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Special Edition
College Access and Success for Undocumented Students

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* This paper co-authored by Clark-Ibáñez went through the blind peer review process facilitated by Camilo, the guest editor. Clark-Ibáñez was not involved in the review nor selection of the published article.

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About the Journal

An Overview

The *Journal of College Access* (JCA) focuses on the current trends, research, practices, and development of all types of programs, policies, and activities related to the access of and success in postsecondary education. Issues of college aspiration, qualification, application, enrollment, and persistence are the primary emphases.

The Journal was co-founded by Dr. Patrick O'Connor and Dr. Christopher Tremblay. O'Connor is Chief Strategist and CEO of College is Yours, an organization dedicated to expanding college opportunity. He is a board member and past chair of the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). Tremblay is Director of Admissions and Recruiting for the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.

Launched in March 2014, JCA is a part of Western Michigan University's ScholarWorks, a digital showcase of research, scholarly and creative output.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We accept submissions year round.

scholarworks.wmich.edu/jca

Affiliations

The *Journal of College Access* is affiliated with the Michigan College Access Network, the Center for Postsecondary Readiness and Success (CPRS) and the Center for Equity and Postsecondary Attainment (CEPA).

MICHIGAN COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

MCAN is a statewide non-profit organization with a mission to increase college readiness, participation, and completion in Michigan, particularly among low-income students, first-generation college going students, and students of color.
micollegeaccess.org

The Center for
Postsecondary Readiness and Success

The goal of the Center for Postsecondary Readiness and Success is to increase equitable and accessible pathways to postsecondary success for all people. Located at American University in Washington, D.C., the Center creates aligned systems, driven by student outcomes to disseminate new knowledge and discovery of college and career readiness and persistence models, while simultaneously connecting this new knowledge to K-12 and higher education policy formation.
american.edu/centers/cprs

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Center for Equity and Postsecondary Attainment

The Center for Equity and Postsecondary Attainment (CEPA) focuses on promoting equitable access to viable postsecondary pathways and opportunities. Guided by diverse student and parent perspectives, CEPA aims to create college and career counseling and advising practices that reconnect with and elevate the voices of those who have been historically marginalized and excluded. All students deserve access to high quality guidance that supports both individual and collective needs, challenges inequitable and racist school-based systems and policies, and promotes postsecondary opportunities.
education.sdsu.edu/cepa

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Coming Soon: Special Issues

We have two additional special issues in progress focused on these important topics:

Access and Blackness: Antiracist College Counseling and Advising

This issue will offer innovative perspectives or interventions in the context of college and career readiness, as it pertains to antiracist counseling and advising and postsecondary access of Black students. To combat the racist structures which pervade the career counseling and college counseling/advising fields, and disproportionately marginalize Black students, practitioners working with Black youth must be equipped with Antiracist frameworks.

Guest Editors:
Ian P. Levy, Manhattan College
Caroline Lopez-Perry, California State University Long Beach

Equity-Based Career Development and Postsecondary Readiness

The special issue will focus on manuscripts using an equity-based career development lens to prepare at-risk, minoritized, special needs, and vulnerable populations for postsecondary opportunities. The former first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, created two initiatives (Reach Higher Initiative and Better Make Room) aimed at exposing young people to college and career planning as well as emphasizing the need for everyone to obtain additional education and training beyond a high school diploma. This special edition will build on these two initiatives and focus on preparing students from vulnerable populations for optimal career and postsecondary outcomes.

Guest Editors:
Erik Hines, Associate Professor, Florida State University
Renae Mayes, Associate Professor, University of Arizona

From the Guest Editors

Authored by
Diana Camilo
California State University San Bernardino

Marisol Clark-Ibáñez
California State University San Marcos

Welcome to the special issue of "College Access and Success for Undocumented Students." This edition invited authors to submit manuscripts that offered innovative perspectives and interventions in the context of college and career readiness, and post-secondary access for undocumented students. This special issue also seeks to increase awareness and deepen understanding about sustainable frameworks that support the success of undocumented students.

We were delighted to receive numerous manuscripts from researchers, counselor educators, practitioners, educational leaders, college access partners, and doctorate candidates. We selected papers for this issue that represent an array of research-driven approaches, best practices, and policies at the district or college level. Our goal was to offer a significant contribution to the fields of secondary education, sociology, higher education, counselor education, student services, and educational leadership. We hope service providers, educators, other advocates, and those interested in utilizing research to inform their policy work will gain further insight as they lead the efforts to create institutional and systemic change for undocumented students. This issue will further enhance the professional development for those directly working with undocumented students.

The first five articles feature the experiences of undocumented students and their loved ones.

Hyein Lee draws from TheDream.US' latest survey data of 2,681 undocumented students surveyed during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify their specific needs for college completion and career readiness, and institutional supports for equitable access to social mobility.

Carolina Valdivia, Marisol Clark-Ibáñez, Lucas Schacht, Juan Duran, and Sussana Mendoza (members of the UndocuResearch Project) discuss how the political terrain impacted high school undocumented students and they share key recommendations for educators and counselors.

Stephany Cuevas, through the ecological systems theory, highlights the significant impact the political climate in the United States has on undocumented Latinx parents' engagement in their children's education.

Brianna R. Ramirez describes five particular ways in which racist nativism underlies undocumented Latinx college access experiences.

Rachel E. Freeman and Carolina Valdivia focus on undocumented graduate students, specifically the imperative for colleges and universities to build equitable programs at the graduate and professional degree levels. The authors share what they learned working with My Undocumented Life and their facilitation of dozens of UndocuGrads Workshops.

The next six articles highlight effective interventions and approaches for impactful advocacy.

Katherine Bernal-Arevalo, Sergio Pereyra, Dominiqua M. Griffin, and Gitima Sharma share school counselors' perspectives about the experiences of undocumented student and highlight how school counselors can implement programs that tackle the barriers that make college inaccessible for undocumented students.

Keisha Chin Goobsy addresses the need for mentoring undocumented students using cultural wealth mentoring model and other impactful strategies.

Nicholas Tapia-Fuselier examines the ways in which Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) support undocumented students and contribute to institutional efforts to enhance undocu-competence.

Patty Witkowsky, Jennifer Alanis, and Nicholas Tapia-Fuselier discuss how intentionally engaging undocumented students and equipping faculty and staff creates an undocu -competent culture that promotes and sustains students' success.

