluntary. All items on the consent form were reviewed orally.

The researcher communicated with each participant that he or she had the option of dropping out of the study at any time. If he or she chose to end the interview, the data collected up to that point was not used unless he or she gave permission to do so. If a particular participant chose to drop out of the study, he/she made the decision if any of their information may or may not be used in the study, otherwise the information was destroyed right away. Confidentiality and voluntary participation was addressed by items on the form and in the oral review of these items. Participants who have obtained some type of legal status to be in the U.S. were asked to sign two informed consent forms. The researcher kept one copy, and the participant kept the other copy. This is also stated on the informed consent form that the participants sign; see Appendix B for a copy of the consent form.

### **Data Collection Methods**

In-depth interviewing was the primary data collection method (Patton, 1987). The interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2008. The individual's participation in the



initial face-to-face interview ranged from approximately 60 to 120 minutes. Additional follow up questions were sent via electronic mail or asked by telephone. Each participant was given the option to spend extra time reviewing their own transcript of his or her interview for clarifying purposes or to give additional information.

An interview guide was used to collect the data. It consisted of semi-structured questions and was loosely structured (Kvale, 1996); see Appendix C for a copy of the interview guide and Appendix D to view how each research question correlated with the interview guide. The participant was given the opportunity to talk more freely about a particular subject, giving rich in-depth details and information. The participant did most of the talking, while the interviewer listened attentively. Since the interviewer speaks both Spanish and English, the participants had the option to speak in the language they feel most comfortable speaking. Although many participants spoke in English, some switched in between languages to emphasize a word or phrase, and only a few primarily spoke in Spanish.

Each interview was audio taped and video taped with the participants' permission. Participants had the option to choose to be interviewed without being video taped to keep their identity confidential. If a participant did not want to be video taped they still participated in the study without being videotaped recorded. Videotaping was strictly voluntary.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

A concept modeling approach was used to analyze the data (Padilla, 1991). This approach consists of utilizing a computer in a two-stage process, which includes analysis and synthesis. The initial interview constituted the first part of the analysis by separating

the data into different parts. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of undocumented immigrant students' experiences in the process of acquiring a university degree. Participants gave retrospective accounts of particular social situations, which include their college life experience and their current occupation. Next, the synthesis included finding concepts and relationships from the data collected. The final part of the synthesis consisted of creating a grounded conceptualization in the shape of a visual concept model of the social situation in understanding the process of undocumented immigrant students' experiences during and after college. This final stage consisted of both analyzing and synthesizing the data collected.

**Coding.** Coding was used to analyze the data collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data was initially coded according to questions outlined in the interview guide. The categories and subcategories emerged as this data relates to the research questions. The constant comparative method was used to synthesize the data and discover concepts by comparing similarities and differences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Memo Writing.** In addition to coding, the analysis consisted of writing memos and reflective notes immediately after each interview and during the analysis to help make sense of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These memos consisted of code notes, theoretical notes, operational notes, and diagrams (Corbin & Strauss, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This writing helped in synthesizing the data and comprehending emerging themes, define and clarify categories, concentrate on upcoming data collection, and reveal relationships between categories (Charmaz, 2000, 2001). This writing served as analytic notes, recoding the researcher's thoughts and adding personal comments. The researcher recorded how she could work out any problems to plan for the next interview

(Glesne, 1998), including choosing a more welcoming environment. After each interview the researcher compared and contrasted themes from one interview to the next, using the "constant comparative method" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) finding similarities between each interview. In addition, this process assisted in organizing particular assertions made by participants to develop a concept model of undocumented college graduates' situation. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Figure 3.1 illustrates the data collections methods using the concept modeling approach. First, a series of coding took place after each interview was conducted using an interview guide. Then, categories and subcategories were created using the interview and the "constant comparative method" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Next, memos and reflective notes were taken throughout the coding and comparing process. Finally, after all transcripts from the interviews were analyzed and synthesized several times a concept model was developed to explain and illustrate the experiences of the participants.

### **Validity**

As stated in chapter one, participants had the opportunity to review and edit their individual transcriptions in order to add, delete, or clarify any portions. This process gave credibility to the findings when participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). This feedback assured that the participant's experiences in the process of obtaining a university degree were recorded correctly.

### **Limitations of the Study**

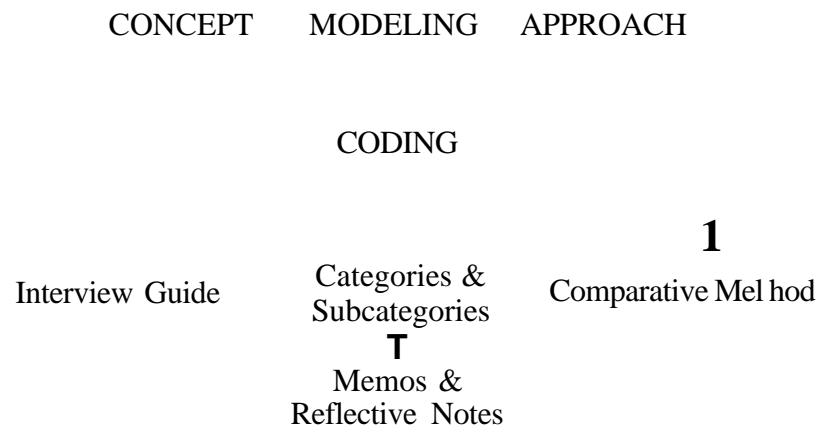
A number of limitations were found in the sample and data collection methods of this study. First, the sample group consists of a sensitive population, undocumented

immigrant students are vulnerable in the sense of not being legal residents in the U.S.. Second, finding an adequate number of participants for the study was challenging.

In addition, issues that pertain to undocumented immigrant students may cause participants to remember traumatic experiences and memories, keeping significant information secret. Some may view this as harmful to the individual. Others may argue that, since these individuals have obtained their degrees, this research can be used as a therapeutic experience of recalling success and a reflection of past experiences, both positive and negative. Resources for counseling were made available to participants if they need them. For example, the researcher communicated to each participant that there might be a risk to participating in the interviews where you may feel tired, distressed, anxious, or sad when talking or reflecting on positive or negative college experiences. All participants were given the phone number to the San Diego Mental Health Hotline, in case they needed to discuss their feelings with a mental health professional.

There were also other limitations related with the data collection in the study. The data was collected only after students graduated from a university. Consequently, only participants' previous academic experiences were captured through their retrospective accounts and reflections, not through direct observations.

In addition, subjectivity was a concern because the researcher is the primary tool of data collection and analysis. Being a Latina with immigrant parents may affect the study. However, reflecting on and disclosing biases, working with others to notice biases, and checking with the participants in order that their experiences have been properly represented, directed subjectivity. The next three chapters describe the findings of the study.

**Figure 3.1****Concept Modeling Approach**

## Introduction to the Findings

This section is an overview of chapters 4, 5, and 6, which constitute the research findings. In order to reveal the true experiences of participants in the study, direct quotes from participants in both English and Spanish are used. There were several overarching themes that emerged from the data that answered the research questions of this study. As stated earlier, the research questions were: (1) How do undocumented immigrant students access U.S. colleges? (2) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist? (3) What factors support their efforts to persist? (4) In which ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society? Concept modeling was used as a tool to organize these themes (Padilla, 1991). Taken together, chapters 4, 5, and 6 explain the participants' experiences of getting into, through, and beyond college. The following section presents an overview of chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Chapter 4 addresses the participants' experiences of getting into college. This chapter answers the first research question: (1) How do undocumented immigrant students access U.S. colleges? As shown in Figure 4.1, what emerged from the data were elements of encouragement and discouragement that served as metaphor that describes undocumented immigrant students' experiences of taking a roller coaster ride with regard to being admitted into college. This roller coaster ride was not a form of entertainment for these students. Rather, this roller coaster ride included moments of both "ups" and "downs" for the students. The "ups" represent those elements that supported and pushed these students forward along their pathway to college. Conversely, there were elements that elicited doubt, fear, confusion, and served as obstacles for these students. These elements constituted the downward trajectory of the roller coaster ride. During this time it

became difficult, a bit scary, and uncomfortable for these students. Hence, the title for chapter 4 is "The Roller Coaster Ride of the Pathway to College for Undocumented Students." The elements of encouragement included: college preparatory programs and events, advice from counselors and teachers, and private scholarships. The elements of discouragement included: the predicament of undocumented status, advice from counselors, and the lack of federal funds available for undocumented students.

Chapter 5 reveals the roller coaster ride as it describes the process of persisting through college. This section answers research questions two and three: 2) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist? 3) What factors support their efforts to persist? According to the data, both elements of encouragement and discouragement continued to affect participants' ability to persist through college. As a result, the title for chapter 5 is "The Roller Coaster Ride Continues: Elements of Encouragement and Discouragement During College," (see Figure 5.1). The elements of encouragement encompassed the following themes: family and friends, networking groups, and life improvements. The elements of discouragement included: economic hardships, familial obstacles, and undocumented stigmatism.

Chapter 6 illuminates participants' experiences after the roller coaster ride and includes a discussion of their contributions to society. This chapter answers the fourth research question: In which ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society? The title of this section is "Life Beyond the Roller Coaster Ride: The Contributions of the Unwanted." The data indicated participants contributing to society in diverse ways. In particular, the data revealed that upon college graduation all participants choose careers in the helping professions. For example, they became teachers,

counselors, advisors, medical doctors, scholars, and administrators. As shown in Figure 6.1, participants experienced the cycle of giving. Participants made a positive difference by becoming: volunteers, role models, advocates, "life long learners," and leaders . The next chapter provides evidence with regard to the elements of encouragement and discouragement for undocumented students along their pathway to college.



## CHAPTER 4

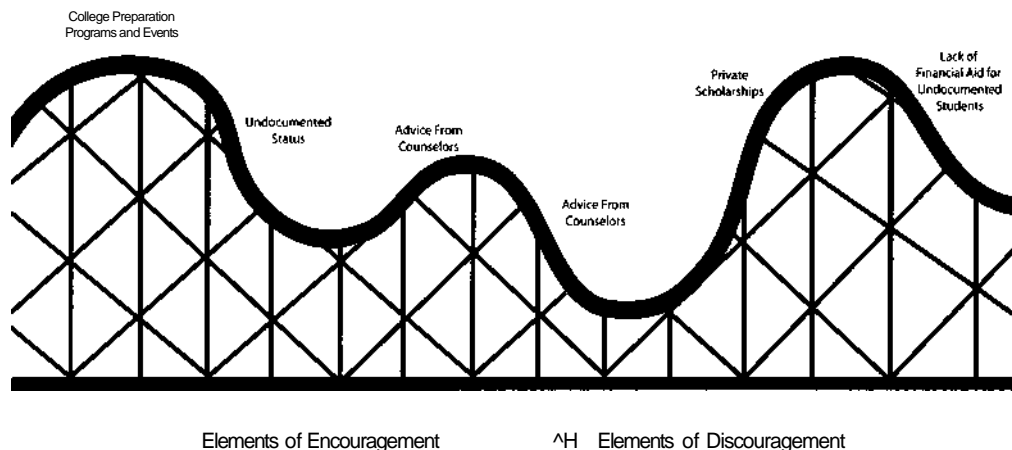
### Findings

#### The Roller Coaster Ride of the Pathway to College for Undocumented Students

This chapter addresses the participants' experiences of getting into college. The chapter answers the first research question: (1) How do undocumented immigrant students access U.S. colleges? As shown in Figure 4.1, The Roller Coaster Ride of the Pathway to College for Undocumented Students, depicts elements of encouragement and discouragement that served as what can be described as a roller coaster ride with regard to being admitted into college. When participants were metaphorically on this roller coaster ride there were specific moments of both "ups" and "downs." The "ups" refer to the elements of encouragement representing the supports that helped push students forward along their pathway to college; the "downs" refer to the elements of discouragement representing obstacles impeding their pathway to college.

Figure 4.1

#### The Roller Coaster Ride of the Pathway to College for Undocumented Students



The first trajectory upward on the roller coaster involved elements of encouragement. The elements of encouragement include college preparatory programs and events, advice from counselors and teachers, and private scholarships. The first trajectory downward represents elements of discouragement. The elements of discouragement include the predicament of undocumented status, advice from counselors, and the lack of federal funds available for undocumented students. The following section describes each trajectory of the roller coaster ride, starting with the first element of encouragement, college preparatory programs and events.

### **College Preparatory Programs and Events**

The data indicated that specific college preparatory programs and events served as powerful and motivating forces that encouraged and supported the participants' pathway to college. Specifically, college preparatory programs and events refer to both formal and informal activities designed to inspire and prepare students for participating in college. Participants were engaged in many college preparatory programs and events, such as: International Baccalaureate (IB), Upward Bound, The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Summer Bridge, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Puente Project, Migrant Education, Opportunity Program Services (OPS), *Adelante Mujer* (woman advancement) Conference, UniCamp, Business Bilingual Finance Academy (BBFA), and the Chicano Leadership Youth Conference. College preparatory programs and events positively impacted the participants' pathway to college by stimulating their thoughts about participating in college. The following describes how college preparatory programs and events served as a catalyst for thinking about attending college.

### **A Catalyst for Wanting to Attend College**

Many participants described that college preparatory programs and events were catalytic to thinking about attending college. In other words, these programs served as the participants' introductory experience to the idea of attending college. Monica gave an example of this in the following quote:

I was in a program called Migrant Education and they really emphasized, you know, us going to college. I remember my first experience with higher education was when they took us to a conference called *Adelante Mujer* for Latinas - it was at a community college, San Diego City College; and I remember vividly this workshop that I attended there was a panel of Latinas who were talking about their professions; and I remember this lady saying that she was a court reporter. I was like oh my God, you know. I do want to go to college, and I want to be a professional. I really never thought I could do it, until this.

The quote above is an illustration of how a college preparatory program and event served as a catalyst for thinking about attending college. Monica, like other students in the study, singled out a formal activity, specifically an educational conference that sparked the idea of attending college. From her interaction with a professional role model, she impetuously chose a pathway to college. This type of interaction was common for many of the students in this study and had similar affects.

Participants explained that college preparatory programs and events gave them the opportunity to socialize with other professionals, in particular other Latinos/as who were college graduates and professionals. Omar explains this experience in the following quote:

I was in the AVID program. And then, one of my Latina teachers [from the program] in high school asked me where I was gonna go to college - not if, but where. And I had never really thought about it. Nobody had ever asked me that before. So I told her that I didn't know. I had no idea where I was gonna go. So it's funny that I didn't think of saying, "I'm not gonna go to college." I told her I didn't know where I was gonna go to college. So from that moment on, I started looking into different colleges and different places to apply... It was Mrs. Rodriguez that asked me where I was gonna go to college. She planted that little seed. That little seed kind of grew into something that made me very excited!

The previous quote shows how a participant started to think about the idea of attending college by talking with a teacher from a college preparatory program. This interaction occurred after class and serves as an example of an informal activity that led to thinking about college. In particular, Omar explained that his teacher was a Latina role model that ignited his thoughts to attend college. Many participants shared that conversations with other Latino/a professionals, in the context of a college preparation program, triggered their thoughts about attending college.

In the upcoming quote, Samantha illustrates another example of a college preparatory event that was inspirational to consider attending college.

One of my friends, he was very political, and he gave me an application for this camp called The Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Camp Conference. It was a whole week of all these activities where you ...connect with other Latinos that were into school and just learn about what college was all about. It's an amazing camp! It helped me start thinking about college and motivated me...

The previous quote illustrates how a college preparatory event served as a catalyst for thinking about college for a student. Specifically, Samantha explained that through this college preparatory program, she had the opportunity to informally network with other Latinos/as, which instigated and motivated her to think about acquiring a university degree. Like Samantha, many participants shared that college preparatory programs stimulated their thoughts of attending college by meeting or "connecting" with others who were Latinos/as and had desires to attend institutions of higher education. In addition, Samantha explained that this college preparatory program and event supplied formal information about college. Many of the study's participants also highlighted common experiences, like Samantha, which had an indistinguishable impact.

An additional quote demonstrating how college preparatory programs and events served to prompt students to imagine participating in college, is shown by Lydia:

I was in a program called Upward Bound, that's a program catering for at risk youth, for lower income at risk youth... They put it in my head that I could do anything, or be anything, or go anywhere I wanted to go. That's where I got it! That's where I starting thinking about going to college because my parents didn't go or know much about it.