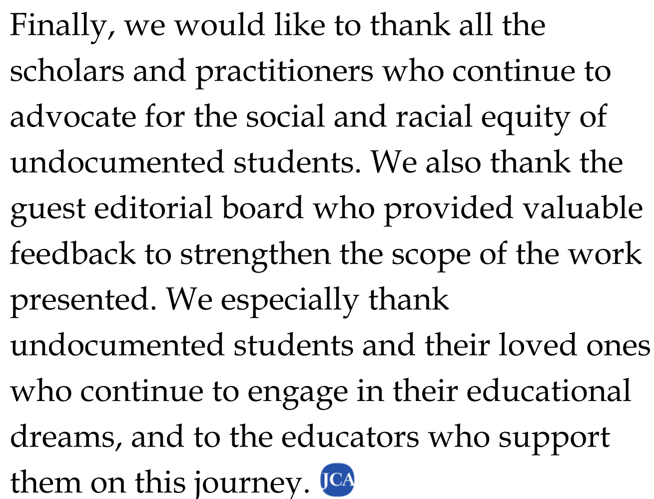
Rachel E. Freeman, Daniela Iniestra Varelas, and Daniel Castillo showcase university presidents featured in the film College Presidents with Undocumented Students to demonstrate their leadership in building equity with undocumented students.

John A. Vasquez, Alejandra Acosta, Rosario Torres, and Melissa Hernandez describe how a group of undergraduate and graduate University of Michigan student researchers, both documented and undocumented, developed an instrument and website (https://uleadnet.org/mi-undocu-map) to analyze institutional policies related to in-state resident tuition, admission, and financial aid in the state of Michigan.

Iliana Perez, Nancy Jodaitis, and *Victor Garcia* from Immigrants Rising (IR) highlight lessons and best practices from the California Campus Catalyst Fund (CCCF), supports programs for undocumented students at 32 campuses within each of the public higher education segments in California (University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges).

Reflecting on these diverse contributions, we call for further research and policy inquiry. Many authors were from undocu-friendly states and institutions, and further research and legislation must be created to improve the educational trajectories for undocumented students across the United States.

Additionally, in many states, undocumented students attend community colleges at higher rates than 4-year universities. Therefore, we call for more research on the pathways to and through community college that include non-credit courses, technical education (also known as vocational), and general education or transfer pathways. We hope this issue will lead to new research and also create change at local levels and beyond.



Finally, we would like to thank all the scholars and practitioners who continue to advocate for the social and racial equity of undocumented students. We also thank the guest editorial board who provided valuable feedback to strengthen the scope of the work presented. We especially thank undocumented students and their loved ones who continue to engage in their educational dreams, and to the educators who support them on this journey.

Identifying Institutional Best Practices: Supporting Undocumented Student Success in a Time of COVID-19

Authored by
Hyein Lee (*TheDream.US*)

ABSTRACT

Due to the sensitive nature of identifying undocumented status, it is difficult to examine the impact of immigration status in the context of higher education and factors crucial to postsecondary and career success. What we do know is that prior to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and for students ineligible for these programs, the biggest structural barriers hindering college success were centered around prohibitive laws restricting access to critical financial resources such as federally-funded supports or any form of work study. Additional research is necessary to address the impact of relatively new and crucial supports in facilitating college success among undocumented youth – especially during a period of uncertainty for programs like DACA,TPS, and the unprecedented impact of COVID-19. TheDream.US is an organization that partners with colleges in 19 states and Washington D.C. to provide approximately 6,500 undocumented students with private scholarships and tailored programming to complete an associate and/or bachelor's degree. This best practices paper draws from TheDream.US's latest survey data of 2,681 undocumented students to identify their specific needs for college completion and career readiness, and institutional supports for equitable access to social mobility.

Keywords: undocumented immigration, college success, social mobility

The inclusion of undocumented immigrants in the discussion of college access and success is crucial for equitable educational and career outcomes in the United States. Recently, programs such a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which has provided approximately 800,000 undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as minors a renewable, two-year period of temporary relief from deportation and eligibility for a work permit, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which has provided approximately 320,000 individuals unable to return to their home country due to ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary conditions with a renewable work permit and temporary relief from deportation, have reduced barriers in accessing educational and economic opportunities for undocumented immigrants (Gonzales et al. 2014; Wong et al., 2018). However, it is important to acknowledge that with or without DACA or TPS, undocumented immigrants have been and will continue to be an integral part of the American education system and workforce. It is essential to identify best practices in supporting undocumented students in college for academic and career success, especially

following a period of heightened uncertainty for immigrant communities during the Trump administration and coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Questions regarding the experiences of undocumented immigrants in higher education and the job sector nationally remain unanswered. This is in part due to the limitations of collecting data on the undocumented population and their legal vulnerability (Massey & Capoferro, 2004). The Migration Policy Institute estimates there are almost 98,000 undocumented students graduating from U.S. high schools every year and anywhere between 5 to 49 percent are overcoming steep economic and structural barriers to attend colleges and universities across the country and find gainful employment afterwards (Batalova et al., 2014; Gonzales, 2011; Ortega et al., 2018; Passel & Cohn, 2009; Zong & Batalova, 2019). Yet relatively little is known about the higher education and employment outcomes of undocumented young adults.

A number of qualitative studies conducted in California draw attention to key barriers to college access including prohibitive laws, lack of tuition assistance, and the financial need to prioritize low-wage work over school in the face of their families' low incomes (Abrego, 2006; Chavez et al., 2007; Gonzales, 2010; Perez et al., 2009; Seif, 2004). Studies addressing the experiences of undocumented immigrants in higher education suggest that despite being hyper-selected among their peers, in that they represent the most resilient, high performing undocumented students, their legal status negatively impacts academic performance (Gonzales, 2016; Hsin & Ortega, 2017; Terriquez, 2015).

Drawing from results from TheDream.US[1] Scholar Survey of 2,681 undocumented college students, we identify the specific needs of this population and best practices in supporting their college success and career readiness. Furthermore, the findings emphasize the urgency for institutional, state, and federal laws to ensure equal opportunity and access to higher education, gainful employment, and pathways to permanent status for all undocumented immigrants. This is particularly pressing given the impact of COVID-19. For example, despite undocumented immigrants and students working on the frontlines in essential industries such as healthcare, food and goods provisions, and education, and the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on racial and ethnic minority groups – they were excluded from federal financial relief, including higher education funds in the CARES Act (CDC, 2020; Murakami, 2020; NAE, 2020; Wood, 2020; Zamarripa, 2020).

Undocumented Youth and Young Adults

There are approximately 4.6 million undocumented young adults aged 16-34 currently residing in the United States.

[1] TheDream.US is the nation's largest college access and success program serving undocumented immigrants. Over the past seven years, TheDream.US has awarded over 6,500 scholarships for Dreamers – undocumented immigrant students – to pursue a college degree at one of 70+ Partner Colleges in 19 states and Washington D.C.