The preceding quote highlights an additional example of how a college preparatory program served as a catalyst for thinking about going to college. Like other students, Lydia stated it was a specific formal program that put attending college in her head. Moreover, Lydia, similar to other students, was without parents who had any experience with college. Therefore, the influence of such programs was ever greater.

College preparatory programs and events motivated and assisted participants' pathway to college. Participants' involvement in college preparatory programs and events served as a catalyst to thinking about attending college. Although participants were persuaded to attend a university through college preparatory programs and events, they were also dissuaded. Participants experienced elements of discouragement, which hindered their pathway to college because of their undocumented status. The following section highlights an element of discouragement associated with participants' predicament of their undocumented status.

### **Predicament of Undocumented Status**

The data revealed that participants' predicament of their undocumented status resulted in powerless and impeding circumstances that discouraged their pathway to college. In particular, the predicament of participants' undocumented status refers to the complicated and difficult situation of not being U.S. citizens. It is important to restate that it was not their choice to be undocumented. Their parents placed them in this undocumented position. This situation not only hindered but often blocked participants' pathway to college. Participants' undocumented status served as an obstruction for wanting to attend college. The following describes how participants' undocumented status became an impediment for attending college.

### **An Obstruction for Attending College**

All of the participants in the study communicated that the predicament of their undocumented status became a major obstruction for wanting to attend college. In other words, participants' undocumented situation led to unmotivated desires to attend college. According to the participants, their undocumented status created emotions of frustration

and uncertainty about considering going to college. The following highlights students' experiences of frustration with being undocumented and desiring to go to college.

For example, Linda illustrated being agitated about going to college, in the following quote: "And I remember - filling out the application to go to college - it was supposed to be a fun, exciting time. And for me it was very frustrating because of my undocumented status!" Linda captures the feelings of many participants when she described her feelings upon entering college with regard to her undocumented status. Linda, like many participants in the study, experienced feelings of frustration toward wanting to attend college because of her undocumented status.

Ariel offers another quote that describes a sense of exasperation toward attending college due to her undocumented status:

I was so upset when I found out I was undocumented! By the time I was a junior in high school, I realized that I didn't have the legal status and I had never thought about it before, never. I had been in the country for almost seven, eight years. I had no ties to Mexico anymore. Mexico was not my country. I always thought I was American and I was an American teenager! I always thought I could go to college without a problem, until I found out about my undocumented status.

The quote above shows how a participant's aspirations to go to college were obstructed due to her undocumented status. Many participants in the study, like Ariel, did not even know they were undocumented until they were in high school. Ariel was motivated to attend college and viewed the possibility to attend college as unproblematic, until she learned about her undocumented status. When Ariel discovered she was undocumented

she became disillusioned and uncertain about attending college. These experiences were common for many of the students in this study and had a similar impact.

The succeeding quote highlights how Paulina's undocumented status transformed her view of attending college:

*Bueno, pues la verdad fue muy frustrante porque cuando yo estaba en la high school siempre pense que saliendo de la high school iba a poder venir al colegio. Se me hacia como que todo era color de rosa, como tenia el mundo adelante y todo estaba perfecto, dije -no voy a tener ningun problema. Pero resulta que no tenia papeles, y eso fue como se me destrozó toda mi vida ahí porque pense que no iba poder ir a la universidad. [Well, to tell you the truth it was very frustrating because when I was in high school I always thought when I leave high school I will be able to come to college. Everything seemed like it was rose color, like I had the whole world ahead of me and everything was perfect. I said, I will not have a single problem. But it resulted that I didn't have papers and that was like my life was destroyed in front of me because I thought I couldn't go to college.]*

This quote shows a common example of how a participant's college ambitions were diminished after finding out about her undocumented circumstance. Paulina stated she was on the pathway to college until she came to a barricade, her undocumented status. Many participants shared similar experiences where they thought college would be easily accessible until they were confronted with their undocumented status situation. Paulina, like many participants in the study, thought the idea of going to college was unattainable because of her immigration status.



Jessica, like Paulina illuminates another example of how her undocumented status affected her inclination to attend college:

I came here when I was three years old from San Luis Potosi Mexico, but I didn't really know I was undocumented until I got to my junior year of high school you know when everybody's getting their driver's license, applying for college and doing all those things. I was a straight A student. I was captain of the cross-country team. I had my whole life ahead of me. I fantasized about going to a great university. Everyone would ask: where is Jessica going to school? Assuming I would go to an amazing university. At the time, I was a TA [teacher's assistant] for a college advisor. I was actually helping others fill out their FASA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] forms and I couldn't even fill out one for myself. I was learning what it was to be undocumented. At the time, I realized that I didn't have a Social Security number. Then, I knew I was different but I didn't know exactly what it meant. Junior year, finding out I was, actually, undocumented was really difficult. I thought wait, I can't go to university that I want to. I felt a hard depression for about 6 months when I found out [about being undocumented]. I thought it was not fair that my university hopes were over because of my immigration status.

The previous quote illustrated how the participant was disillusioned about attending college because she lacked legal residency. Although Jessica merited the qualifications to be admitted to a prestigious university, she felt her opportunities confined because she did not have a Social Security number, which was required for applying to college. Many participants shared identical experiences like Jessica. They worked hard in high school in

order to be accepted and graduate from a noteworthy university, but once they found out they were undocumented their yearning to attend college was crushed.

Jessica's quote also explains how her undocumented status climaxed to feelings of frustration and uncertainty, which developed into a state of depression about her future education goals. Many of the study's participants were overachieving students, like Jessica, and also experienced a temporary stage of depression, when faced with the realities of being an undocumented student. These feelings derailed students' pathway from wanting to attend college. Like Jessica, many participants elaborated on losing their hope and drive for thinking about going to college, once they faced the fact they were undocumented.

Another example, which shows feelings of frustration and uncertainty about attending college, is portrayed from Octavia:

I think the most challenging was basically my [undocumented] status. I remember when I was in high school I knew that because I wasn't a permanent resident or a legal resident of the United States that it was going to be an issue when I applied. And so I felt very - it felt very frustrating knowing that I may not have the opportunity to go onto college based on that. And just dealing with the lack of control of my, quote/unquote, destiny was very, very difficult.

This quote illustrates how a participant felt disheartened about attending college as a consequence lacking U.S. citizenship. Specifically, Octavia felt disappointed that she might not be able "to have the opportunity to go onto college" because she was not a legal resident or citizen of the United States. Octavia also elaborated on her sense of helplessness in determining her educational future deriving from her undocumented

status, not her educational worth. Many of the study's participants also disclosed the same emotions of annoyance regarding their lack of opportunity of going to college due to their undocumented situation.

Participants' predicament of their undocumented status impeded and hindered their pathway to college. Participants' lack of citizenship resulted in an obstruction for wanting to further their education past high school. For example, Janet said:

I was here illegally so I was afraid -I didn't know what was going to happen if they were going to let me continue. I was afraid that my dream of going to college was going to be stopped at one point or another.

The preceding quote described how a participant was unsure about going to college because of her undocumented situation. Specifically, Janet was fearful that her goals of going to college and becoming a college graduate might be over because she was not a U.S. citizen. Janet, like many participants in the study, experienced emotions charged with fear, frustration, and uncertainty pertaining to attending college because of her undocumented status. Janet was hesitant, unsure, and confused about her future college goals. These types of feelings were common for many of the students in this study.

Several participants in the study shared that they questioned the fact that they would even be able to go to college due to not being U.S. citizens. They shared similar experiences of feeling insecure and uneasy about attending college. Even though participants suffered negative reactions toward entering college because of their immigration status, they continued to sustain their perseverance from their self-determination and the support they received from others. For example, advice from high school counselors and teachers invigorated participants to follow a pathway to college.

The following section emphasizes an element of encouragement regarding how advice from high school counselors and teachers assisted participants to begin a college education.

### **Positive Advice from Counselors and Teachers**

The data indicated that positive advice from high school counselors and teachers resulted in inspirational influences that revitalized and guided participants' pathway to college. Specifically, positive advice from counselors and teachers refers to enlightening conversations directing and convincing students to attend college. Positive advice from counselors and teachers served to support and persuade participants' to attend college by guiding and encouraging them to participate in college. The following addresses how counselors and teachers became advocates to help participants choose a college path.

#### **An Advocate to Help Decide to Attend College**

According to the data, high school counselors and teachers became advocates by assisting participants to gain access to college. The following is an example of this, from Margarita:

I had my [high school] counselor call me to her office, and she told me, "You know what? Your grades are fairly good. You should go to college." So I just told her, "Well, I'm not really interested," but I only said that because I thought I couldn't go. And she was very pushy - for me going to college, and I told her, "Well, I'm not - well, college is not really for me. That's not what I wanna do." And then she kept on pushing, and I was like, "Well, we don't have money." And then she told me how this other kid, who had similar grades and didn't have the support of their family and they were poor, and he was able to go to a Cal State

and get a lot of financial aid. And she pushed me to the point that I was like, "Okay, you know what? I can't go because I'm undocumented." And her expression was like, "Oh," just out of kinda like disappointment that she couldn't help me anymore. And the one thing that stuck by me, is that she said, "Well, go to community college and see what happens afterwards." So I stood with that... that conversation actually motivated my choice to go.

The previous quote gives an example of positive advice convincing a participant to go to college. Specifically, a high school counselor guided Margarita, like many participants in the study, to go to college. This counselor motivated Margarita's choice to go to college by suggesting her to go to a community college, when she thought that she had no possibility to go college. This experience, where counselors and teachers became advocates to promote participants to choose a college career, was shared by many of the study's participants.

The next quote also highlights another example of how a high school teacher influenced Linda to choose a college:

At the beginning I was really confused ... but one of my teachers in high school took me aside and told me you are really good at math you can do this [go to college] and he convinced me to choose an engineering school.

The preceding quote serves as an example of positive advice given by a teacher that "convinced" a participant to go to college. In particular, Linda was not only confused about going to college but also perplexed about what type of school she should or could attend. With the assistance of a high school teacher, Linda was guided in the right direction toward the pathway to college. Linda, like many participants in the study

received positive and motivational advice that supported her decision to go to college.

This type of advocacy was beneficial to many of the study's participants.

Maria, like Linda offers an example where a counselor assisted her to participate in college:

The kind of advice and support that helped me come to college came from the help of my counselors and with the help of their guidance, making sure that I met the deadlines. Following up on what I needed to do and if I felt lonely or in trouble I knew I could go over there and talk with them.

The quote above is another typical example of how a participant received "advice and support" to go on to college from counselors. Maria, like many participants acquired a positive relationship with counselors, which inspired and supported her to decision to go to college.

Counselors and teachers became advocates for many of the study's participants to attend college. Positive advice from high school counselors and teachers guided participants' pathway to college. Both high school counselors and teachers became advocates for participants to attend college. Although advice from high school counselors and teachers served to be inspirational and encouraged participants' decision to go to college, some advice discouraged participants away from college. The following section addresses an element of discouragement correlating how negative advice from high school counselors affected participants' pathway to college.

### **Advice from High School Counselors**

The data indicated that specific advice from high school counselors served as an intimidating and an afflicting strain that discouraged participants' pathway to college.

Specifically, advice from high school counselors refers to unenthusiastic and dissenting recommendations constructed to draw students away from participating in college.

Advice from high school counselors shun participants' pathway to college by blocking their inspirations to participate in college. The following depicts how advice from high school counselors served as an impeding force distracting participants' pathway to college.

### **An Impeding Force Pulling Students Away from College**

Many participants described that advice from high school counselors became an impeding force distracting them away from attending college. In other words, these conversations dissuaded participants to want to go to college. For example, Fabi reflected this:

My [high school] counselor told me that you're not good enough. Your English is not good enough. You don't have papers. You cannot go to college because if you do, you have to pay a lot... So part of me wanted to give up at the moment and say okay, that's it!

The previous quote is an example of how advice from high school counselors hindered participants' decision to go to college. In particular, Fabi developed thoughts of surrendering her aspirations to go to college as a consequence of the pessimistic information given to her by her high school counselor. Fabi, like many of the study's participants, experienced this type of disillusionment, which unmotivated her pathway to college.

The following quote offers another illustration from Paulina depicting the lack of support from a high school counselor:

*Bueno, pues para empezar tambien tuve una mala experiencia con mi consejero, porque ahora que lo miro, la verdad que nadie me informo sobre - mira, en mi casa nadie ha ido a la universidad- yo soy la primera en graduarme. Entonces no tenia ese soporte en mi - no tenia ese apoyo en mi casa. Nadie me decia, "O, mira, esto es lo que tienes que hacer. Tienes que aplicar - hacer tu tiempo, o vas a hacer esto, estos exámenes, " nada, no sabia nada. Mi consejero no me consejo en esas cosas que tenia que hacer, nomas me dijo que yo no iba a ir a la universidad. Y estofue dificil oír. [Well, to start I had a bad experience with my counselor because now that I see it, no one informed me about-look in my house no one went to the university. I was the first to graduate. So I didn't have the support in my house. No one told me this is what you have to do. You have to apply, do this, take time for that, take these exams, nothing I didn't know anything. My conselor didn't counsel me in these things I had to do, he only told me that I wasn't going to go to the university. And this was difficult to hear.]*

The preceding quote illustrates how a participant received disheartening advice from a high school counselor. Specifically, Paulina was not guided from her high school counselor to follow the appropriate steps in order to go to college. She was told the unfavorable statement that she was not going to go the university. Many participants, like Paulina, were told they were not going to college from their high school counselor. This type of advice impeded participants' aspirations to go to college.

An additional example of unwelcoming advice from a high school counselor is discussed by Javier. He stated:



...when I asked her [high school counselor] for an application, she just started laughing and she said, "You have no papers, you have no money, you have no family, why do you want to go to college? You can't do it." And so, like hell, it hurt.

The quote above shows the detrimental voice of a high school counselor thwarting a student from attending college. In particular, Javier was rudely told he could not go to college. This news dissuaded Javier from wanting to go to college. Javier, like several participants in the study, was given negative information preventing a clear pathway to college. It was painful for Javier to hear the negative words that he was not going to college, especially when he desired to go. This type of premonition was common for many of the students in this study.

Advice from high school counselors impeded participants' inspirations to attend college. Participants' experiences with advice from their high school counselors served as an impeding force mentally pulling them away from wanting to attend college. Even though, participants' aspirations to attend college were interfered by comments from some high school counselors they continued to have perseverance, due to private scholarships. Private scholarships facilitated participants' pathway to college. The following section focuses on an element of encouragement associated with participants receiving private scholarships.

### **Private Scholarships**

The data indicated that, in spite of participants' financial difficulties, various private scholarships served as a beneficial monetary significance that encouraged and strengthened participants' pathway to college. Specifically, private scholarships refer to

financial payments to facilitate participants' college education costs. Private scholarships indisputably influenced the participants' pathway to college by offsetting their school tuition debts. The following describes how private scholarships served as an advantage to help pay for college.

### **A Financial Advantage to Help Pay for College**

The majority of the participants in this study revealed that private scholarships served as a financial advantage to help pay for college. Receiving private scholarships was significant for this group, especially because they did not qualify for any type of government loans or grants. For instance, private scholarships assisted participants to be financially capable to attend college. Javier commented on this:

... what was really helpful in terms of going to college was when I was in high school, I actually applied for several fellowships and scholarships and I got a bunch of different scholarships. I got - I entered into essay contests, I got people to do fundraisers for me. They're - the whole community was involved with me coming to the university. 'Cause you know, I was one of the few who got accepted, you know, and I couldn't get financial aid, so, people sold candies, they did car washes, they did collections at the - at churches. The Latin-American Teachers Association helped me- you know, I won a contest...

The preceding quote illustrated how a participant received several private scholarships to help offset his college costs. In particular, Javier received many different scholarships, fellowships, and grants that assisted him to go to college. A number of participants, like Javier, also experienced receiving private scholarships that served to support their college costs and inspirations to attend college. Javier had the opportunity to receive several

different types of private financial support to go to college. This type of assistance was common for many of the students in this study and had equivalent influences.

The following quote serves as an example of how private scholarships helped Jessica attend college:

I learned that there were a lot of scholarships that didn't ask for a Social Security number or that didn't have a residency requirement. So I applied to a lot of them and I learned that I was able to get about \$12,000 for scholarship money out of high school, but at the time there was no AB 540, the law that allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. So for me at the time, to go to a junior college, it was about \$133 a unit and everybody else was paying \$11 a unit. So it was a lot more and since I couldn't do financial aid, it was really difficult to pay for school. So that money that I got was really big for me. It allowed me to pay for all my junior college and allowed me to do all that stuff..

The previous quote exhibits another example of how private scholarships alleviated college cost and allowed a participant go to college. Specifically, Jessica received \$12,000.00 in private scholarships, which allowed her to pay for her college tuition and expenses. Private scholarships were extremely beneficial for Jessica, as well as many of the study's participants, with regards to attending college. These scholarships were especially important to participants because their undocumented status barred them from receiving any type of federal or state funds and in some cases participants were required to pay out of state or out-of-country rates, like Jessica.

The following quote is another example of how private scholarships helped offset college costs for Linda:

I applied for a lot of grants and scholarships. At the time I knew I didn't have a green card. It was hard to get money through the state. I did get some money through private scholarships, which was really good.

The quote above shows how private scholarships gave a participant monetary assistance to proceed to college. Specifically, Linda was awarded several private scholarships in order for her to pay for college. Although Linda, like the other participants in this study, could not receive any state funds, the private scholarships she received were beneficial.

The upcoming quote is another example from Pamela showing the advantages of receiving private scholarship to assist in attending college:

I insisted that I really needed to try to get the scholarships, which I did. I ended up getting a lot of scholarships out of high school. That helped me to go to college and gave me some hope, too.

The previous quote illustrates the benefits of receiving private scholarships for a participant in this study. In particular, Pamela explained that being awarded several private scholarships was advantageous to attend college. Pamela also described scholarships as giving her a stronger desire to go to college. Pamela, like many of the participants in this study, received private scholarships, which helped financially to attend college and also helped to deepen their ambitions, aspirations, and "hope" to go to college, too.

David, like Pamela explains he also received private scholarships to help pay for his college costs:

Oh, I applied to every scholarship that I could apply for. I actually did get a couple scholarships from a couple of different private groups, like the B

foundation, which are based out of North County as well as others. All in all, I think it was about \$2000-\$3000 worth of scholarships. It wasn't much but it was something! This really helped me.

The previous quote gives another example of a participant receiving private scholarships to attend college. Specifically, David mentioned he did not receive a lot of money in scholarships but the little he received was significant for him. David, like several participants in this study, was grateful to be able to be awarded private scholarships to relieve some college debt.

Private scholarships were very beneficial to the participants in this study. Private scholarships served as a financial advantage to help participants attend college. Since participants were unable to receive federal or state funds they relied heavily on private scholarships in order to attend college. Many of the study's participants were awarded several scholarships to help alleviate college costs. Although private scholarships helped participants toward the pathway to college, they also experienced situations, which hindered them away from attending college. The lack of financial aid available for undocumented students set back participants to attend college. The following section address examples of how the lack of financial aid available for undocumented students diverted participants' incentive from attending college.

### **Lack of Financial Aid for Undocumented Students**

The data indicated that the lack of financial aid available for undocumented students hindered their pathway to college. The lack of financial aid available for undocumented students refers to the inability to qualify for federal or state funds and loans to help pay for college. Participants in this study experienced being excluded from

receiving any type of government money to pay for college. The lack of financial aid available for undocumented students served as a burden thwarting participants' ambitions to attend college.

### **A Financial Burden to Attend College**

The lack of financial aid available for undocumented students served as a burden to attend college for participants in this study. A majority of the participants explained they were "devastated" when they found out they were not eligible to receive any type of government financial aid or loans to pay for college. Ariel reflected on an example of this in the following quote:

My senior year [in high school] was the toughest year probably of my life because I was a 3.6 student, not necessarily super intelligent, but definitely very hard working. I had a resume full of extracurricular activities and I started applying to schools and I got fee waivers for applications. I applied to NYU, Loyola Marymount, San Diego State, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State LA and ultimately USC and I got into some schools and I got rejected to other schools, but all of my letters said that they were not going to give me financial aid because I was not documented...I was devastated! What was I going to do?

The quote above serves as an example to show how a participant had a difficult time dealing with the fact that she did not qualify for financial aid. In particular, Ariel was shocked to learn she was not going to receive any financial aid to help pay for college. Ariel, like many of the study's participants became uncertain and confused about attending college due to the absence of financial aid available to her.

In addition, participants were not only devastated but also discouraged about attending college because of the lack of financial aid available to undocumented students. The following emphasizes Monica's experience:

I just continued taking my college preparation classes, continued with Upward Bound, continued with Migrant Education. When I was ready to go to college - I got discouraged, well I found the barriers that I couldn't apply for financial aid, that I couldn't qualify for anything because I didn't have any papers.

The previous quote is an example of the greatest barrier participants had to face regarding attending college, the lack of financial aid. Specifically, Monica explains that she became "discouraged" to attend college because she did not qualify to receive government assistance to help pay for college. Monica, like many of the participants in the study, was also unmotivated to attend college due to the lack of financial aid available for undocumented students. This situation was common for many of the students in this study and had the same consequences.

The quote below illustrates how Pamela's ambitions to attend college decreased because of the lack of financial aid available for undocumented students:

What was challenging was mostly financial, to come up with the money and expenses. It was so expensive. ... At the time I know I didn't have a green card. It was hard to get money and impossible to receive financial aid. I didn't know how I was going to do it. This was really straining and I began to lose hope.

The preceding quote illustrates the emotional toll a participant experienced due to financing college. Specifically, Pamela explained that her biggest struggle with entering college were the financial barriers of not qualifying for any type of government aid.

Pamela, like several of the participants in this study, repeatedly disclosed that the lack of federal and state financial aid available was not only economically straining but also emotionally draining her desires to attend college. Pamela, like many of the study's participants struggled with finding a way to pay for college without depending on financial aid.

The next quote is another example highlighting how Erica felt about the absences of financial funds available to her:

So I had, I think a misconception or misperception about the type of [financial] support I was suppose to get and it was-I felt deceived. I found out that I wasn't eligible for any financial aid and everything that I'd heard through the years, "oh, you're a Latina, you're Mexican, you're gonna totally qualify, you have a huge family, your parents don't make that much money." And I really got pissed off about it [lack of financial aid for undocumented students]! I didn't know how or if I was going to be able to go to college.

The previous quote shows the financial barriers a participant had to face prior to attending college. Like Erica, several of the study's participants, explained she also experienced the hindrance of not qualifying for financial aid due to her undocumented status. Many participants, like Erica, revealed that they felt the lack of financial aid hindered their desires and opportunities for attending college. Erica felt mislead and "deceived" after finding out she was not eligible to receive financial aid. This experience was similar for a majority of the participants in the study and had similar effects.

A number of participants in this study wrested with the reality of not receiving financial aid. Many did not know if a college education would be possible without



receiving government financial assistance. In particular, participants felt hopeless because of the lack of financial aid available. This experience took a toll on many of the students in the study not only financially but also emotionally.

In conclusion, this chapter addressed the participants' experiences of getting into college. In particular, this chapter answered the first research question: (1) How do undocumented immigrant students access U.S. colleges? The data indicated that there were elements of encouragement and discouragement that served as what can be described as a roller coaster ride with regard to getting into college. This roller coaster ride included moments of both "ups" and "downs" for the students. The "ups" represented those elements that offered hope, support, and pushed these students forward along their pathway to college. These elements constituted the upward trajectory of the roller coaster ride. The elements of encouragement included: college preparatory programs and events, advice from counselors, and private scholarships.

Conversely, participants also experienced moments of discouragement along their pathway to college. These were the "downs," which represented elements that elicited doubt, fear, confusion, and served as obstacles for these students. These elements constituted the downward trajectory of the roller coaster ride. The elements of discouragement included: the predicament of undocumented status, advice from counselors, and the lack of federal funds available for undocumented students. This chapter summarized both positive and negative experiences from participants before they entered college. The following chapter addresses the experiences of participants as they persisted through college.

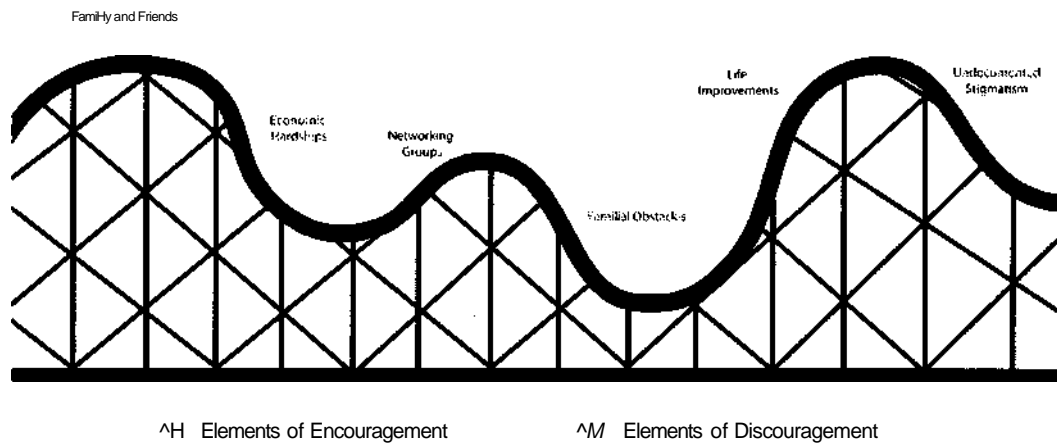
## CHAPTER 5

### The Roller Coaster Ride Continues: Elements of Encouragement and Discouragement During College

Chapter 5 highlights the roller coaster ride as it explains the participants' process of persisting through college. This section answers research questions two and three: 2) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist? 3) What factors support their efforts to persist? As shown in Figure 5.1, The Roller Coaster Ride Continues: Elements of Encouragement and Discouragement During College, describes the roller coaster ride with regard to persisting through college.

Figure 5.1

The Roller Coaster Ride Continues: Elements of Encouragement and Discouragement During College



The data indicated that participants' ability to persist through college was influenced by contrasting experiences. As stated in the previous chapter, these experiences represent "ups" and "downs" on the trajectory of the roller coaster ride of the

pathway through college. The "ups" represent elements of encouragement and the "downs" represent elements of discouragement. In the process of persisting through college, the participants' experienced the following elements of encouragement: family and friends, networking groups, and life improvements. Conversely, participants also had negative experiences in the midst of persevering through college. These consisted of the following elements of discouragement: economic hardships, familial obstacles, and undocumented stigmatism. The following section focuses on how family and friends encouraged participants pathway through college.

### **Family and Friends**

The data indicated that family and friends served as positive influences uplifting and motivating participants to continue and persist through their pathway to college. Specifically, family and friends consisted of empowering relationships between parents, siblings, other family members, and close companions. For example family and friends influenced participants' to persist through college by providing emotional support. The following section describes how family and friends' emotional support encouraged participants to persist through college.

### **An Emotional Pillar to Help Persist Through College**

Many participants described that family and friends were "emotional pillars" that inspired them to persist through college. In other words, an emotional pillar was a person who provided sentimental reassurance to participants in order for them to persevere through college. For instance, participants described emotional support consisted of heart rendering acts of goodness like: being present for them, giving words of inspirations to

continue on their college pathway, and believing in their merits and abilities to complete a college degree. Paulina presents an example of this in the following quote:

*...mi familia me dio apoyo emocionalmente para terminar la universidad- como por decir mi mama, hubo noches que se quedo conmigo haciendo la tarea porque -para que no me quedara dormida, o a veces me dictaba algunas cosas, o simplemente el estar ahi conmigo. Yo no se lo pedia, ella simplemente lo hacia ...ella de cualquier forma le gustaba acompanarme por cualquier cosa ahi.*

[. .my family gave me emotional support to finish college-let's say my mom, there were times when she would stay with me doing my homework in order for me not to fall asleep, or she dictated some things to me, or just simply being there with me. I did not ask that of her, she simply did it because she wanted to, anyway she liked keeping me company for anything.]

The quote above offers an example of how a participant received emotional support from her mother, which influenced her to complete her college degree. In particular, Paulina's mother supported and helped her persist through college by simply giving her some personal attention. Paulina described that emotional support was something as simple as her mother keeping her awake when she was studying. Paulina, like many participants in the study, explained that having someone there and present, like her mother, was very crucial during the time she was struggling to complete her degree. Many of the study's participants also described similar insights, like Paulina, which had the same outcomes.

Another example explaining how Linda received emotional support and motivation to complete her university degree from her family follows:

Again, my parents... When I was in college my parents helped so much. I mean my parents were always there for me, emotionally. They were always telling me, "you can be someone and the only way is to go to school; have an education." And that alone, you know helped me to want to finish college. And I know they're very proud of us [children]. And that alone means a lot. I mean everything is worth it. When they talk about all of us, you can just feel the pride they feel, like, "*oh hija* [my daughter], *en la Universidad* [in the university] and blah, blah, blah." So, you know, that.. .to have that type of emotional support from your parents is priceless. It's, you know, it's more than a motivation.

The preceding quote shows how parental emotional support was a motivational incentive to encourage a participant to persist through college. In particular, Linda explains that her parents played a significant role in influencing her to acquire a university degree. Linda, like many participants in the study, was given emotional support and courage from her parents to assist in wanting to persist through college. Specifically, parental pride and belief in participants' merits were valued to uplift them in their journey through college. This type of emotional support encouraged Linda, like many of the participants in the study, to become successful university graduates.

The following quote serves as another example showing familial emotional support from Sara:

The support that I had from my family, they did support me emotionally and in the little things that they could. The emotional support that I had from my husband was amazing, too. He really encouraged me and gave me the emotional support that I needed to continue and to graduate from college. He was just there

for me! The support from friends that I had encountered at UC helped me to finish college, too. I couldn't have done it without this type of support. They all were my emotional pillars!

The previous quote describes how family and friends' emotional support assisted a participant to persevere through college. Specifically, Sara explained that her family and friends were "emotional pillars" encouraging her to graduate from college. Sara, like many of the participants in the study, shared that having someone there in the process of enduring through college was extremely significant in persevering through college.

Fabian saw it this way:

Well, my family had a lot to do with it [completing a university degree]. Without their support, I really, really - by myself, I would not have been able to do it. Not even if I put an extra effort. I think that I would have stopped... My parents were always there for me. It was them asking me how I did at school, listening to me. Listening to things that I would explain or try to explain to them - I mean, I liked school and all, but, you know, in the down times, if they hadn't been there with me or giving me advice on the things that I should do, not necessarily take this class or that other class, but just, you know, keeping me focused and all the emotional support that they gave me, my brother and sister, too. I really wouldn't have been able to do it. So, it's really not just my degree. It's our degree.

The preceding quote describes a participant's experience with having supportive parents. Specifically, Fabian explains that he would not have been able to finish college without his parents' emotional support. Fabian recounts that his parents were always there for him, they listened to him, and gave him the advice he needed to continue in his journey

through college. Fabian, like many of the participants in the study, highlighted his parents as the giving him the emotional support in order to keep him focused on his pathway through college.

Another participant sums up the type of emotional support she received in the following quote: "My mother always supported everything that I started, especially college, mainly because she couldn't help me any other way. So she was my cheerleading squad." This comment gives a typical example of how a mother emotionally supported her daughter through college by just offering words of encouragement. Participants shared that emotional support positively influenced their success toward their pathway to college. Conversely, participants explained that financial difficulties drew them away from college. The following section reveals how participants' economic hardships pulled participants away from their pathway to college.

### **Economic Hardships**

The data indicated that participants experienced economic hardships, which discouraged their pathway through college. In particular, economic hardships refer to the lack of financial means to fund college. In fact, participants explained that economic difficulties were the most pressing barrier experienced through out their process of acquiring a university degree. Although participants received financial assistance through private scholarships, once they were in the university they ran out of scholarship money.

Participants discovered that the money they received through private scholarships was not enough to finance their entire university careers. One participant shared that "being an undocumented person at the time, I never felt it [acquiring a university degree] was a problem or thought in my mind I couldn't do it, until it came to the economics

part." The quote above illustrates a participant's financial hardships with paying for college. Like many of the participants, the inability to fund college distracted their pathway to college. The following section describes how economic difficulties distracted participants' college path.

### **A Distraction to the Pathway to College**

The data indicated that economic difficulties resulted in a major distraction for participants' pathway through college. For example, Linda said, "the only negative aspect that I could remember in college was always struggling financially. Always struggling to get money to finance it [college tuition]..." Linda, like many of the study's participants not only had a difficult time with financing college, but was also distracted by this fact.