Considered "illegal," this group accounts for over 40 percent of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants navigating the precariousness of living within a restrictive political system barring their access to federal benefits and civic participation (Gelatt & Zong, 2018; MPI, 2018). Having arrived in the United States before adulthood, these undocumented youth and young adults are attending or have attended public K-12 schools, growing up firmly rooted in American society and developing deep social ties to the country. Not only are they coming of age and pursuing higher education in states historically considered entry points for immigrants, such as California, Texas, and New York, but they are also in newer destinations such as Georgia, Illinois, and Colorado (Passel & Cohn, 2018). Furthermore, the numbers and diversity in countries of origin affected by this experience are at historical highs (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017). While approximately half of all undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, growth rates of undocumented immigrants have been fastest for populations from Asia, Central America, and Africa (Rosenblum & Ruiz Soto, 2015).

Laws and Access Barriers

Undocumented immigrants have been systematically excluded from federal and state government, such as laws restricting access to key forms of financial aid for college and professional licensure for increased economic opportunity, and have navigated life under threat of deportation (Kasinitz, 2012; Varsanyi, 2006). However, there have been notable developments at the national level. According to Plyler v. Doe, all students are guaranteed K-12 education regardless of immigration status. It has provided relative legal invisibility for undocumented children as they do not experience the need to confront their legal status until they try to obtain a driver's license or apply for college (Gonzales et al., 2015; Gonzales, 2016). Today, DACA and TPS provide a select group of undocumented immigrants temporary relief from deportation and eligibility for a work permit once assigned a social security number and the Biden administration has proposed legislation providing pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and a budget proposal expanding the Pell Grant to DACA recipients (Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2021; The White House, 2021).[2]

The discussion on college access and social mobility for undocumented students, however, remains at the state-level. Since the rapid growth of the undocumented population in the 1990s and settlement into newer destination states, state governments across the country have implemented individual provisions and laws to extend or withhold benefits for higher education (i.e. access to in-state tuition and state aid), mobility (i.e. access to driver's licenses or other forms of ID), and employment (i.e. access to professional licensure) to

[2] https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FY2022-Discretionary-Request.pdf

undocumented immigrants. Since the Trump administration adopted anti-immigration practices such as rescinding DACA in September 2017 and TPS for certain recipients in October 2018, legal activity at the state level has increased and become more specific to types of undocumented status, oftentimes excluding those without DACA or TPS (Jawetz, 2019; NCSL, 2016).

Currently 17 states and Washington D.C. offer in-state tuition rates at public universities for undocumented students by state law, at least 11 of which also offer state financial aid (NCSL, 2021). The remaining states impose varying levels of exclusion and criminalization with extreme cases such as Georgia where undocumented students are barred from receiving in-state tuition (Perez, 2014; NCSL, 2021). Similar policies shape undocumented access to benefits affecting economic mobility such as driver's licenses, health care, food assistance, and licensure to practice in fields such as law and medicine (Castañeda & Melo, 2014; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Stuesse & Coleman, 2014). This political context means a heterogeneous and uneven landscape of state immigration practices that demonstrate the multitude of undocumented experiences (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017).

Survey

During May and June 2020, TheDream.US administered its second annual "Scholar Survey" to better understand the college experiences of program participants and the contexts in which they navigated their college and career journeys. Given the unprecedented pandemic, questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 were included. The survey was sent via email to approximately 3,850 program participants who were enrolled in college during the 2019-2020 academic year. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was conducted amidst two other significant events – first, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to reject the Trump Administration's attempt to terminate DACA: and second, the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 and the heightened Black Lives Matter movement and attention to racial justice. According to Scholars, they reported higher levels of anxiety but also resilience as they made their way through college in an increasingly tenuous immigration and social climate.

Participants

There were 2,681 survey participants, resulting in a 70% response rate. Participants were enrolled in 86 colleges throughout 17 states and Washington D.C., with New York (18%), Texas (16%), Florida (13%), and California (11%) accounting for the highest proportions of survey respondents (Table 1). Eighty six percent (n=2,302) of respondents had DACA, 3% had TPS, 11% were undocumented with neither DACA or TPS, and less than 1% were of other undocumented status or had adjusted their status to permanent resident. Eighty percent identified as Latina or Latino, 10% multiracial, 5% black, 3% Asian, and 1% non-Hispanic

Table 1.
Social and Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants.

	N	%
Immigration Status		
DACA	2,302	85.9
Undocumented	281	10.5
TPS	75	2.8
Other undocumented status	16	0.1
Adjusted status	7	0.0
Gender		
Female	1,872	69.8
Male	804	30.0
Prefer not to identify	5	0.0
Ethnoracial Identification		
Latina/o	2,152	80.3
Multiracial	271	10.1
Black	137	5.1
Asian	94	3.5
White – non-Latina/o	27	1.0
First generation college student	2,286	85.3
Year in college		
Freshmen	488	18.2
Sophomore	653	24.3
Junior	755	28.2
Senior	595	22.2
Graduate	190	7.1
States of college attendance		
New York	469	17.5
Texas	433	16.2
Florida	352	13.1
California	292	10.9
Colorado	187	7.0
Arizona	165	6.2
Illinois	140	5.2
Connecticut	117	4.4
Tennessee	115	4.3
Other	411	15.3
Average age of arrival to the U.S.	4	
Average age	22	
Average household income	$29,818	

Source: TheDream.US 2019-2020 Scholar Survey and TheDream.US administrative data, N=2,681

white[3]. Two-thirds of participants were female, which reflects the overall TheDream.US student population. College enrollment included, 18% freshman (n=488), 24% sophomores, 28% juniors, 22% seniors, and 7% of students who graduated in Fall 2019.

The survey participants reflect a self-selected group of high performing undocumented students as they were all enrolled in or recently graduated from college. However, the majority of participants come from low-income family backgrounds. Eighty five percent were the first in their family to attend college and the average household income was approximately $30,000. The majority have also spent most of their lives in the United States, with the average age of arrival to the U.S. being four years old. The average age of respondents at the time of survey was 22.

"Given these uncertainties, higher education institutions, state governments and the federal government must address barriers posed by legal status by extending institutional, financial, and emotional supports to all students regardless of their immigration status."