The distractions of economic difficulties resulted in participants developing habits of frugality. As a consequence, many participants used public transportation. Furthermore, many participants had no choice but to work long hours while attending college. Consequently, economic difficulties were a distraction in participants' pathway to college. The following describes Pamela's experience pertaining to economic problems:

But for the most part, it was always a challenge to make sure that I had all the money for tuition, that I had money for living expenses and books and such. But I also remember that I had an incredible understanding of my situation. I had a very clear understanding that I couldn't go out and spend money on clothes and shoes. A lot of the stuff were just hand me downs. This was the biggest challenge and it actually interrupted my studies.



The previous quote depicts the economic struggle of a participant. Specifically, Pamela was challenged to make ends meet when it came to paying her college bills. Pamela, like many participants in this study, had to develop an exceptional understanding of conserving money, in order to proceed through college. In addition, Pamela's financial worries impeded her pathway to college. These uneasy thoughts about financing college were very common for most of the study's participants and had parallel consequences.

The following comment describes another example of economic difficulties from Sara:

The other thing that I think, I guess, was demanding or could consisted of an obligation or more of a distraction in college was that I had to actually help my mom whenever I could. She works at cleaning houses so I would have to go with her and help her clean houses and just support her in that aspect.. This was something I just had to do during college.

The preceding quote depicts the economic difficulties of a participant by showing the type of work she had to do. In particular, Sara was obliged to clean houses. Sara described this as a distraction in college. Sara, like many participants, had to work during college to help her family financially.

As a result of economic difficulties many participants had to commute to school and work by depending on public transportation. The following illustrates Ariel's experience with these types of economic difficulties:

I had to commute to go to work and school. I used to take four buses to get to work and I used to work on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays because I had full day classes on Mondays. I had full day classes on Wednesdays.

Tuesdays, I had only morning classes, but it used to take me 1-1/2 hours to get to work and I would work from 3:30 p.m. until closing, which was about 10:00... It was a very difficult.

The quote above illustrated financial difficulties by showing the tedious commute of a participant. Specifically, Ariel had to take several buses to get to work which was time consuming and distracted her studies. Ariel, like many of the participants in the study, had to commute to work and or school. This made attending college more difficult and served as a major distraction. Many of the study's participants also mentioned commuting to school and work experiences and had similar outcomes, like Ariel.

Paulina also explains about her financial hardships:

*Si, tenia que - trabajaba tiempo completo - 40 horas, era cajera en una tienda Mexicana, y en las mahanas a veces iba a la escuela, a veces en la tarde, dormia muy poco porque pues tenia que - salia de trabajar a las 10:00 p.m. a veces.*

*Despues de las 10:00p.m. me ponía a hacer tarea, a veces nada mas dormia como cuatro horas, cinco horas, y si era exdmenes finales hubo muchas noches que no dormi. [Yes, I had-I worked full time-40 hours, I was a cashier at a*

*Mexican market, and sometimes I went to school in the morning, sometimes in the evening, I slept very little because I had to-I didn't get out of work until 10:00 p.m. After ten I began my homework, sometimes I only slept four hours, five hours, and if I had final exams, there were many nights I didn't sleep at all.]*

The previous quote elicits an example of a participant's financial hardships. In particular, Paulina shares her experience with working while she was in college. This resulted in little sleep. Paulina, like many participants in the study, suffered from lack of sleep due to

long working hours when enrolled in college, which made college more difficult and distracted her studies.

Paulina also said:

*Yo creo que esofue lo mas dificil, tener un balance entre el trabajo y vida privada y los estudios. Yo creo que todos pasamos por eso, pero una cosa es cuando tienes que trabajar porque quieres y otra cosa es porque necesitas.*

*Entonces eso pone un poco mas de presion.* [And I think the most difficult was balancing my work, my private life, and my studies. I think that we all pass through this but, it's one thing when you work because you choose to and another is when you have to work for necessity. The later puts a little more pressure on you.]

The quote above shows how economic difficulties were straining. Specifically, Paulina explains that it was extremely taxing to find balance between being a college student and working. Paulina's college career suffered from dealing with economic pressures, like many participants in the study.

Several participants described economic hardships as impeding participants' pathway to college. Participants' college careers were distracted and made more difficult due to the fact that they had to learn to save, commute, and work. In spite of participants battle with economic difficulties, they instilled a high expectation of themselves. Participants were encouraged to continue their education from the motivation they receive through networking groups.

## Networking Groups

The data indicated that a number of participants had the opportunity to participate in distinct networking groups that facilitated their process of completing a university degree. In this study, networking groups refer to three or more people meeting for a common purpose. According to participants, these gatherings became a means of empowerment to complete a university degree. In other words, participants associated with others in order to gain encouragement to proceed in the process of acquiring a university degree. Many participants were part of different groups such as: M.E.CH.A (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan), IDEAS (Improving Dreams, Equality, Access and Success), sports teams, and student government. These networking groups provided participants with an inspiration of hope to persevere through college. The following section focuses on how networking groups became participants' inspiration for hope to complete a college degree.

### **An Inspiration of Hope**

The data indicated that many participants were involved in distinct networking groups, which resulted in an inspiration of hope toward their journey to becoming college graduates. Specifically, inspirations of hope means participants' desires to persist through college were uplifted and restored through these groups. For example, Sara stated:

I received a lot of support during my undergraduate degree from a group I was part of...It was a group called IDEAS and it's mainly for undocumented students, AB-540 students that were just entering UC and it was a support group that we had... in this group we talked a lot about how we were feeling during the time that we were in the university, the struggles that we were going through

financially, emotionally, even physically...The number one concern that we all had was how were we dealing with our feelings in terms of family and just entering the university. This support group, it was very unique and it's still unique for the simple reason that every time we had a meeting, we checked in with each other to make sure everybody was emotionally okay, just because being undocumented is just so, it's very hard ..There were many of us that would not have made it through college without this group.

The previous quote describes the involvement of a networking group from a participant. Specifically, Sara recounts her experiences with an undocumented immigrant group association. Sara recalls having the opportunity to share with others that were experiencing similar struggles in college as she was having. She mentioned the people involved in the group were there for one another and they helped each other in their journey through college. Sara, like many participants in the study, was blessed to have a group with whom she could relate with in order to help her in the process of persisting through college.

The following quote is another example from Pamela:

I went to UC and they had a really good networking group of students at the Center for Chicano Latino Students. That was pretty good. I got involved in lots of their clubs and just did a lot of things that were fun..there were different Chicano Latino clubs, like the Tomas Rivera Club, Tomas Rivera was a teacher's club, the Women's Latinas Club, and MECHA. There were all kinds of different groups and events. But for the most part, we would just hang out a lot at the Chicano Student Center and meet people who were taking classes. We would talk

about what classes they were taking, and maybe take classes together and help each other or study together, or just having a place to study or even to have lunch was inspirational. I honestly think that made a big difference in my college experience, because it would have been a little bit different had I been sort of on my own without a place to go. If I had any problems, they knew where to guide me.

The preceding quote highlights the experiences of a participant's involvement with a networking group. In particular, Pamela described her involvement with the particular groups from the Latino Student Center at her university. Pamela's involvement with different groups at that center helped build relationships, which became an inspiration for hope with regards to acquiring a university degree. Pamela, like many participants in the study, not only relied on this networking group for socialization purposes but also guidance.

The upcoming quote is an example of Margarita's experience with a networking group:

And eventually I actually tried out for the soccer team at college, which was very hard for me to do because I just didn't think I had the skills necessary to be on the soccer team. I didn't feel that I blended in with the other girls that were on the team, and just overall, I just did not feel that I had enough experience. But I still tried out and actually made it, I belonged to part of a group at school! Just feeling that I belonged and was accomplishing goals little by little really helped to keep me moving forward. I mean, overall it just seemed that my situation was just very, very - pretty much that I just had not too many options. So whenever I

could get a small step forward, it was just a huge encouragement to keep on going.

The previous quote portrays another example of a student participating in a networking group. Specifically, Margarita connected with being on a soccer team, which inspired her to proceed through college. Margarita, like many participants in the study, was motivated to finish college by belonging to a college group.

Networking groups served to be an inspiration for hope for participants to persevere on their journey through college. Participants described their involvement in specific groups encouraged them to endure their goals of acquiring a college degree. The relationships participants created within these groups facilitated their progress. Participants developed relationships, a place of belonging, and guidance through their involvement in networking groups. In contrast, participants suffered during their struggle through the pathway to college from a number of familial obstacles. The following will describe familial obstacles that participants had to combat in order to progress through college.

### **Familial Obstacles**

The data indicated that familial obstacles disturbed participants' pathway to college. Familial obstacles refer to personal family situations that impeded participants' progress in college. In other words, participants experienced family circumstances and conflicting cultural attitudes hindering their pathway through college. Specifically, participants encountered particular personal family life occurrences as obstructing forces disturbing participants' motivation to complete their university degrees. The following

section highlights participants' familial obstacles as a barrier blocking their pathway through college.

### **A Barrier Blocking Participant's Pathway Through College**

Many participants described familial obstacles as a barrier blocking their pathway through college. A barrier blocking participants' pathway through college includes conditions and perspectives that were in the way of participants' inspiration of acquiring a university degree. For example, many participants in this study became parents during the time they were in college and or were distracted by negative attitudes from family members. Steve describes his experience in the following quote:

I was an honor roll student too at UC. But I think you know what's interesting enough, the biggest challenge at college, it wasn't college. It was my whole family just having to deal with the issues going on with my family... my parents got divorced when I was a junior in college... So actually my biggest challenge was just trying to like deal with my, with the issues happening to my family... and then I got my girlfriend pregnant at the time, which was whoo! Another big challenge! And so I had to be responsible so I actually dropped out of college for two years because I had to work and I had to support my baby and I finally went back and I got my Bachelor's so it took me an awful long time to get my Bachelor's...it might have taken me almost 10 years to get a Bachelor's. So I had a lot of obstacles, especially family ones.

The previous quote highlights a familial obstacle, which became a barrier for acquiring a university degree. Specifically, Steve described his family plights with dealing with his parents' divorce and becoming a young father while enrolled in the university. Steve, like



many participants in the study had to overcome several familial obstacles before finishing his university degree. These experiences were obviously an enormous barrier, which derailed Steve's pathway to acquiring a college degree.

The following quote highlights another example of a participant becoming a young mother while in the pursuit of acquiring a university degree. This is what Monica said:

...I remember my dad when I told him I'm pregnant...I remember him saying when I told him you know I'm pregnant, and the very first question - the very first thing he said was well, how about your school? And I said well, I'm going to continue, and he kind of laughed you know, because for us Latinos usually when you get married, when you have a baby that's like the end. That's like the end of your life, you know. You're just going to be at home and that's it. So he kind of laughed like oh yeah, right. ...you know we come from a culture where once you get married, once you have a baby, that's it for you. You know, your dreams are left behind. So dealing with my family drama was a challenge when I was in college.

The preceding quote depicts a typical cultural perspective, which impeded a participant's spirit to persist through college. In particular, Monica's father did not believe she could continue to attend college because she was pregnant. These attitudes and remarks did not help they only hindered Monica's thoughts to persist. Eventually, she did persevere in her pathway through college, despite these experiences. Monica, like many participants, had to face opposing reactions and comments from family members while trying to remain in college.

The succeeding quote is another example, where a cultural perspective makes attending college more challenging. Lucia reflected the following:

My parents even and my father, that's the key, my father didn't think I could even finish a university degree because in his view women didn't get educated, women got married. I was very rebellious. Looking back I think that's what happened and that's the hardest thing. That's the hardest thing that I could ever think and it was, going against my father's negative cultural attitude.

The quote above shows how a participant had to deal with her "father's negative cultural attitude," towards her ambitions. In particular, Lucia had to go against the cultural belief where "women didn't get educated, women got married." Lucia, like many participants in the study had to go against her family's "cultural belief in order to reach her educational goals of acquiring a university degree.

The upcoming quote serves as another example depicting Fabi's challenge with completing her university degree, she said:

The most challenging, I think was living at home and being at home with my parents and all the drama going on in there. Also, knowing that I was the only woman at that time going for a higher education, for my Bachelor's. No one, in my family understood what I was going through. That made finishing school more difficult.

The quote above gives an example of familial obstacles. Specifically, Fabi was dealing with living at home and being the only one in her family pursuing a college degree. Fabi, like many participants in the study had to deal with the difficult situation of being the first one in her family to go to college and not being able to be understood in her home.

Familial obstacles became a barrier blocking participants from completing a university degree. Many participants experienced difficult family situations like: dealing with their parents' divorce, become new parents, fighting against the odds of cultural beliefs, and feeling alone in their own home while pursuing their educational goals of becoming university graduates. Although participants struggled through major familial obstacle barriers, they also experienced inspirations from family circumstances. The fact that participants' families' economic situation was challenging gave them the aspirations to want to improve their lives and complete a university degree. The following section highlights how the yearning for life improvements encouraged participants to acquire a college degree.

### **Life Improvements**

The data indicated that many participants had a strong yearning to improve their current living conditions and economic situation. In this study life improvement refers to making life style enhancements and increasing monetary income. Participants' desire to improve their life and economic situation gave them an incentive and assisted their pathway through college. For example, the inspiration to boost participants' current economic situation came from their family's life circumstances.

Participants' experiences with yearning to improving their life influenced them to persevere through college. In other words, participants' family experiences gave participants an incentive to finish college. Specifically, participants explained that their parents lack of education and laborious work lead them to want to complete a higher education, in order to improve their lifestyle and work conditions. The following section

focuses on how a lack of parental education spearheaded participants' desire to acquire a university degree.

### **A Lack of Parental Education**

Participants described the lack of their parents' education inspired them to want to continue on their pathway to college. Pamela gives an example of this in the following quote:

My parents don't have an education. Their education level is really, really low. My mom, I don't think she even finished third grade. And my dad maybe finished fifth grade. So they barely know how to read and write. My mom really doesn't read. She really never practiced it. They just don't have very good skills at that. My dad, when we first got to the US, he was a janitor for a drive-in theatre. He would work at night picking up the trash. A couple of times we went to help him, so I knew what that job was like. I didn't want to do anything like that. We were always very hopeful that we would finish college. Once we got in, I think there was sort of this thing in our mind that we were going to finish. There was this drive to finish. The drive to finish and to get a degree had mostly to do with the low wages that my parents had, the hard work that they had to do in order to keep us fed and dressed and housed. Their life examples were our motivation to finish school.

The quote above is a typical example of a participant's rationale for wanting to complete a university degree. Specifically, Pamela desired to complete a higher education because she did not want to end up with the labor intense jobs that her parents had to do. Pamela,

like many of the study's participants, valued an education knowing it would lead to a better life and working conditions.

The next quote is another example from Sara stating why she decided to persevere through college, she said:

I think my biggest motivation to finish college was my family and just overall my father. He just has an elementary [school] degree. My mom is the same; they both didn't finish high school in Mexico... I think growing up here and going to elementary, middle school, high school, and college changed my mindset to want something more than what my parents had accomplished. Knowing that I wanted a better life helped me through college.

The previous comment illustrates how a participant was inspired to finish college in order to progress past her parents' education. In particular, Sara, like many of the participants in the study, had parents with a limited education and desired to do more with her life. Therefore, Sara's inspiration to finish college was her parents' lack of education, like many participants in the study.

In the following quote Monica described how her family's situation was a significant factor for her success in college:

So and my parents, barely had an education - they brought us here for a reason. They brought us to have a better future, and it was really up to us to take advantage of that. So I said you know, I'm here for a reason. I'm here to do what my parents wanted us to do... you are expected to do something, like they expected us to have a better future. They said okay, you're here, you know. Take advantage, so it was really up to us to do that, and they didn't have to do anything

else but just bring us here and say- here are the opportunities for you. Take them or don't, so now really it's - it was up to us, to me, to take those opportunities and improve my life. College was the only answer for improving my life. So I just had to finish.

The preceding reflection shows an example of how a participant's inspiration to finish college came from her family. Specifically, Monica explained that her drive to finish college came from her parents instilling in her to have a better future. Monica, like others in the study, took advantage of the educational opportunities to gain life improvements.