Key Findings and Best Practices

Overall, anxiety regarding legal status and the financial impact of COVID-19 weighed heavily on students during the 2019-2020 academic year. The economic burden brought on by the loss of their and immediate family members' income was significant. Participants' confidence in achieving their academic goals and sense of community, and belonging in the United States decreased when compared to the previous year's survey. Students had heightened concerns regarding their short and long-term plans and ability to pursue meaningful careers. Remarkedly, despite these challenges, participants reported remaining focused on completing college, giving back to their communities, and pursuing post-undergraduate goals. The findings reflect national conversations on the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 on the Black and Hispanic/Latinx communities (CDC, 2021; Tai et al., 2020). Furthermore, the continued volatility of DACA and TPS, and absence of pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants constricts their ability to recover from an ongoing pandemic and stifles mobility in the country that is their home. It also creates high levels of anxiety for their safety and livelihood as well as for their family members, who are often also undocumented. Given these uncertainties, higher education institutions, state governments and the federal government must address barriers posed by legal status by extending institutional, financial, and emotional supports to all students regardless of their immigration status.

[3] Less than 1% preferred not to respond.

The importance of belonging at college
Since the outbreak of COVID-19, all students reported moving to remote learning during the Spring 2020 semester and the majority were satisfied with the supports received from their college in response to the pandemic. Seventy seven percent were "moderately" or "very satisfied" with the support received from faculty and 82% were "moderately" or "very satisfied" with the support received from college staff. However, the frequency and quality of interactions with faculty and college staff decreased when compared to the previous academic year. This reflected student narratives of finding the transition to virtual learning disruptive, isolating, and worrisome for their academic journey. Twenty nine percent expressed "less" or "a lot less" confidence in graduating on-time since COVID-19 and maintaining a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher.

The learning resources students utilized and needed the most were virtual check-ins with their TheDream.US Scholar advisor, academic advisors, faculty, and classmates. Forty four percent also utilized access to free internet and 35% for learning devices. Thus, not only are tangible tools such as consistent access to learning devices and internet crucial for undocumented students, students reported they value interpersonal supports from mentors and peers on-campus. This suggests that feeling a sense of belonging in a college environment is important for undocumented and non-traditional students; especially as belonging varies by institutional and student characteristics and tends to be lower for racial-ethnic minority and first-generation students. Strong networks of social supports and having someone believe in their ability to succeed contributes to increased motivation and engagement on-campus that promote perseverance (Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Johnson, 2018; Lei et. al., 2018; Tinto, 2016). Colleges should ensure that faculty and college staff are sensitive and open to the experiences of undocumented students to maintain student engagement in a remote and hybrid-learning environment.

Career readiness and economic livelihood
COVID-19 decreased income significantly and heightened anxiety regarding financial stability for undocumented students and their families. The percentage of students working in addition to school decreased from 70% prior to COVID-19 to 43% post COVID-19. Of those working, 71% were in industries considered "essential" or "front-line" such as food and goods provisions, healthcare, and education. Eighty three percent had an immediate family member whose job was also affected by COVID-19. Sixty one percent stated access to money for rent and utilities was "worse" or "much worse" since COVID-19 and 86% were "more" or "much more" anxious about supporting family members financially. These outcomes suggest that it is imperative for higher education institutions, businesses, state governments, and the federal government to include undocumented immigrants in their response to COVID-19 and to provide sustainable supports for economic recovery and equal opportunity for

social mobility. Colleges must extend institutional aid and raise private funds for emergency grants to undocumented students in light of their exclusion from higher education funds in the CARES Act stimulus package. State governments and the federal government must ensure the inclusion of undocumented immigrants with or without DACA or TPS in all provisions of future COVID-19 relief packages.

Even without the pressures of COVID-19, undocumented college students, especially those without DACA, face steep challenges in building career blocks while in school. For example, securing internships during college is considered an integral part of career readiness and research indicates internships increase employability upon graduation (Callahan & Benzing, 2004; Knouse et. al., 1999; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Saltikoff, 2017). However, during the 2019-2020 academic year, only 30% of TheDream.US students completed internships – half of whom were paid. The most common reason for not participating in internships was difficulty finding paid internships that fit with their existing work and/or class schedule. Furthermore, students with DACA or TPS must navigate awareness of their own employment rights, as employers and recruiters are often hesitant to hire them, unaware that they can be hired legally, or deny applicants on account of legal status (Campbell, 2018; Jordan, 2020; Maurer, 2020). Those with neither DACA or TPS are completely shut out from internship and hiring opportunities in most industries. Sixty six percent of TheDream.US students were looking for a job aligned with their career path. This increased to 75% for senior students and 78% of recent graduates. Addressing the unique institutional challenges undocumented immigrants face in finding job opportunities will allow for career development during and after college. To achieve equitable career readiness for all students in college, higher education institutions should establish income earning opportunities open to all undocumented undergraduate students, with or without DACA or TPS. This could be in the form of fellowships and teaching assistantships that can be disbursed as grant funds. Campus career service centers should include staff trained to provide professional development and job placement opportunities for undocumented immigrants with and without work authorization. For example, for students without work authorization, resources on alternative income opportunities, such as starting a business or worker cooperatives, should be readily accessible.

Businesses should include undocumented college students and graduates in the revitalization of the economy. Businesses should provide paid internships and apprenticeships for undocumented students and graduates with DACA or TPS. They should proactively recruit and hire graduates through their website, social media, job fairs, and opportunity placement firms. Human Resources and hiring managers must be trained and informed of the rights of DACA and TPS applicants and employees.

Another crucial issue that must be addressed by state governments and the federal government is professional or occupational licensure. Fifty seven percent of TheDream.US students are pursuing careers requiring licensure to practice, such as medical, legal, or engineering careers. However, federal law restricts states from extending professional or commercial licenses to aliens and undocumented immigrants (8 U.S. Code § 1621). Currently, only 11 states have passed legislation opting out of the federal restrictions to authorize occupational licensure for certain professions to undocumented immigrants, mostly for those with DACA or TPS (CLINIC, 2019). Extending licensure for all professions in all states to individuals regardless of immigration status provides a means of building a career for undocumented immigrants and is beneficial for the economy and communities in which they are rooted in. Increased wages from immigrant professionals means increased tax revenue and a supply of labor to fills jobs that are in high demand, such as healthcare (NCSL, 2017; State of New Jersey, 2020; Williams, 2019).

Personal well-being and community supports

Racial-ethnic minority and immigrant communities have been harder hit by COVID-19 due to long-standing inequities in the healthcare system and economy. Systemic inequality is associated with a number of factors increasing risk and exposure to the disease (CDC, 2021; Tai et al., 2020). Living in multigenerational households makes quarantine difficult, which is particularly precarious as highly populated homes often include elderly family members. Family members are more likely to work in "essential" jobs such as food and goods provisions where virus transmission has been high. Detainment in an immigration detention center increases exposure. Cultural and language barriers may deter undocumented immigrants from seeking and receiving the right medical assistance. Furthermore, despite federal policies such as the CARES Act and Families First Act expanding health care services such as free COVID-19 testing to undocumented immigrants, fears around immigration enforcement and "public charge"[4] are pushing undocumented immigrants further into the shadows and escalating fears (CDC, 2020; Duncan & Horton, 2020; IDSA, 2020; NILC, 2020).