The next statement is another example from Margarita, describing her determination for finishing college:

I think just wanting to have a better life. My mom didn't finish school. She either has some junior high or beginning high school education level... Seeing how hard she had to work. My father had a heart attack when I was very young, and he pretty much could not - was pretty much disabled since the time I was six months old, so she had to be the fighter. So the types of jobs that she took, the type of work that she had to do is what really pushed me. It made me realize, that type of work I don't wanna do. I wanna do something that I enjoy. I wanna do something that I like, and I will at least be well compensated for.

The previous comment serves as another example describing a participant's longing to better her life. In particular, Margarita stated that she yearned to have a meaningful job that required an education. She explained that her motivation to improve her life and complete a college degree was developed from witnessing her mother's hardships.

Margarita, like many of the participants, yearned to improve her life through an education

because her mother was not educated and she did not want to do the same laborious jobs as her mother.

The next reflection serves as another example from Ariel, describing her desire to have an education and better life:

My parents didn't have the opportunity to go to school. They worked so hard for so little money... We lived in a one-bedroom apartment, we never had our own home. We grew up riding the bus. I just didn't want to do that for the rest of my life. I remember saying to myself, "You know what? I don't want to live in a neighborhood that's all tagged up. I don't want to take the bus for the rest of my life. I don't want to have 20 kids." And so I knew what I did not want very clearly and I knew exactly what I wanted. I knew that I wanted an education and a better life for myself.

The statement above illustrates how a participant was determined to get an education in order to improve her current living situation. In particular, Ariel explained she aspired to have an education and live in a better neighborhood. Ariel, like many participants in this study, strived to have an education and a better life than the one she was experiencing. Many participants also yearned to have a better occupation than their parents. The following section will give examples of participants desire to improve their lives with earning a better occupation.

### **A Better Occupation**

Many participants desired to earn a better living and obtain a better occupation than their parents. The following depicts another example from Lucia describing her plight to acquire a university degree.

I knew that first and foremost I had to finish what I started. Then that would mean a good job. That would mean good money, respectability from my parents, who didn't go to college. Then I could help my family. That was the biggest driving force to finish college.

The information shared above shows how a participant wanted to finish college in order to better her life and help her family. In particular, Lucia was compelled to help her parents financially by completing a university degree. Lucia knew that acquiring a university degree would lead to a better life for her and her family, like many of the participants in the study.

Pamela also discussed the following:

But mostly it was my parents and the circumstances around us, being in the US, and being thankful too. I think we all wanted to show our appreciation by finishing college, not that all of the kids did, but at least the ones who did finish. Finishing college takes persistence; going through all the things you have to go through. But for us, knowing the possibilities that if we didn't finish, what was left for us to do were jobs that we definitely didn't want - house cleaning, babysitting, being a janitor at night or a gardener, which is another job my dad did. That was a tremendous incentive!

The previous comments serves as a typical example from a participant yearning to acquire a university degree. In particular, Pamela clearly explained that her parent's lack of education and laborious jobs were her main incentive for finishing college. Pamela, like many of the participants in the study, strived to improve her life and current situation by completing a higher education.



Omar noted:

What motivated me was seeing how hard my parents were working. Both of my parents are maintenance workers, and they continue to be maintenance workers to this day. My mom is a housekeeper, and my dad works as a handyman... I see how hard they're working every day. Physically their bodies are really wearing down now. My mom has to use these really harsh chemicals to clean other people's homes. My dad has to essentially teach himself to do plumbing and to do yard work, and God knows what he doesn't do. And I thought I can't go that route... and that's what pushed me to finish at the university.

The preceding words from Omar depicts how a participant chose to finish college because of the laborious work his parents were forced to do. Specifically, Omar understood the physical hard work of his parents and knew that finishing a college degree would give him other options. Omar, like many participants in this study, was motivated to become a college graduate in order to avoid the laborious jobs that his parents had to do.

Economic improvement was the driving force for participants' pathway to college. Participants experienced the economic difficulties due to their parents' lack of education and witness the laborious jobs they had to perform. These experiences made participants strive to improve their futures. They learned that they could make their life better by acquiring a higher education. Participants were inspired to acquire a university degree because their parents did not have the opportunity to be educated and they knew they could improve their lives if and when they completed a college degree. In other words, striving for life improvements helped participants' pathway through college.

Although participants were inspired to complete a college degree and persevered through difficult situations they still suffered because of their undocumented status. The following section describes participants' plights with their undocumented situation.

### **Undocumented Stigmatism**

The data indicated that participants felt that their undocumented status was a type of stigmatism, which distracted their pathway through college. Specifically, undocumented stigmatism refers to participants feeling that they carried a mark of disgrace because they were outcast from several activities due to their immigration status. The following quote illustrates how a particular participant felt about her undocumented status in college. Margarita claimed:

And on top of that, the other big challenge is feeling rejected by the community, feeling like I was doing something wrong by being in school, even though it was something extremely positive. It was a big challenge. That undocumented status was a big challenge that I had to fight with it day in and day out. That undocumented status did not identify who I was, did not identify my capabilities, especially because I had heard so many times how illegal immigrants were a burden on society, were criminals, were such bad - it was such a bad part of the community...Even though you're fighting against that notion, even though you know that that's not true...It doesn't matter whether it's right or not, but everything becomes just - everything is just so much more difficult. Nobody really knows or understands, unless they have been in this situation.

The previous explanation serves as an illustration of the difficulty participants experienced because of their undocumented status in college. Specifically, Margarita was

surrounded by negative stereotypes of immigrants while she was trying to finish a college degree. Margarita, like many of the participants in the study, faced challenges from negative comments and attitudes about immigrants.

In addition, participants described they were barred from typical activities for college students because of their immigration status, like: driving, working, traveling abroad, and having a checking account. As a result of not being able to participate as full citizens in these activities participants experienced feelings of creating a hidden identity and experienced a series of missed opportunities. The next section focuses on participants' issues dealing with their hidden identity.

### **A Hidden Identity**

The data indicated that participants described creating a hidden identity in order to blend into the college community. In other words, many participants explained they did not advertise their undocumented status to everyone. Their undocumented situation was something they kept to themselves, unless they felt someone could really be trusted. One participant mentioned, "You learn to live a hidden life." An additional participant shared that "they [school administrators] talk about staying underground and hiding." Another said, it was "taboo" to talk about her immigration status due to fear of being discovered. Many participants explained that the extra burden of keeping a hidden identity held them back from their goals. For example, Octavia reflected on the following:

I felt that I may not be accepted by those who had negative feelings towards undocumented individuals. It was something that I didn't readily speak about. It was something that I only discussed with people that I trusted. And so there was always in the back of my mind that part, that may somehow interfere with my

goals or would make my goals more difficult to achieve. I never thought it would stop me, but it certainly would slowed me down...

The preceding statement depicts an example of a participant describing her hidden identity of being an undocumented student in college. Specifically, Octavia describes that she never spoke about her undocumented status to anyone, unless it was someone she trusted. Octavia, like many of the participants in the study, felt that she should keep her undocumented status to herself and these preoccupations of being an undocumented student prolonged her process to complete a university degree.

Participants also explained that they created a hidden identity because they feared they might be deported. The quote below gives an example describing Ariel's experience:

..they always asked me, "Well, why don't you drive? Why don't you have your license?" And I really couldn't say, "Well, I don't have papers." And, again, it was kind of like I was really living a lie because I didn't tell anybody that I didn't have any papers. It was really. It was scary. It was very scary to let somebody know that I didn't have papers... I thought they were going to kick me out of the school because I didn't have any papers and that's how I lived... And I remember always just... becoming very afraid of getting deported.

Ariel's previous reflection illustrated how a participant did not want to expose her undocumented status to others for fear of losing her pathway to college. Specifically, Ariel had to carry this guilt of not having her legal documents in place, making her college life more stressful. Ariel, like many participants in the study, had to hide her undocumented status from others in order to continue her pathway through college,

follow her dream of becoming a professional, and continue living in the only country she knew as home.

The following comment is another example from Margarita, explaining about her hidden identity in college:

And having to explain to people why I don't - why I can't do certain things, having to come up with lies on why I don't have a checking account or why I don't have a driver's license, all of that just made - college - that much more difficult. Not knowing your immigration status will be figured out. Or what was going to happen after graduation. That was also very difficult to deal with and very - what's the word? Oh yes, it was very distracting to what I really wanted to do.

The preceding statement describes how a participant had to hide her undocumented status. Specifically, Margarita explains that dealing with the issues of her undocumented status made attending college more difficult and distracting. She worried about the future with regards to clearing her immigration status and what she was going to do after completing her university degree if she was still undocumented. Margarita, like many participants in the study, had to struggle with hiding her undocumented identity and had to grapple with an unknown future.

The following quote is another example where Jessica explains about hiding her undocumented immigration identity:

It's like I was safe in high school, but in college it was much more difficult, you're always reminded of it anywhere you go. Like if you get invited somewhere, you're always reminded that you're undocumented, but you kind of put it in the back of your head and don't think about it too much because it could

be really depressing. When people would ask me why don't you drive yourself? I would get teary eyed. There is a certain stigma to being illegal. There is a stereotypical image that people have of immigrants. It's very negative.

Immigration topics would come up and people would say negative things about immigrants to me without knowing I was one. It was tough hiding the truth.

Jessica's comments serve as another example of a participant explaining about her hidden identity as an undocumented student. In particular, Jessica, like many of the participants in the study encountered numerous negative comments geared at immigrants without sharing her own identity as an undocumented student. She described being an undocumented student in college was more difficult and the pressures regarding immigration became more intense and depressing. These types of feelings were common for many of the students in this study and had similar affects.

Many participants explained that they carried an undocumented stigmatism throughout college. Participants described how they had to create a hidden identity in order to mask their undocumented status. These experiences distracted participants from their pathway through college. Participants also described experiencing a series of missed opportunities in college due to their undocumented stigmatism. The following section highlights participants' experiences with a series of missed opportunities in college.

### **A Series of Missed Opportunities**

Many participants experienced several missed opportunities as a result of their undocumented stigmatism. Missed opportunities refer to the inability to engage in particular activities due to being an undocumented student. Some of these missed opportunities included not being able to travel, not being allowed to accept work-study

opportunities, or not being able to participate in other professional career related activities.

In fact, all participants experienced a series of missed opportunities, in college, due to their undocumented status. For example, Ariel said: "They told me that you can't get employment here because you don't have your papers, you weren't born here. You're not legally here. You're not legal." This quote illustrated a participant's missed opportunity of receiving a job at the university. Although Ariel was chosen and highly qualified for the position, she was unable to participate in this particular work-study opportunity because of her undocumented status. Many participants experienced similar situations. The upcoming comments illustrate Sam's experience:

I applied to be the assistant editor [for the school newspaper] and I got the job, but the job you get paid for it so I was like, "Oh crap I'm going to have to tell him the truth." And so I told the editor-in-chief the truth [about being undocumented] and he investigated for me and turns out the school can't pay me because it's illegal to get paid if you don't have a Social or if you don't have proper identification or whatever and so I basically got kicked off of the paper.... it would have looked great on my resume...

The previous comments are an example of a participant's missed opportunity. Specifically, Sam was chosen to be the assistant editor of the university school newspaper but because of her undocumented status she could not legally hold that position. Sam later explained that even though she was unable to become the assistant editor she still continued to work and write for the paper without getting paid. Sam, like many

participants in the study, missed the opportunity to receive a paying position at the university because of her undocumented stigmatism.

Another participant, Fabian also described his missed opportunity during college: Another thing that also brought problems is in my last year when I was doing research, I was supposed to be doing research as a student. And, actually I got to become part of a research program, and I was gonna be paid as I was doing research, but I couldn't because of the same problem. Had I probably been a student with a student visa, than I would have been able to do it.. .So, I had to get out of the program. I was out of the program. And, that was something that hit me, too, not just economically, but also it hit me morally, you know. I was kicked out. Well, I don't like to say kicked out. I was just not allowed to stay in the program, because of my immigration status. So, that was something sad. And, those things, you know, bring you down...

The preceding quote serves as another example of a participant experiencing a missed opportunity in college. Specifically, Fabian lost the chance to participant in a research program because of his immigration status. Fabian, like many of the participants in the study, lost the opportunity to not only earn money while working directly with his school projects but also lost the possibility to gain new knowledge and insights through a specific program. This experience made Fabian feel devastated, like many participants in the study.

The next reflection is another example depicting missed opportunities in college from David:



The tough times included the missed opportunities to have a better paying job and traveling. For example, I couldn't participate in internships or go study abroad. I always wanted to do that, not being able to do that was tough... So sometimes I wish I had the ability to work somewhere else to make twice the money. Basically make the same amount but work half the amount, be able to take a trip to Europe and study a semester over there. Those were the tough times. When I saw the friends I went to school with doing things like that and then them asking me hey, we should take a semester abroad and me having to find a reason say, excuses, hey, I can't go because something else. So that was tough. Seeing other people be able to do things that I wanted to do that I couldn't because of my [undocumented] situation.

The preceding experience illustrates an example where a participant described some missed opportunities in college. Specifically, David yearned to have a better paying job and travel and study abroad but was unable to do so because of his undocumented status. David, like many of the participants in this study, lost the opportunity to participate in a professional setting internship and travel while he was enrolled in college.

Ariel also had this to say:

The most challenging part for me was understanding why I was not going to have the opportunity to do something with my life and what I mean by that is, for example, my friends traveled and I couldn't leave the country. My friends had a driver's license. I certainly didn't have a driver's license. My friends were getting jobs and I couldn't get jobs because I didn't have a valid Social Security number. I felt extremely marginalized and as an adult, I can now verbalize it, but at that

time I remember a deep depression, feeling defeated, feeling like all my hard work was just going to the trash because there was nobody willing to give me an opportunity.

The experience shared above serves as another example depicting a series of missed opportunities. Specifically, Ariel describes numerous missed opportunities like not being able to travel, drive, or work legally. Ariel, like many participants in the study, experienced feelings of depression, defeat, and hopelessness due to her undocumented stigmatism.

Many participants in the study experienced a series of missed opportunities, while they were in college. These missed opportunities included not being able to work, drive, travel, open a bank account, participate in work-study programs, or internships. Many participants described these missed opportunities as making their college experience more difficult, stressful, and depressing.

In summary, this chapter described the plights and successes of undocumented students persisting through college. As stated previously, this chapter addressed the following questions: What barriers complicate their efforts to persist? What factors support their efforts to persist? The data indicated that participants' ability to persist through college was influenced by different "up and down" experiences. As stated earlier, participants encountered what I described as a roller coaster ride experience in the process of persevering through college. Participants were exposed to "ups" representing elements of encouragement: family and friends, network groups, and life improvements. Conversely, participants also experienced "downs" representing elements of discouragement, which included: economic hardships, familial obstacles, and

undocumented stigmatism. The next chapter highlights participants' experiences after the roller coaster ride and includes a discussion of their contributions to society.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Life Beyond the Roller Coaster Ride: The Contributions of the Unwanted**

Chapter 6 illuminates participants' experiences beyond the roller coaster ride, as described in chapter 4 and 5. Specifically, it explains what participants are doing after graduation and what they are experiencing after getting off the roller coaster ride. In addition, this chapter also provides a discussion of participants' contributions to society. The research question addressed in this chapter is: In which ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society?

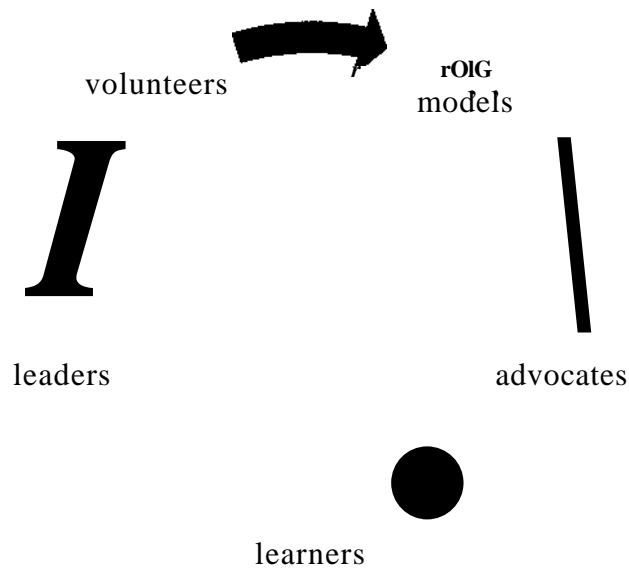
The data indicated that participants contribute to society in diverse ways. In particular, the data revealed that upon college graduation all participants choose careers in the helping professions. In other words, many of the study's participants chose careers of public service, focusing on education. In particular, they became teachers, counselors, directors, coordinators, advisors, medical doctors, scholars, and administrators. Through these specific careers participants strived to make the world a better place. As shown in figure 6.1, participants experienced the cycle of giving making a positive difference by becoming: volunteers, role models, advocates, "life long learners," and leaders. In particular, participants became volunteers to make a positive impact in the lives of others. The following section focuses on different ways participants were involved with volunteering.

#### **Volunteers**

The data indicated that participants became volunteers in distinct capacities to make a positive difference on society. After receiving residency, a work permit, or

Figure 6.1

## The Cycle of Giving



citizenship participants felt proud to have proof that they exist as legal participants in the economy. They were able to make a better living to support themselves, their family, and others. Specifically, many participants expressed that they carried a particular responsibility to help others. According to the data, participants acquired a sense of duty to give back to the community and society at large through volunteering.

A vast majority of the participants engaged in some form of volunteering after they graduated from college (see appendix E). Volunteering refers to offering services freely. In other words, participants described their experiences with volunteering accounted for helping others outside of their work obligations who were in need of assistance. Many participants volunteered with distinct groups who shared common experiences as they had. The following section focuses on participants' accounts of

making a positive difference on society through volunteering with those whom they had a personal connection.

### **A Personal Connection**

Many participants have made a positive difference on society by volunteering their time with others. Participants described that they volunteered with groups of people that they could relate to because they shared similar experiences. For example, many participants spend their free time with groups of people who are economically less fortunate. In the following quote Fabi describes this:

... we take clothes and food and a whole bunch of stuff to a community in Tijuana, to this little school that doesn't have anything. I believe I am making a difference in their education because they need supplies to go to school and without them they might not be able to be in school. They don't have anything over there. So I make sure we have enough supplies like books, pencils, paper, binders, whatever, clothes, anything that they need and take it to Tijuana... I do this because I can connect with these people. I know what it is like to have limited resources.

The quote above illustrates how a participant volunteered her time with less fortunate families. Specifically, Fabi helps collect and transport supplies to remote areas to people who lack financial stability. Fabi, like many of the participants in the study, gives her free time to help others in need. She connects with others who have similar experiences, as she did, like many of the participants in the study.

Many participants also volunteer with different organizations and associations. Paulina shared her experience in the following quote:

*Por ejemplo, aqui en la universidad hay una organization de estudiantes AB540, que estdn luchando porque les den-por que pas en la ley para recibir prestamos y todo eso. Entonces doy de voluntar y voy a sus juntas y me interesa como - ser un tipo de apoyo para ellos, porque aunque ya no estoy en la situation de ellos, he pasado por esa situation y se lo que se siente y me veo reflejada en muchos de ellos.* [For example, here at the university there is an organization of AB540 students that are battling to get-to pass a law in order to help them finance their education and all that. So I volunteer and attend their meetings and I am very interested how-I like to support them, because although I am no longer in their situation, I have passed through their situation and I know how it feels and I see myself in many of them.

The quote above highlights how a participant volunteered her time and shared her experiences with others. In particular, Paulina supports a group of immigrant students at the univesity and shares her college experiences, which include plights and successes. Paulina, like many participants in the study, shared distinct experiences of being undocumented in college and helps others who are going through similar situations.

The quote below serves as an additional example of volunteering in another capacity from David:

I do a lot of community service. One of the things I really enjoy doing is volunteering with juvenile detention centers, my favorite group to work with. So I like to think that I'm really young, almost kind of wild, and I could relate to these guys. They have obviously been misguided. I like that I am just able to talk to them, talk to them about some of the things that I've gone through and for me to

hear their experiences, why they are there. By going there, I make a positive impact... being able to volunteer like that is good.

The quote above describes how a participant volunteers his time. Specifically, David shares his life experiences with juveniles and is able to connect with them. David, like many participants in the study, chooses to volunteer with a particular group because he could relate with them. David, like many of the participants in the study is making a positive impact in the lives of others. Many participants not only became volunteers but also became role models after graduation. The following section highlights the ways in which participants became role models.

### **Role Models**

The data indicated that many participants became role models after acquiring a college degree and began working in their field of study. Being a role model refers to person that serves as a witness of success, influencing others to do the same. In this study, a role model refers to a person who influences others to go to college and choose a professional career. For example, when participants completed their college degrees, they felt they were in a position where they could direct and guide others to become college graduates, like themselves. Specifically, participants explained that they were role models, making an exemplary influence on other young people to go to college. The following section depicts how participants made an exemplary influence on others.

### **An Exemplary Influence to go to College**

The data indicated that participants made an exemplary influence on people, inspiring them to become university students and graduates. An exemplary influence means that participants impacted others in a positive way. In particular, participants



motivated young people to go to college. Participants emphasized that through their own experiences of endurance and through their job choice they are able to influence others to follow in their footsteps. For example Octavia gave an example of this in the quote below:

And I've been to the extent that I've been able to promote the sciences. I've been involved in different organizations to promote learning and a higher education. I encourage pursuing a career in medicine for women... just from everything I have been through, I think I serve as a role model for other people, other women, especially Latinas, to pursue a higher education...

The quote above shows a participant describing how she is a role model. She is also an exemplary influence for others to go to college. In particular, Octavia is a role model for other women, specifically for Latinas to choose a career in medicine. Octavia's choice in her career to be a medical and research doctor has made her an example for others to follow. Octavia, like many participants in the study, is a role model because of the educational merits she has reached. In addition, Octavia makes an exemplary influence for others to go to college.

The quote below is as an example from Omar:

...I worked in an elementary school with children between like 7 and 11, and it was a very different space, right, in the psychotherapeutic space...The children that I work with, some are undocumented. I don't know if my White colleagues understand what that is because they've never experienced it. I have... I am able to be a role model to them to go to college. I work with adolescents, too and ask them, "What are you doing after high school? Is college in your future? Where

are you gonna go to college? I ask them this, just like someone asked me that very same question and it changed my life. Maybe I will guide their thoughts to go to college, too.

The quote above depicts a participant as a role model, making a positive influence for young people to go to college. Specifically, Omar shares similar experiences of being undocumented with his clients and feels he can encourage them to seek a college degree. Omar, like many participants in the study, motivates others to go to college through his line of work.

The quote below offers another example from Ariel showing how she is a role model to high school students:

I see myself in a lot of the kids that I work with and I help. We were driving to Whittier, which is an okay neighborhood, I mean, it's not, by far, Beverly Hills or anything like that, but it's a very suburban neighborhood, the amazement of the kids were, "Wow, this is so clean and wow, this is just so nice. There's no tagging and look, it looks so safe and look, people are walking their dogs." Those were the same comments that I had when I was teenager. They were the same comments that I had when I was growing up and so my whole spiel to them was like, look, you guys go to college and you guys can be successful and you guys have to really, really work hard. And then two of them say, "Well, we don't have any papers." And I say, yeah, but you know, you could still do it. It's going to be really, really hard, but you can still do it. Look at me, I did it, I was just like you once. Then they say "you Mrs. A.?" and I tell them "yes!"

The quote above shows how a participant was a role model to teenagers. Specifically, Ariel was living proof to her high school students that receiving a college degree was feasible. Ariel was a role model to her students. She instilled in them that you need to work hard in order to be successful. Ariel, like many participants in the study, inspired others to become college students through her own hard work and educational success.

Andrea described how she is a role model to high school students, too:

*Trabajo en un escuela de una comunidad socioeconomic\*} no muy alta, y tengo cada chico con cada problema, y muchos de ellos no creen posible llegar a una universidad y estoy todo el tiempo, 'Si se puede. Si se puede.' Creo que - aunque a veces creo yo mas que ellos. Espero que al final, en algun momento en su vida puedan darse cuenta de que si mis palabras tenian algun valor y los ayude. He tenido chicos que a pesar de que tengo muy poco tiempo trabajando, tengo chicos que regresan y me dan las gracias por algo que les di, porque eso fue lo que - una palabra o un comentario clave que afecto su vida para llegar a ser lo que son en ese momento, haberse graduado en la universidad simple... [I work at a school in a community where the economic status is not very high and I have young kids with every problem, and many of them do not think it is possible to attend a university and I am telling them all the time, 'yes we can! Yes we can!' I think-eventhough I think so more than them. I hope at the end, at some point in their life they will realize the value of my words have helped them. I have had kids, eventhough I have little time working, I have kids that return and thank me for something that I gave them, because of- a word or a key comment that*

affected them in their life to reach who they are at that moment, a university graduate...]

The quote above shows how a participant is a role model to high school students. Specifically, Andrea gives words of encouragement to her students influencing them to attend college. Students come back to show their appreciation to her because she influenced them to graduate from college. Andrea, like many of the participants in the study was able to encourage others to go to and graduate from college.

The quote below shows another example from Margarita:

.. .through my job, I'm able to talk to other students who were in my situation, who are in the situation where I was in high school and college, that have no documentation, that they didn't know what they could do or they could not do or what their possibilities were. And I talk to them and let them know what they're capable of doing. I've done a couple of talks about AB 540, about what are their options, and how having a college education is something that nobody can take away from you, and how, yes, it's difficult, but it's not impossible. And I think just talking to children who feel they have no hope because they've been told they have no hope has made an impact in some children and young adults.

The quote above illustrated how a participant motivates others to go to college. In particular, Margarita's job gives her the opportunity to inspire students that are undocumented to attend college. Margarita's experiences of perseverance, like many participants in the study, give other undocumented students hope to graduate from college.

That data indicated that many participants in the study were role models showing an exemplary influence for youth to desire, attend, go to, and graduate from college. Specifically, participants encouraged other students to seek a college degree through their careers of helping others. Participants were not only role models for others to go to college but they were also advocates. The following section emphasizes examples of participants being advocates.

### **Advocates**

The data indicated that many participants became advocates after graduating from college. An advocate represents someone that supports a specific cause; in this case, participants supported others to continue their education. For example, participants explained that after being established in their careers they were able to "advocate resources" to promote a higher education for others. In other words, participants became supporters to assist others in completing an education. The following section will highlight how participants have been supporters of educational programs.

#### **A Supporter of Educational Programs**

Many participants described how they became advocates of educational programs promoting a higher education. In this study, a supporter of educational programs refers to person who financially and emotionally encourages specific programs promoting college. For example, Maria said the following:

I have the ability to advocate resources for different areas in the university.

Particularly, for the departments that serve average students, which are the low-income, first-generation college student populations. I was able to write a grant that was a \$1.2 million grant over a period of four years for the student services

support program. I was also able to garner some support for EOP with additional funds. Then most recently, I just acquired through a private foundation was \$140,000 for a program to foster youth. So my heart is in educational equity programs... I understand the experience and the importance of these programs, I have the opportunity to influence how the decisions are made. I'm able to provide and lead people to better practices and I know the experience of low-income first-generation college students, first handedly.

The quote above gives an example of how a participant is an endorser of opportunities for college. Specifically, Maria helps find funding for particular college programs to support distinct groups, especially low-income first-generation college students, to continue their educational goals. Maria is emotionally invested in advocating funds for educational equity groups because she understands and has experienced their plights. Maria, like many of the participants in this study, has developed a way to financially and emotionally support programs that promote others to continue their education.

The quote below is another example illustrating a promoter of educational success from Javier:

So, I know for instance I work in this program, right? It is a very prestigious program but it's a federally funded program, so no AB 540s can receive funding- This is the McNair Scholars Program. And so we train people to - students to move from undergraduate to graduate school and so we want them to go on and get their Ph.D., right? So - but since it is a federally funded program, we cannot accept any AB 540 students, right? So we have all these AB 540 students, and they really want to do research and they really wanna continue on to grad school,

but they have no papers. So, what do we do?...So we have developed a program -  
..it's a research program, just like the McNair's but it's for AB 540 students  
only...

The quote above emphasizes how a participant is an advocate for educational programs. In particular, Javier's job is to encourage others to succeed in graduate school. He has also developed an additional program for immigrant students to have an opportunity to continue their studies. Javier, like many participants in the study promotes educational opportunities.

The quote below is another example from Steve:

..I write curriculum. I start programs for young people like me that weren't making it. I have actual programs for them now. I promote funds for this program. I train teachers... I have the power to make a difference in a lot of peoples' lives and it's pretty exciting... I've seen so many young men change their lives with this program and with the work that we've done..now we have kids coming back who are lawyers. I'm starting to get a little emotional, but you start realizing that all the work that you've done and when you do it out of your heart and seeing your work, it's amazing to see all these young people that when you met them, they were so lost just like you were and you were able to influence them.

The quote above illustrated a participant promoting an educational program. Specifically, Steve's job allows him to make a positive impact on young peoples' lives and help them aspire to go to college. Steve, like many participants in the study, supports educational programs that encourage youth to choose a college career and makes positive changes in their lives.

Many participants became supporters of educational programs for college. Participants promoted a higher education by creating and advocating resources to support college programs. In particular, participants both financially and emotionally supported others to be successful in college by advocating resources for specific programs that encouraged a higher education.

### **"Life Long Learners"**

The data indicated that participants continued seeking opportunities to be "life long learners." The phrase "life long learners" (Yeaxle, 1929) refers to a person who persists to continue to acquire knowledge. For example, even after participants graduated from college they desired to continue in their journey to be educated and seek extensive educational challenges. Although a majority of the participants hold higher education degrees, are in the process of completing an additional degree, or are preparing to enter into another educational endeavor, they still feel that their educational aspirations are not complete. In other words, participants continued to enroll in school in order to be knowledge seekers and be able to make more of a difference for others in the jobs they are doing. The following section describes how participants are knowledge seekers.

#### **A Knowledge Seeker**

Many participants became knowledge seekers, even after graduation. For instance, a majority of the participants were not satisfied with only receiving an undergraduate degree, they desired to continue their educational pathway. For example Lucia said the following:

I consider myself work in progress because I am not finished learning by any means. Like I said without a doubt I love being a student... Going to school, I like



it. I love Italian and I would love to learn Japanese. There are so many things I would like to do. I still have not finished my education. I think it's a life long process. There is just so much to learn! So much to do! So many people to help!

The quote above illustrates how a participant is a "life long learner." In particular, Lucia explains that even though she has acquired a higher educational degree, she continues to seek more knowledge. Lucia, like a majority of the participants in this study, considers learning to be a "life long process." Lucia's attitude about wanting to learn more in order to help others is a common for many of the participants in this study.

The quote below is another example from Paulina depicting how important it is to continue her education:

*Bueno, pues cuando ya agarre porfin el tan esperado papelito, me di cuenta que ese papelito no iba a ser suficiente, que apenas voy aqui mefaltan miles de millas por recorrer. Porque antes - antes de haber recibido mi licenciatura - yo pense que ya con recibir una licenciatura era suficiente, pero ahora que estoy trabajando me doy cuenta que una licenciatura no es suficiente, tienes que tener por lo menos una maestria, sino es que un doctorado porque puedes ayudar a mas gente y sino estas limitando tu potencial o si no lo haces.* [Well, when I finally received that awaited little piece of paper, I found out that it was not going to be enough, I am only here and I still have thousands of miles to cross. Because before-before I received my degree-I thought that receiving my degree would be enough, but now that I am working I have found out that having an undergraduate degree is not enough, you need at least a master's degree, if not a doctorate

because you can help more people and you are just limiting your potential if you don't.

The quote above serves as another example where a participant is depicting being a knowledge seeker. In particular, Paulina explains she plans to continue her journey of being a student and desires to go to graduate school. She has discovered that it is necessary to keep going to school in order to be more useful to others. Paulina, like many of the students in the study, mentioned that "you are limiting your potential" if you do not continue your education past a bachelor's degree.

In the following quote Margarita said the following:

I'm preparing to go to law school.. I would like to stay in public interest and still work for the undocumented community, community overall. I would like to be able to eventually start working in policy and be able to influence policy. And, I mean...civil rights and labor law, because I've been impacted by that.

The quote above illustrates how a participant is continuing her education in order to help others. Specifically, Margarita plans to attend law school to influence policies that deal with civil rights and labor law issues. Margarita, like many of the participants in the study, views continuing her education as significant in improving the lives of others.

The following quote gives another example from Fabi:

I feel very proud of myself that I finished my Bachelor's. Reaching that goal was important because it made me want to make more goals and go after more. That's just me! When I got my Masters, I was like wow I did it. It was really hard, but I did it... So for me, even though my success is being able to say I finished my education completely, I am still going to go on. Although I finished I think it's not

enough. I am going to get my doctorate because I want to do more for others and myself. One of the things I had learned is that your education is never over. So I always want more.