Almost 90% of TheDream.US students are living with immediate family or relatives and 84% were "more" or "much more" anxious about the health and safety of their family members since the outbreak of COVID-19. The familial and financial strains of living with family have taken a toll on students. Forty six percent reported feelings of loneliness increased "moderately" or "a lot" since COVID-19. 20% reported they needed one-on-one counseling. However, 30% said their access to physical or mental health care worsened since COVID-19. For

[4] "Public charge" is part of an American immigration law that penalizes immigrants for utilizing public assistance (e.g. Medicaid), subsequently making it harder for them to adjust their immigration status.

undocumented students juggling school, work, and living in multigenerational households finding the physical and emotional space and privacy to seek counseling is difficult. Colleges and healthcare providers should provide services and information to help undocumented students access physical and mental healthcare. In particular, they should designate counselors and staff trained to serve immigrant populations to increase the utilization of mental health supports. Institutions should also provide services and information to help undocumented students access physical and mental healthcare Similar to the importance of belonging on-campus, sense of community and belonging in the United States must be taken into consideration for undocumented immigrants who consider America to be their home. Forty three percent of TheDream.US students said their sense of community and belonging in the United States "decreased a lot" or "moderately" since COVID-19. Colleges and state governments can develop social-emotional supports addressing feelings of isolation and loneliness. For example, creating a platform and space such as a Town Hall to share experiences and resources and connect with others.

Legal counsel and reform

Since the Trump administration announced it would end the DACA program in September 2017 and TPS for individuals from certain countries, the undocumented community has been subjected to heightened public scrutiny and life disruptions. For example, the continued volatility of DACA and TPS and increased ICE raids. The added stresses of COVID-19 increased TheDream.US participants' feelings of anxiety. 70% of TheDream.US students were "more" (32%) or "much more" (38%) anxious about their legal status; with 55% seeing their legal status as a "very" or "extremely" significant barrier in achieving their long-term goals. Research suggests that the racialization of undocumented immigration contributes to the view that legal status is the "master status" for undocumented young adults – and that legal exclusion will prevent or severely reduce economic and social capital (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2016).

To alleviate the immediate precariousness of being undocumented, colleges can provide legal and financial assistance for DACA renewals and first time applications, should the Department of Homeland Security be able to approve first time applications[5]. Colleges should raise and extend private funds for the $495 DACA renewal and application fee. They should also provide services and information on accessing pro bono legal assistance for completing DACA renewals and first-time applications, general immigration consultation, and immigrants' rights as it pertains to employment and housing rights. To address the overall

[5] On January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden signed a memorandum ordering that the Secretary of Homeland Security preserve and fortify DACA. However, on July 16, 2021, a Texas federal judge issued an injunction barring the Department of Homeland Security from approving any new DACA applications."

prohibitive laws affecting undocumented immigrants, federal, state, and local policymakers should first, expand eligibility requirements for DACA – for example, allowing those who arrived after June 15, 2007 to apply. Second, congress should pass legislation, such as the DREAM Act providing permanent protections and pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Third, undocumented students should be provided access to federal financial aid and inclusion in stimulus packages for higher education. Fourth, enact federal and state legislation extending provisions key to social mobility including in-statue tuition, state and institutional financial aid, occupational licenses, and driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants.

Resilience and ambition

Despite the incredible challenges imposed on undocumented college students during the 2019-2020 academic year, they remained resilient and ambitious. Students remained committed to paying it forward as 78% "frequently" or "always" felt the importance of giving back to community – constant with last year's survey. Eighty nine percent of TheDream.US students did not change their academic course load since COVID-19 and almost all students who intended to return to school in Fall 2020 re-enrolled. Seventy one percent want to pursue graduate school, of which the majority want to enroll within 2 years of completing their undergraduate studies.

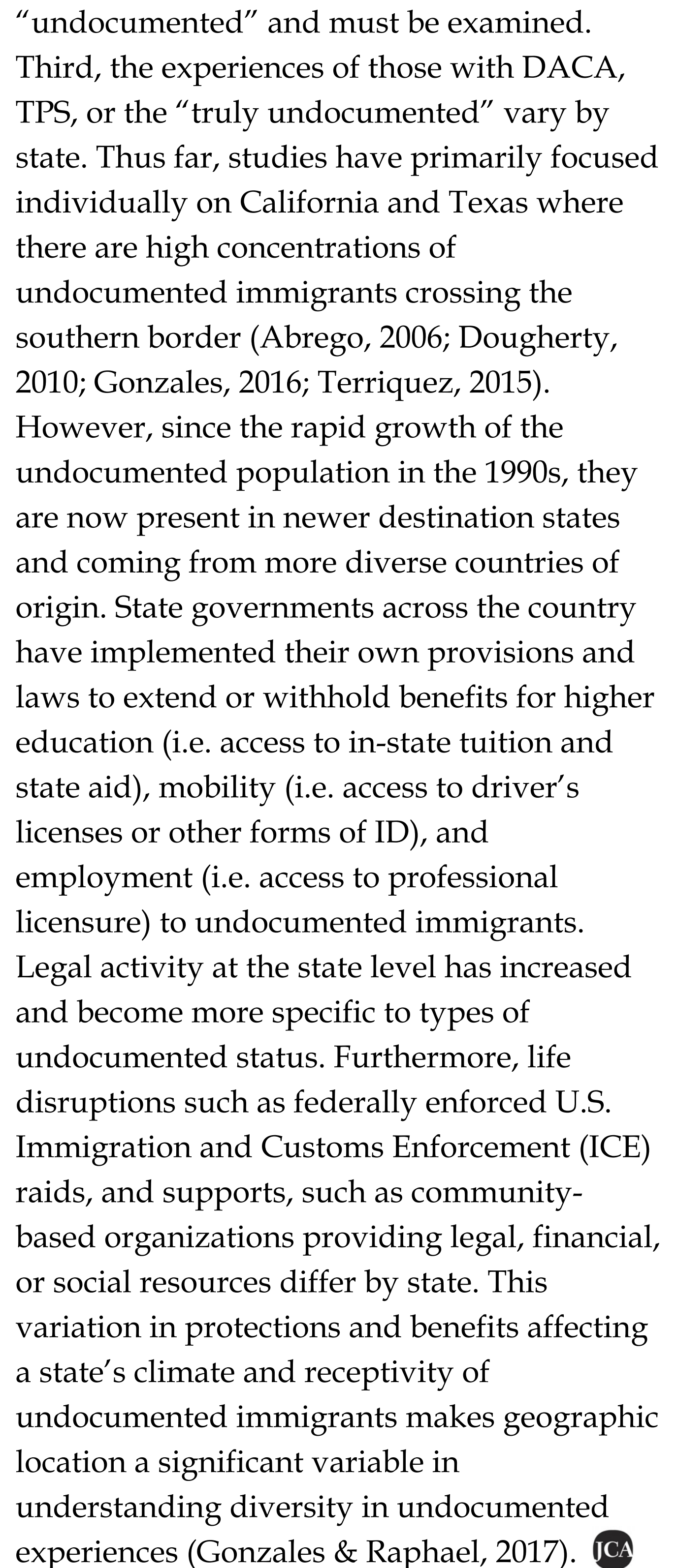
Graduate school has largely been absent from the discussion of undocumented students in postsecondary education (Kennedy, 2021; Mcardle, 2015). The higher costs of pursuing a professional degree, dearth of available graduate scholarships, and restrictions on taking out loans means even steeper barriers for undocumented students to access graduate school. Addressing these barriers is key to the discussion of equitable postsecondary and career outcomes. There has been a steady rise in the share of college graduates overall completing advanced degrees, with 37% of individuals with bachelor's degrees having a completed a graduate degree in 2015 (Baum & Steele, 2017). And those who do, on average earn higher salaries than those with just an undergraduate degree (Baum & Steele, 2017). As such, higher education institutions and policymakers should consider pathways to increasing graduate school access for undocumented students by providing undocu -friendly resources and application supports, raising and extending private funds and institutional aid for graduate scholarships and fellowships, and extending in-state tuition rates for public universities.