In the quote above a participant explains her desire to be a knowledge seeker and continue in her educational journey. In particular, Fabi already finished her Master's degree but still desires to continue her educational pathway towards a doctorate degree. Fabi, like a majority of the participants seeks to persist through college and surpass not just one higher educational degree but two. She craves to keep going on her educational journey in order to help others. This attitude is common for the many of the participants in the study.

The quote below offers another example of being a knowledge seeker from Janet:

I just didn't stop. Finished my B.A. in four years - with a double major and double concentration and then, from there, I finished in '99. I finished and started my teaching credentials, and I finished in 2001... In 2001, I started my Masters right away... So I went for my Masters in education and finished in 2003...So I went for a second Master's in administration... I finished up in 2005 with an administrative credential and a Masters...Now I finished it. Now what?... And there I went. I finished out the program by June 14<sup>th</sup> of 2008 and got my doctorate degree. ... Right now, I have my doctorate. I'm happy with what I do, but I don't ever want to think that I am done. I don't want to forget about my biggest dream is to become an attorney. So I have to tell myself I want to take a couple of years to take the LS AT prep test and then take it later on. And go that

route and take - and do civil law so that I can work for a nonprofit to help more people.

The quote above exhibits a participant's drive to continue being a student and knowledge seeker. Specifically, Janet finished one higher educational degree and proceeded to the next and next degree. She has a drive to keep following an educational journey. Janet, like many of the participants in the study, has tremendous dedication and willpower to keep on progressing through the educational pathway of success, in order to continue to make a positive impact. She is a knowledge seeker and a life long learner, like most of the participants in the study.

Most of the participants in this study continued their education past a bachelor's degree or are in a graduate program and consider themselves "life long learners." As a result, participants became knowledge seekers. The majority of the participants in this study strive to continue their educational journey and help others in different ways. Many participants are eager and aspire to continue their educational pathway to the fullest possible manner. They feel obliged to set higher goals than the ones they have already reached. In other words, after graduation many participants progressed to create more educational goals and complete additional higher educational degrees for the purpose of improving their lives as well as others. The data indicated that participants were not only "life long learners" but also chose to be leaders. Several participants also became leaders in their career fields. The following section will explain how participants are leaders.

### **Leaders**

The data indicated that participants were not only "life long learners" but also elected to hold leadership roles, in order to make positive contributions to society. For

example, the majority of the participants elicited multiple examples of how they are leaders. In particular, a leader represents someone that directs others, resulting in positive and productive change. The following section describes participants as leaders directing positive change.

### **A Director of Positive Change**

The data indicated that participants were leaders by being directors of positive change. A director of positive change refers to a person who has the influence to improve lives and destinies. For example, Steve describes his leadership role in the quote below:

I also started my own nonprofit that actually helps young males, females, fathers, and mothers; it's a program for the whole family. We help students build their self-esteem, believe in themselves, believe in who they are, and where they come from. I started this nonprofit with other friends from college and it's really taken off and it has gotten to the point that we give back to the community.. .We have a summer school program and the kids actually write ideas or they write their stories and then we actually take their stories and put them on stage, offering our performances to the whole community. We re-write their stuff by adding a lot of humor to it.

The quote above serves as an example of a participant being a director of positive change. In particular, Steve established a community theater group for the purpose of boosting confidence, self-determination, and empowerment in others. He is a devoted leader directing positive changes in many peoples' lives. Steve, like the majority of the participants in the study, holds a leadership role where he is in charge of enlightening lives and positively altering destinies.

The quote below offers another example illustrating Janet's experience with being a leader and director of positive change:

I was a classroom teacher. Classroom teachers are valuable. They are the people that we need to make a difference, but I wanted to do bigger and better things. I just didn't want to stay in the classroom because I knew... my professor told me this. "As a teacher, you can impact 20 kids, 40 at a time per year, but if you become a leader, you could impact the world"..So I did. I bought into this idea of I can make a difference and I can be a leader..So I went from teacher to administrator... I am making a bigger difference. And right now I am the assistant director of education at a charter school in Ventura. That's what I do. It's a charter school that works under the same philosophy that I did my dissertation: learner centered teaching and constructivist learning.

The quote above highlights a participant holding a leadership role. Specifically, Janet is the director of a school, where she makes a positive impact. She also explained that she became a leader to make a greater difference. Janet, like the majority of the participants in this study, constantly seeks to enhance the lives of others.

The quote below serves as yet another leadership example from Octavia:

I'm actually speaking to a lot of people from Latin America who are interested in the studies or locals who speak Spanish or Latinas or Latinos. And so it puts me at a very interesting place as a leader, a specialist, with very special and unique clinical experience. I'm able to make a difference for people who may not be part of the study because of the language barrier or because they don't have enough information. It's actually difficult to get into those studies if you don't get the

live referral or if you don't see the right rheumatologist... And so to be able to be in that position and to serve as a link between the Latinos and this type of study... It's an incredible opportunity and an awesome responsibility that I very much welcome.

The quote above depicts a participant as a leader. In particular, Octavia is a medical and research doctor that holds the power to strengthen the results of a study on arthritis by adding Latinos/as to it. She is an eager and willing leader that makes a positive difference in her field, like many of the participants in this study.

In conclusion, chapter 6 addressed participants' experiences beyond college. This chapter answered the following question: In which ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society? The data indicated that undocumented college graduates contributed to society by helping others. Specifically, participants gave of their free time to groups or organizations which they share common experiences. For example, participants volunteered with others who are in need economically, or who are having behavior difficulties, or immigrant groups.

In addition, many participants became role models portraying an exemplary example to inspire others to go to college. In particular, participants chose careers of public service where they could make a difference in the lives of other students and motivated them to go to college. Furthermore, participants advocated resources to help others in their pathway to and through college. They became proponents to assist in programs that promote educational opportunities. Moreover, participants developed a mindset of where they became "life long learners." In this process participants continue to be involved in an educational environment in order to make a greater difference in

their communities and in the lives of others. Furthermore, participants chose to become leaders in their field impacting the society in a positive way.

In conclusion, many of the participants in the study became, what one participant described as, public servants. In particular, participants chose careers in public service in order to make a positive impact through being volunteers, role models, advocates, "life long learners," and leaders. They became volunteers to assist others in need. Participants also became role models to inspire youth to attend college. In addition, they became advocates promoting educational programs to serve distinct populations. Furthermore, participants also became "life long learners" seeking knowledge to progress and improve the lives of others. Moreover, participants became leaders to reach out to more people and make a positive difference. After graduation, participants effectively touched the lives of many people. The next chapter addresses a summary, discussion/implications, and a conclusion of the study.



## CHAPTER 7

### Discussion and Implications

Today the U.S. immigration policies are in need of reform. In particular, one enormous legislative policy rift in the immigration debate centers on the question of what to do with the children of undocumented immigrants who had no choice to come to this country. Although, the children of undocumented immigrants are not accountable for the unlawful actions of their parents (Aleinikoff, et al., 2003; Bruno & Kenzi, 2002; Legomsky, 2002), they face limited opportunities in attaining a university degree.

The data indicate that undocumented immigrant students struggle with: psychological stress from illegally entering the country, fear of deportation, not being allowed to obtain a license to drive, ineligibility to work legally, and the lack of access to federal and state scholarships, financial aid, and loans for college (Martinez, 2001; Perez, 2009; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In addition, national and state legislation regarding undocumented students' access to a higher education has been ambiguous, especially with regard to: (a) those seeking to pay in-state tuition rates and (b) determining resident tuition status to attend college (Olivas, 1995, 2004). In short, issues such as allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates, granting undocumented students access to federal financial aid, loans, and work-study opportunities, and having the right to work legally in this country are still unresolved.

Despite the difficulties and policies that undocumented students encounter, they are finding ways to earn degrees in U.S. colleges. In fact, some undocumented students are academically high achieving students participating in student government, clubs and organizations, and church and service groups (Stevenson, 2004). As high achieving

students, they have the capacity to contribute positively to the U.S. economy (Alfred, 2003; National Immigration Law Center, 2003 & 2005).

Although, the current literature describing this particular population is growing, it is still limited in explaining how members of this group successfully manage to receive a college degree. Furthermore, there is a need to know how undocumented immigrant college students impact our society after they graduate. In the context of immigration policy it makes sense to know the ways in which undocumented immigrants, who have completed a university degree, contribute to this country.

As stated previously, there is little known about the actual experiences of undocumented students who have acquired a university degree. The purpose of this study was to understand the collegiate experiences of undocumented students, particularly in the process of persisting through college graduation and their contributions to society post graduation. Specifically, this study described undocumented students' experiences of getting into, through, and beyond college.

This study relied upon qualitative data to explore undocumented students' collegiate experiences. Twenty-one in-depth interviews from former undocumented college graduates were conducted between 2007 and 2008. A concept modeling approach (Padilla, 1991) was used as a tool to understand their experiences, inductively. The questions addressed in the study were: 1) How do undocumented students access U.S. colleges? 2) What barriers complicate their efforts to persist? 3) What factors support their efforts to persist? 4) In which ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society?

The findings constituted several overarching themes that emerged from the data to answer to questions stated above. These themes were divided into three distinct chapters. These chapters described participants' experiences before, during, and after college graduation. In chapters 4 and 5, the data uncovered elements of encouragement and discouragement. These contrasting elements were described as a roller coaster ride, which was full of "ups" and "downs" with regard to getting into and through college. The "ups" represented those elements that supported and pushed these students forward along their pathway to college. In contrast, the "downs" represented elements that elicited doubt, fear, confusion, and served as obstacles for these students.

In chapter 4, "The Roller Coaster Ride of the Pathway to College for Undocumented Students" highlighted participants' experiences upon entering college. The elements of encouragement that emerged from the data included: college preparatory programs and events, advice from counselors and teachers, and private scholarships. The elements of discouragement were: the predicament of undocumented status, advice from counselors, and the lack of federal funds available for undocumented students.

In chapter 5, "The Roller Coaster Ride Continues: Elements of Encouragement and Discouragement During College," reveals participants' experiences in their process through college. The elements of encouragement encompassed the following themes: family and friends, networking groups, and life improvements. The elements of discouragement consisted of: economic hardships, familial obstacles, and undocumented stigmatism.

Chapter 6, "Life Beyond the Roller Coaster Ride: The Contributions of the Unwanted," illuminated participants' experiences beyond the roller coaster ride and

included a discussion of their contributions to society. The data indicated that participants choose careers in the helping professions and public service sector jobs. For example, participants participating in such careers as: teachers, counselors, advisors, medical doctors, scholars, and administrators in educational institutions, in order to make a positive difference. In their pursuit of making a positive difference through their careers of public service, participants experienced the "cycle of giving." The cycle represents how participants gave back to the community. In particular, participants contributed to society by becoming: volunteers, role models, advocates, "life long learners," and leaders.

A number of limitations were found in the sample and data collection methods of this study. For example, issues pertaining to undocumented immigrant students may cause some participants to remember traumatic experiences and memories, keeping significant information secret. A second possible limitation of this study concerns the differentiation between undocumented versus class status and how these variables impacted the experiences of the participants in this study. As exemplified throughout the findings chapters, it was clear that undocumented and class status were intricately intertwined for the participants in this study. As a consequence, it is difficult to differentiate how much of their experience was due to their undocumented status as opposed to their class status. A third possible limitation of this study involves the role of social and emotional intelligence in the participants. It is difficult to determine the extent to which their success was due to high levels of social and emotional intelligence as opposed to other factors. This is a potential area for future research.

## **Implications**

The U.S. economic deficiency has become a major issue. Our nation is experiencing social and economic trials. Increasing the number of college-educated people is needed to contribute to the American workforce and welfare of our future (Matthew, 2009; Reindl, 2007). Today the U.S. is urgently requiring people to obtain college degrees in order to contribute to the new era work force. In particular, the nation is falling behind in college degree attainment, in comparison to other countries in the world (Mattews, 2009; Reindl, 2007). In addition, our nation is changing from an old economy, where physically demanding jobs were required, to a new knowledge-based economy that requires employees with a college degree (Atkinson, 2002; Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996). Therefore, more college-educated people are needed to compete economically with the rest of the world. The Lumina foundation set a goal of increasing the percentage from thirty percent to sixty percent of Americans who hold college degree by 2025 (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2009). President Barack Obama (2009) stated that:

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity-it is a pre-requisite... we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

It is obvious that the future college attainment goals set for our country are rigorous and demanding, but yet necessary. If our nation wants to increase the attainment rate of college graduates, then undocumented immigrant students need to be part of the equation.

For example, one group of students that are well prepared and already have the educational merits and desire to help our nation are undocumented immigrant college students and graduates. The data from this study shows that undocumented immigrant students graduate from universities not only to improve their own lives, but also the communities in which they live. After graduation, many chose careers in the public service section, focusing on education. As stated in the previous section, most become volunteers to help the needy, role models to promote a higher education, advocates to sustain college programs, "long life learners" to continue acquiring knowledge for the greater good of others, and leaders to influence positive change in our nation.

Investing in education is a responsibility for our nation. Diversified investments are more advantageous. One of the many ways that our nation can reach their college attainment goal rates is to consider granting undocumented students college support. In particular, undocumented students need to have access to federal assistance to help offset college tuition and be allowed to work legally after graduation.

This study affects many individuals. In particular, students that may not be able to access or complete a university may be inspired by the participants' perseverance and dedication to becoming college graduates. Although the emphasis of this study focuses on undocumented students, it may influence other similar groups of students. For example, the participants in this study belong to the low income, minority, and first generation college student population. The data in this study reveals that in order to increase college attainment supports for educational programs promoting college attendance and graduation, improvements in educational counselors in high school and

college, increase in fiscal opportunities to attain a college degree, and network/support groups sustaining students through college should be expanded.

As stated above, educational opportunities promoting college attendance and graduation are incumbent. A significant factor upon entering and succeeding in college is being prepared. This study supports the literature, which found that students that receive information about college requirements are more apt to access a college degree than others that do not (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Flint, 1993; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). In part, the gap in college attendance rates by race and socioeconomic status is associated with low rates of students who participate in college-prep curriculum, graduate from high school, take the SAT or ACT, and apply to postsecondary institutions (Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002; Gandara, 1999; Hughes, 2003; Perna, 2000; Rendon, 2002; Teranishi, Allen & Solorzano, 2004). The data in this study indicates that college preparatory programs and events helped undocumented immigrant students apply and graduate from college.

The data in this study also indicates that multiple supports assisted undocumented students plights and success into and through college. In particular, lower involvement in college preparatory activities is directly related to local communities' economic wealth and how primary and secondary schools serve students of color (Caldera, Robitschek, Frame, & Pannel, 2003; Hughes, 2003; Nora, 2004; Rendon, 2002). The findings of this study support the argument that student relationships with numerous individuals such as peers, siblings, and adults at school, at home, and in their community also influence their decision to access college (Cooper, 2002; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001;

Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999;), and his or her predisposition to prepare for college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). This study indicated that preparation contributes to a student's ability to access a university degree.

The data in this study implies that programs, which encourage, develop, and prepare students for college, are essential for undocumented immigrant students, as well as low-income, first college generation, and minority students. Not only are these programs vital for college access, but they also are needed to help students progress through college in order to ultimately influence what they do after graduation. Policy makers and educational leaders need to encourage such programs that promote and support students to access and graduate from college.

The findings of this study also support is study also found that finances are another factor that helps or hinders a student to acquire a university degree. The literature claims that an awareness of college prices, financial aid resources, and other support services helps increase college enrollment for Latino students (Gandara, 1999; Olivas, 1985; Rendon, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). Many families, especially lower income families and those with parents who did not attend college, do not understand the complexity of financing a college education costs (Olivas, 1985; Olivas, 2004). Moreover, many students and families are unsure about application requirements and financial aid options (Gandara, 1999; Olivas, 1985; Olivas, 2004; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). This study concurs with the studies indicating that many low-income students and students of color do not have adequate access to relevant and timely information about college finances (Olivas, 1985; Olivas, 2004).



The findings of this study also support research stating that in order to ensure that students and families make informed choices about postsecondary education they need to be aware of university costs and available financial resources (Gandara, 1999; Olivas, 1985; Olivas, 2004; Rendon, 2002). Research indicates that the financing of higher education is a shared responsibility of governments, postsecondary institutions, students and their families, philanthropies, and businesses (Hu & St. John, 2001). This responsibility is viewed as shared because of the social and individual benefits society gains with increased levels of education (Nettles & Perna, 1997). In order for our country to endure societal gains and increase the level of education in our country it is essential for governments, postsecondary institutions, students and their families, philanthropies, and businesses to invest in undocumented students' pursuing to complete a college degree. This fact is especially significant because undocumented students usually are not allowed to receive federal aid for offset college costs.

A crucial barrier to increase college access and success is financial aid, including federal, state and institutional financial aid programs (Rendon, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). During the last two decades, tuition prices for higher education have increased, while grant aids have declined (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). In addition, loans have replaced grants as the primary method to pay for college. Because of these changes, students, particularly low-income students, find it increasingly difficult to afford a college education (Olivas, 1985; Rendon, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). This information is particularly significant for undocumented students who almost always come from poor families and do not qualify for any federal grants or loans. The data from this study indicates that by allowing undocumented students access to government loans,

their pursuits into and through college could have been a smoother path. Therefore, this study implies that granting undocumented students federal assistance may break down one of the most pressing barriers blocking their pathway to receive a college degree.

The data indicated that an increase in financial assistance would be greatly beneficial for undocumented students seeking to complete a college degree. In particular, private scholarships, federal and state loans, grants, work-study opportunities, and internships are needed to increase the number of not only undocumented students in college but other minority, low income, and first generation students. Granting undocumented students access to federal financial aid and loans is an effective and productive investment to our country because these students are bound to be employed at better jobs with a college degree.

Institutions are responsible for educating all students, even undocumented immigrants. More than any other entity, higher education institutions directly influence access and success (Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira, Gullatt, 2002; Olivas, 2004; Nettles & Perna, 1997; Rendon, 2002). This study concurs with the data that states, postsecondary institutions have to adequately develop programs and services to ensure equitable opportunities for all students, especially students of color, low-income students, and first generation students (Cuandraz, 2002; Hughes, 2003; Miville, Koonce, Darlington, & Whitlock, 2000; Oliva, 2004; Olivas, 1985; Teranishi, Allen & Solorzano, 2004). These services and programs require administrative policies and resources that help access, retention and achievement for an increasingly diverse student body (Caldera, Robitschek, Frame, & Pannel, 2003; Miville, Koonce, Darlington, & Whitlock, 2000; Nora, 2004; Oliva & Nora, 2004; Olivas, 1985; Rendon, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

Networking and support groups in college and beyond were found to be significantly beneficial to the participants in this study. The findings in this study support that maintaining and increasing network support groups would encourage, assist, and sustain undocumented immigrant students and other similar students to apply, stay in, and ultimately graduate from college.

Based on the study's findings policies and practices related to undocumented students need to be reformed. Federal, state, local, and institutional policies supporting this population are needed. Current federal legislation that could give undocumented students an opportunity to contribute positively to society is under consideration by Congress is Senate Bill 279. This legislation is titled D.R.E.A.M. (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act and House of Representatives Bill 1751 titled American Dream Act. These bills would assist undocumented students to gain access to college. According to the current act, students will be given a 6-year period to complete 2 years of trade school, military service, or 2 years of a 4-year university program. If passed, it would provide students with an easier pathway toward becoming citizens and be able to work after graduation.

Specifically, the DREAM Act would grant undocumented immigrant students the chance to obtain legal status and thus, enable them to pursue a higher education as U.S. citizens. This would make them eligible to pay in-state tuition and they would be able to apply for state and federal financial aid. In order for students to be entitled to the rights outlined in the DREAM Act, they must meet the following criteria, students must have: lived in the U.S. for 5 years or more; entered the U.S. before the age of 16; and

demonstrated "good moral" conduct, meaning they do not have any type of criminal record.

Due to our nation's current political climate, many question if the DREAM Act legislation will pass. If the DREAM Act does pass it will increase the members in our society with college degrees. President Barack Obama stated that: "There is no stronger weapon against inequality and no better path to opportunity than an education that can unlock a child's God-given potential." This study concurs with President Obama's quote previously stated because it proves that education shaped and molded the lives of the participants in this study in order to make positive changes in our nation.

State legislation also can affect undocumented immigrant students positively. For example, at the state level other states can pass similar legislation to the other ten states that allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates. State legislation that is especially helpful for undocumented students are states like Texas and New Mexico because they allow undocumented students to receive state financial aid. If other states implement this type of legislation, it would assist undocumented students to pay for college.

The study's findings also can inform educational institutions. This study not only shows that there is a lack of financial assistance for undocumented immigrant students, but there also is a lack visibility and sensitivity for these students in educational institutions. In particular, this study shows that there is a need to improve the services of counselors in high schools, community colleges, and four-year universities are essential. For example, counselors need to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges of the undocumented students experiences. They need to serve as liaisons communicating to

undocumented students and their parents about college requirements, academic study skills needed to get through college, and financial resources available specifically to them. Positive support, assistance, encouragement, guidance, and direction from counselors is essential to strengthened undocumented students chances of applying, progressing through, and graduating from college. Administrators in high schools and colleges should take into account that students, especially undocumented students and students with similar circumstances benefit greatly from effective and favorable counselors throughout their educational careers. Teachers, instructors, and professors also can make a difference in the lives of undocumented students. They can serve as role models and mentors offering encouragement in their pathway to and through college.

Finally, the data highlight a number of themes that are universal to the larger human race. Specifically, the participants demonstrated how humans endure great challenges and succeed despite moments of great discouragement. They also demonstrated a strong sense of hope and determination. Lastly, the participants exhibited many altruistic acts that benefited others. These characteristics can serve as powerful examples of what humans can do to create a better world.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows that undocumented immigrant students are the most vulnerable group in American colleges, today. Although they are not accountable for illegal actions, they suffer the consequences of being a marginalized and unwanted population. They not only have difficulty paying college tuition rates because of the absence of federal and state assistance available, but they also risk being deported. Despite these complications, undocumented immigrant students possess a "*si se puede*" [yes, we can] attitude. They

choose to value an education by taking full advantage of the opportunity to attend college.

As stated previously, undocumented immigrant students often face a difficult time being admitted into universities (Perry, 2004; Olivas, 1994; Rangel, 2001; Salsbury, 2004) and, once in, negotiating the system to succeed. Although some studies exist highlighting undocumented students access to college, more are needed. Few studies target the experiences of undocumented students illuminating their success through college graduation and beyond. More studies are needed focusing on what undocumented students do after graduation.

Although there may be some resistance to immigration, more studies are needed to see the benefits of this group. For example, Cornelius (2004) argues that:

The average American may object to large-scale immigration (at least from Mexico and other 'undesirable' source countries) because it increases cultural diversity or tax burden, but s/he recognizes the labor market realities and economic functions of immigration. (Cornelius, 2004)

The quote above illustrates that immigrants help the nation economically. In particular, this study gives evidence to the fact that undocumented immigrants, despite the multiple barriers, graduate from universities and contribute to our society immensely, after graduation. Specifically, as stated previously, they choose careers in the public service to improve the society in which we live.

At a moment where the nation is desperate for persons with college degrees, undocumented immigrant students, who were brought here as children and educated in the U.S. system are a population of well-educated undocumented college students and

graduates ready to contribute to the economic wealth and well-being of the nation.

Restricting this particular group of undocumented students, who are not accountable of unlawful actions, access to college is not only a violation of their human rights but it also limits educational, social, cultural, political, technological, and economic contributions to the nation.

There is a need to solve the ambiguity found in current legislation restricting these students access to a university degree, specifically the ambiguity with paying in-state tuition rates, the lack of federal and state financial aid available, and the burdensome and complicated issue of not being able to work after college graduation. More studies on undocumented immigrant students are required to understand this complex issue and change anti-immigrant sentiments of unwanted to wanted people into our nation. In addition, undocumented students can affect the national goals of increasing the population with more college-educated people. One way to do this is by passing legislation that supports undocumented immigrant college students, like the DREAM Act.

There are multiple changes that need to take place in order to increase the rate of college graduates in our country. In particular, undocumented students and similar types of students pursuing professional careers need special attention. Transformational adjustments at the federal, state, local, institutional, and departmental levels are necessary. For example, federal and state legislation allowing undocumented students to receive in-state tuition rates and a pathway to citizenship helps students to graduate from college, but these students will still continue to experience other difficulties that have been highlighted in this study. Federal and state policies to help undocumented students

assess and persist through college are significant but they will not solve all the issues regarding this population. Local and institution change are also needed.

Educational institutions also can make a positive difference for undocumented students and similar types of students. For example, institutions need to be aware that these students exist as well as their collegiate plights. Educating faculty, staff, financial aid officers, administrators, and students, in all departments regarding, not only undocumented student experiences and issues but also first generation, minority, and low income students is necessary. Supporting networking groups that foster educational success for minorities and economically disadvantaged students is essential. In particular, Latino/a organizations that enhance the actual college learning experiences with culture, diversity, politics, and enduring hardships. Currently several groups supporting undocumented students have sprung up within colleges and universities, across the nation, organizing conferences. Both undocumented immigrant students and U.S. citizens organize many of these groups. They are updating others on their collegiate struggles and recent immigration policies. These efforts have been significant and in order to reach more people the attendance of these events should include a broader audience.

The data indicates that granting undocumented students access to federal and state loans benefits our country. Specifically, these students graduate from college and contribute to society by choosing careers in public service, focusing on education. As stated in the previous chapter, they became teachers, counselors, directors, coordinators, advisors, medical doctors, scholars, and administrators. Through these specific careers participants give back to their communities and strive to make the world a better place, making a positive difference through their participation as: volunteers, role models,



advocates, "life long learners," and leaders. Therefore, this study shows that undocumented immigrant students contribute to society in diverse ways.

Today, the participants in this study, who are former undocumented college students, are altering the lives and destinies of others in a positive way. The battle of undocumented students pursuing a college degree is difficult. Although all the participants in this study had the opportunity to become legal residents and or citizens during or after graduating from college, there are still others that have not had that opportunity. This study implies that these undocumented immigrant students, without legal status have the capability to offer contributions to our nation, but with limited access to financial aid, lack of legal employment, and little visibility in their institutions their merits and potential depict "the contributions of the unwanted."

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Appendix A  
Letter Searching for Participants

## Letter Searching for Participants

To:

I would like to know if you might be able to help me find some research participants. The following explains who I am, the study I am conducting, and the criteria for my study.

Claudia Chavez, a doctoral student at the University of San Diego, is conducting a study on Latino immigrants who have received a university degree. Information from this study will contribute to the knowledge in the field of higher education, immigrant students, and policy.

In order to be selected for this study participants will need to satisfy the following four criteria, which includes he or she will need to be a person who (a) lives in the U.S. but who was born outside of the U.S. and brought to this country as a child between the ages of zero to sixteen years old, (b) attended U.S. secondary schools, (c) is a Latina or Latino (preferably from Mexico or Central America) who has graduated from a public university in California, and (d) is a child of undocumented immigrants and has been undocumented during, at least part of, his/her college experience but has obtained some type of legal authorization to be in the U.S.. The latter criterion was included so that participation in this study in no way put the student in legal jeopardy of being deported.

Please e-mail or call me if you meet the criteria or know anyone else that might be interested in this study. [Claudia-06@sandiego.edu](mailto:Claudia-06@sandiego.edu) or (858)792-7224.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Claudia

Appendix B  
Research Participant Consent Form

## **Research Participant Consent Form**

Claudia Chavez is a doctoral student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research project she is conducting for the purpose of exploring the experiences of former undocumented student's retrospective accounts in higher education. Information from this study will contribute to the knowledge in the field of higher education, immigrant students, and policy.

The project will involve two in-depth interviews that ask questions about your process of acquiring a university degree. Each interview will last about 60 to 90 minutes and also will include some questions about you, such as your age, place of birth, home town, schools attended, discipline of study, occupation, income, and participation in extra-curricular activities. Interviews will be audio recorded and videotaped. Videotaping is completely voluntary and will be viewed by only the researcher for analysis. If you choose not to be videotaped you may still participate in the study. You will also have the option to review your transcriptions to add, delete, or clarify any portions of each interview. The interview will take place at a time and place convenient for you. Participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to answer any question and/or quit at any time. Should you choose to quit, no one will be upset with you. Data collected prior to withdrawal will not be used unless participant agrees in writing to let these data be used; otherwise, your information will be destroyed right away. If you decide to quit, it will not be counted against you in any way or form.

The information you give will be analyzed and studied in a manner that protects your identity. That means that a code number will be used and that your real name will

not appear on any of the study materials. In addition, all proper nouns, such as names of cities, states, and schools will also be changed to protect your identity. Information you provide will remain confidential and locked in a file cabinet and password protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years before being destroyed. All video recordings will be destroyed six months after the dissertation is defended.

There may be a risk that participating in the interviews may make you feel tired. Sometimes people feel distressed, anxious, or sad when talking or reflecting on positive or negative college experiences. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings, you can call the San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339. Remember, you can stop the interview at any time you feel tired or for any other reason.

The benefit to participating will be in knowing that you helped educators and policy makers learn how to better help others who have gone through similar higher education experiences as you. The information collected from this study will be used for writing a dissertation, giving presentations, and possibly writing articles for publication. There is no agreement written or verbal, beyond that which is expressed on this consent form.

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

• \_\_\_\_\_ This check mark and my initials indicate that I give my permission to be videotaped.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix C  
Interview Guide

## **Interview Guide for Undocumented Students**

1. Tell me about your experiences upon entering college.
2. Talk to me about what was the most challenging. Why?
3. What were some of your successes during this process?
4. What were some difficulties you faced while you were enrolled in college?
5. Tell me about any negative aspects you encountered?
6. What motivated you to obtain your university degree?
7. What contributed to your success of acquiring a university degree?
8. How has obtaining a university degree influenced what you do today?
9. Describe any positive impacts you have made or make today?
10. What do you consider your greatest contribution? Why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share? If so, what?

### **Information:**

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Name and Place of Elementary School Attended:

Name and Place Middle School Attended:

Name and Place High School Attended:

University Attended:

Date enrolled in university:

University Graduation Date:

Major:

Occupation:

Income:

Clubs/organization/group participation:

Volunteer/outreach work:



Appendix D  
Research Questions Correlating with Interview Guide

## Research Questions Correlating with Interview Guide

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS			
1. How do undocumented students access U.S. public colleges and universities?	1. Tell me about your experiences upon entering college.	2. Talk to me about what was the most challenging. Why?	3. What were some of your successes during this process?	11. What else would you like to share?
2. What barriers complicate their effects to persist?	2. Talk to me about what was the most challenging. Why?	4. What were some difficulties you faced while you were enrolled in college?	5. Tell me about any negative aspects you encountered?	11. What else would you like to share?
3. What supports or facilitates their effects to persist?	3. What were some of your successes during this process?	6. What motivated you to obtain your university degree?	7. What contributed to your success of acquiring a university degree?	11. What else would you like to share?
4. In what ways have undocumented college graduates contributed to society?	8. How has obtaining a university degree influenced what you do today?	9. Describe any positive impacts you have made or make today?	10. What do you consider your greatest contribution? Why?	11. What else would you like to share?

Appendix E  
Types of Volunteer Work

pseudonym

## Types of Volunteer Work

Lucy	volunteer at elementary schools
Steve	MECHA (Mexican American student organization group), work with youth
Monica	AB 540 organization (advocacy group for undocumented students)
Samantha	MECHA, community center, contributor to university school newspaper
Paulina	AB 540 organization, MECHA, college student groups, literacy projects
David	Special Olympics, juvenile detention centers, volunteer with at risk youth
Ariel	help students fill out college applications, high school youth & sport groups
Maria	minority college student organizations
Sara	church group, MECHA
Fabi	AB 540 organization, Tijuana outreach program
Andrea	AB 540 organization, help youth with college application process
Jessica	AB 540 organization (advocacy group for undocumented students)
Octavia	Latina advocacy groups and organizations, medical research
Margarita	AB 540 organization, immigrant groups
Fabian	AB 540 organization, tutoring students
Pamela	MECHA, high school student organizations
Linda	volunteer at elementary schools
Javier	AB 540 organization, college student organizations, MECHA
Omar	MECHA, volunteer at elementary & high school
Erica	MECHA, health clinics, womens organization
Janet	volunteer at elementary schools