Future Research

There is still much to be learned about the undocumented population in the United States and in particular, the diversity in experiences of the undocumented youth and young adults. In regard to higher education, research has historically identified significant variables such as student engagement and

financial aid in association with positive undergraduate outcomes including persistence, graduation, and career readiness (Finn & Rock, 2007; Lei et al., 2018). Findings, however, are more inconclusive when comparing effects for low-income, minority, first-generation students to traditional students (Hu, 2011; Johnson, 2018; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Legal status has yet to be considered in such comparisons.

In regard to undocumented immigration, the research predominantly focuses on the racialized, marginalized, Latinx (mostly Mexican) experience. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Mexicans represent 47 percent of the undocumented population and altogether around 70 percent of the Latinx population. Still, according to the Center for Migration Studies, a substantial proportion of the undocumented are Asian (16%) and a number are black (6%) immigrants, and we know little about their experiences and trajectories (Passel & Cohn, 2019). Second, while the undocumented are typically lumped together as sharing the same legal status, this ignores differences in legal status within the group. While the majority of undocumented immigrants remain excluded from higher education and the formal labor market due to lack of status, legal changes at the federal level, namely DACA and TPS, have extended temporary, renewable work permits and relief from deportation for just over a million undocumented individuals. Thus, access to opportunity structures vary within the larger umbrella of being



"undocumented" and must be examined. Third, the experiences of those with DACA, TPS, or the "truly undocumented" vary by state. Thus far, studies have primarily focused individually on California and Texas where there are high concentrations of undocumented immigrants crossing the southern border (Abrego, 2006; Dougherty, 2010; Gonzales, 2016; Terriquez, 2015). However, since the rapid growth of the undocumented population in the 1990s, they are now present in newer destination states and coming from more diverse countries of origin. State governments across the country have implemented their own provisions and laws to extend or withhold benefits for higher education (i.e. access to in-state tuition and state aid), mobility (i.e. access to driver's licenses or other forms of ID), and employment (i.e. access to professional licensure) to undocumented immigrants. Legal activity at the state level has increased and become more specific to types of undocumented status. Furthermore, life disruptions such as federally enforced U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, and supports, such as community-based organizations providing legal, financial, or social resources differ by state. This variation in protections and benefits affecting a state's climate and receptivity of undocumented immigrants makes geographic location a significant variable in understanding diversity in undocumented experiences (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017).

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Heightened Uncertainty and Determination: The "Trump Effect" and College Aspirations for Undocumented Students

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the educational experiences of undocumented high school students during the Trump administration—a time marked by the intensification and expansion of immigration enforcement practices. Drawing on 24 in-depth interviews, we find that undocumented high school students experienced increased instances of bullying near the time of the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Our respondents also worried about the growing uncertainty surrounding immigration policies and the future of DACA. This uncertainty shaped their plans; many students felt compelled to prioritize working and delay starting college to make use of their work permit while they had access to DACA and build emergency savings. While the current political climate gravely exacerbated students' fear and anxiety, students demonstrated a tremendous amount of resiliency, agency, and determination to achieve their goals. We find that access to a support network and encouraging school personnel played a key role. Thus, we conclude this article with a set of key recommendations for educators and counselors who are working with undocumented students and their families on the ground.

Keywords: immigration, undocumented students, college, enforcement

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Introduction

> *When Trump ended DACA, I was just like, 'What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to work? How am I supposed to be able to provide for myself and go to school and not be scared?' I literally cried when he got elected.*

Leticia, a high school senior and DACA beneficiary, shared how she felt about the 2016 U.S. presidential election and actions of the Trump administration thereafter. For many undocumented students, it marked a critical juncture in their lives. During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump mobilized anti-immigrant sentiment by calling for the deportation of all undocumented immigrants and the fortification of a physical wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Within a few months of its inauguration, the Trump administration also sought to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which provides eligible undocumented young adults with a temporary work permit and

protection from deportation[1]. Until recently, approximately 98,000 undocumented students were graduating from U.S. high schools each year *without* being able to apply for DACA. Youth, such as Leticia, live with the uncertainty that they may not be able to continue renewing their permits should the program end in the foreseeable future. In this article, we examine how the Trump administration's mobilization of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies—what has been termed as the "Trump effect" (Andrade, 2017; Rodgers et al., 2017)—has permeated classroom walls and subsequently affected undocumented high school students' educational experiences, including their mental health, ability to concentrate at school, relationships with their peers/school personnel, and plans.

Without access to a legal immigration status, undocumented students are unable to legally work, drive, travel, and are ineligible to receive federal financial aid. While DACA and state-level policies such as Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) in California have improved access to a higher education for those eligible (Abrego, 2006; Clark-Ibañez, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Wong & Valdivia, 2014), significant barriers remain in the context of a rapidly changing and increasingly anti-immigrant political climate. With a few important exceptions (Muñoz et al., 2018; Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018; Valdivia, 2020), the literature has left largely unexplored the consequences that the current political climate is having on undocumented students, especially when it comes to those who are currently enrolled in high school.

Drawing on 24 in-depth interviews with undocumented students enrolled in a high school in San Diego County, California, or recently graduated, we find that undocumented high school students experienced increased instances of bullying near the time of the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Reports of discrimination and bullying, which mirrored the language utilized by Trump during his campaign, continued after inauguration. During this time, undocumented high school students also worried about the growing uncertainty surrounding immigration policies and the future of DACA. This uncertainty shaped their plans; many students felt compelled to prioritize working and delay starting college to make use of their work permit while they had access to DACA and build emergency savings. While the current political climate gravely exacerbated students' fear and anxiety, students demonstrated a tremendous amount of resiliency, agency, and determination to achieve their goals. We find that access to a support network and encouraging school personnel played a key role. Thus, we conclude this article with a set of key recommendations for educators and counselors who are working with

[1] The Obama administration first announced DACA on June 15, 2012. Five years later, on September 5th of 2017, the Trump administration terminated the program. Several lawsuits followed thereafter. On June 18, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the Trump administration's attempt to end DACA. At the time of this writing (April 2021), USCIS has resumed accepting DACA applications, but the future of the program remains uncertain.

undocumented students and their families on the ground.

Literature Review

Undocumented students often begin to learn about the limitations that their immigration status presents during high school (Gonzales, 2011, 2016; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). This stage in the life cycle coincides with increasing adult responsibilities, such as the need to work and drive. This is often a time when undocumented students learn that, unlike their documented peers, they cannot legally work, travel, drive, or apply for federal financial aid without a legal immigration status.

This awareness informs undocumented students' decisions of pursuing a higher education and may lower their aspirations (Abrego, 2006; Abrego and Gonzales, 2010; Greenman and Hall, 2013). In a study among undocumented students before and after high school graduation, for example, Abrego (2006) found that two of the students she interviewed decided not to even bother applying to college because they realized that even if they were admitted, they would not be able to afford tuition. Three students who did apply and were admitted to several universities opted for the more affordable community college, again, because of the lack of financial aid to help cover increasing tuition costs. Indeed, the inability to receive federal financial aid is often the biggest barrier that prevents undocumented students from enrolling in and successfully graduating from college (Contreras, 2009; Flores, 2010).

The limitations that come with being undocumented extend beyond the financial and into the psychological. Studies note that undocumented students experience acute levels of hopelessness, stress, and uncertainty as illegality disrupts their sense of belonging, severely limits their opportunities, and constraints their future (Abrego, 2006; Canseco and Clark-Ibáñez, 2015; Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2010, 2011, 2016; Valdivia, 2020). Additional challenges that undocumented students face in their pursuit of a higher education include the lack of institutional support and encounters with discriminatory school personnel (Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2010, 2016; Mondragon, 2020; Perez, 2009). Notably, school personnel are not always prepared to positively respond and serve undocumented students. Drawing on 20 in-depth interviews with undocumented students, Contreras (2009) found that when undocumented students disclosed their immigration status to ask for help, they were often discouraged from pursuing their goals. For example, when seeking information about pursuing graduate school, an undocumented student was told not to even bother applying because the student would not be able to legally work after graduation with their degree. In this article, we contribute to these studies by shedding light on the wide range of information that is available (or not) to undocumented students at the high school

level, and how this in turn shapes students' post-high school plans.

Lastly, while existing studies have made great strides with respect to understanding the unique challenges and limitations that undocumented students face, we know much less about undocumented students' forms of agency (for notable exceptions, see e.g., Garcia Cruz, 2020; Mondragon, 2020; Monico, 2020; Silvestre, 2020). In this article, we examine how the current political climate has not only exacerbated many of the barriers facing undocumented students, but also how it has prompted students to respond with a tremendous amount of resiliency.

Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) were instrumental in guiding our study. Critical race theory acknowledges the centrality of race in everyday life and that racism is forged into legal and social institutions (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Crenshaw, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b). The theory has roots in legal studies and has become more extensively used in education studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, et al., 2004). There are five foundational themes: (a) racism exists, (b) dominant ideology must be challenged, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) experiential knowledge is valued, and (e) transdisciplinary analysis must be done within the historical and contemporary context (Solorzano & Yosso 2001a; Yosso et al., 2004). Several of these tenets are particularly salient for our study. We found that the students acknowledged the racist ideology espoused by other students and other educators. We value the experiential knowledge of the students who also shared profound recommendations to transform schools and opportunities for future undocumented students. CRT provides the framework "to engage individuals that perpetuate oppression and systems of oppression through critical discourse, analysis, and human agency" (Lara, 2018, p. 20). In particular, the emphasis on agency in CRT is essential because our work is ultimately focused on social change and improving schools.

LatCrit is also crucial for the foundation of our study. Originating in the mid-1990s, LatCrit sought to include the experiences of Latinx individuals and communities into the CRT framework (Valdes, 2005). It added an important analysis of immigration, xenophobia, phenotype, and language into the CRT framework, all of which are key to understanding the experiences of Latinx undocumented communities (Pérez Huber, 2010). For example, Pérez Huber and Malagon (2007) utilized LatCrit to understand undocumented college students who identified structural barriers through "institutional neglect" that may not have otherwise been discovered. Similarly, Wiemelt and Maldonado (2018) drew upon LatCrit theory to help understand how systemic and institutionalized practices in schools privilege white, monolingual students, and further marginalized

undocumented bilingual students of color. Relatedly, UndocuCrit is a theoretical framework that emerged from LatCrit and it focuses on undocumented critical theory. The tenets include acknowledging the role and source of fear, differential experiences of liminality, familial sacrificio as a form of capital, and a collective approach to knowledge produced by and for undocumented immigrants (Aguilar, 2019). Taken together, LatCrit demands that research be focused on ameliorating oppression, which is strongly aligned to the focus of our study on undocumented high school students. Finally, the framework allows for previously unrecognized or unelevated voices to be amplified. In our study, participants illuminated the struggle and resiliency that can shape future directions in efforts to support undocumented students.

Methods

This study is based on the collective work of the UndocuReseach Project, which was initiated in January 2017. We are co-led by Dr. Carolina Valdivia and Dr. Marisol Clark-Ibáñez. The project aims to understand the experiences of undocumented high school students and the school personnel who work with them in San Diego County during the Trump administration. The study entailed three phases: 1) educator interviews, 2) interviews with high school students who identified as undocumented and/or were members of mixed-status families, and 3) ethnography in newcomer high school classrooms. For this article, we primarily draw upon in-depth interviews with 24 undocumented students who currently or recently attended a high school in San Diego County, California[2].

To recruit participants, we shared information about the project, eligibility requirements, and our contact information with undocumented students, educators, counselors, and community organizers in our personal networks. We distributed recruitment flyers when invited to present at various local high schools. We also conducted outreach through a local non-profit, Students Without Limits (SWOL), which supports undocumented high school students with legal and mental health services. SWOL offers direct services to students and professional development training to educators (e.g., teachers, counselors, staff, administrators).
Everyone in this sample was born in México. All but one participant came to the United States when they were young children. Most lived with immediate family members. Six disclosed they did not have DACA while 13 shared that they did have DACA. Two-thirds were females and one-third were males. We utilize pseudonyms to protect the identity of our participants and do not report identifiable information shared in the interviews, such as the name of specific high schools.
Interviews gathered information about students' educational experience, interactions with peers and school personnel, immigration background, views on immigration policy,

[2] Our project was approved as a full review by the IRB at California State University San Marcos (#1204785-1).

and the future. Students shared multiple examples of how immigration enforcement practices at the local level impacted them and their families. Interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes, after which each student received $20 gift card compensation for their time and participation, as well as a resource packet containing information about health, education, scholarships, and legal services available to undocumented immigrants in San Diego County.

Findings

Impact of Political Context

During and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaigns, undocumented high school students in our project reported experiencing an increasingly hostile climate in their schools. Leticia, who was born in Tijuana and migrated to the U.S. when she was five years old, shared she frequently overheard anti-immigrant and pro-Trump views expressed by her peers. She described,

I remember a lot of people [were] talking about "building the wall" and supporting President Trump and [saying] "We need to take all those illegal aliens [sic] out of here," […] This would be in lunch, this would be in passing breaks, this would be in my social media.

These messages were all around students like Leticia, including through side conversations at lunch or classroom discussions. Notably, teachers were often present but would not intervene. This silence further enabled peers to express their anti-immigrant views. When asked about teachers' responses, Leticia explained, "[Teachers] would just ignore it. Regardless, if it was good or bad […] In a way, [students] dominated the teachers. I know that all the bad things I heard… they were never stopped. I know that for a fact." Interviews with undocumented high school students like Leticia revealed that the anti-immigrant sentiment mobilized by the Trump campaign permeated classroom walls even before the administration's inauguration. These messages illustrate the pervasive and porous nature of the political climate in schools.

While these messages did not directly target a specific student, undocumented students were negatively impacted. Several students expressed feeling hurt by their peers' comments. Maribel, a senior in high school, shared:

For me it doesn't come up often in like a classroom setting […] but my classmates do really have strong opinions politically about immigration. And they feel really confident saying that aloud regardless of who's listening and stuff. So, I do hear it come up a lot and, honestly, it really hurts.

Maribel reflected how fellow students' anti-immigrant politics felt quite personal. While students described teachers' negative views about immigration, the frequency of comments by peers was far more pervasive. In addition to the rhetoric in the news and social media (which presumably students could turn on or off), peers' comments in the hallway or cafeteria became painful assaults

on their very existence that they could not avoid.

Outside of the school setting, undocumented students were also frequently hearing about, and at times, witnessing immigration activity in their neighborhood. This further exacerbated students' levels of fear, stress, and anxiety. Teresa, a high school student who migrated to the U.S. when she was only a few months old, recalled:

Once there was this time where there was a truck in front of my window and he [a neighbor] was ready to go to work and he had a daughter. They were our neighbors. She was inside and he was coming in with his lunch box and they were about to leave. And we just heard the girl scream and it was at like 6 in the morning. She screamed and I just looked outside my window and there was this car in the back. A man and women came out and they had guns that said ICE. And then, as they get out of the car and the girl was crying and I knew she knew what was going on. (Begins sobbing)

During the interview, it was difficult for Teresa to hold back her tears as she described what it was like to witness her neighbor's apprehension and the pain the entire family had to endure. Even months after the traumatic event, the nature of the arrest and the emotions it created continued to affect her. The fear that rushed to the surface was vivid in Teresa's memory.

She continued: "That day, it was a weekday. I was getting ready for school. My dad and mom didn't want to go out. It's, like, they're right in front of my house (begins crying) and they could be there any day for my parents. Ever since then, I have been scared." Witnessing the arrest impacted Teresa's parents and her their worry about her leaving the house even to go to school. The event had taken place the year before, but in the interview, Teresa's strong emotional reaction indicated that it had long lasting effects (see also e.g., Valdivia 2019, 2020). Given the political climate and high level of ICE activity in San Diego County (Garcia, 2019; Valdivia, 2019), many of our respondents recalled frequently hearing about a community member's arrest. Every participant had either witnessed an event like Teresa described or had heard such an arrest recounted by family members (or both). Coupled with indirect comments at school, participants' well-being, daily routines, and participation at school were informed by the community context, along with anti-immigrant political and media rhetoric.

Mixed Emotions

Under the anti-immigrant political climate fostered by the Trump administration, our respondents experienced mixed emotions. That is, while on the one hand students experienced a tremendous amount of fear and uncertainty as discussed on the previous section, students also maintained a sense of hope, actively searched for support and opportunities, and remained committed to their short- and long-term educational goals. Viviana, for example, has lived in the U.S. for over two decades and aspires to be a teacher.

She recently graduated from a local public high school in San Diego and, at the time of the interview, was attending community college. She reflected on her emotions immediately after Trump was elected in 2016:

The night when he was elected, I was very upset… emotional. I remember one of the professors here emailed me [and said], 'I am sorry. Just don't lose hope.' Overall, my hope, my motivation towards obtaining my teaching credential and teaching and being in the classroom have never really gone [away]. Even though the political climate is very toxic and negative towards immigrants, I know, and I always had faith and hope that I will be a teacher and will have my classroom and I will be able to teach students, whether I am getting paid or not, I am still going to do it.

Viviana shared that her professor bolstered her spirits and mentioned her personal resolve to commit to her goal and not lose hope. Like Viviana, many of the students we interviewed dreamed of becoming teachers, doctors, social workers, or lawyers. They were eager to pursue a career that would enable them to help others in various capacities. Although the anti-immigrant political climate fostered by the Trump administration negatively affected students' emotional well-being, many students remained undeterred and verbalized how they would continue to pursue their goals.

Some students also remained hopeful of one day being able to adjust their immigration status. We found this sentiment expressed by participants who were currently enrolled in college and had an immediate family member who was a U.S. citizen. When asked about his plans, for example, Adam shared,

In 5 years, [I will] hopefully [be] in medical school. And, in 10 years, I hope medical school pays off and I hopefully get citizenship at that point because by then my sister will be able to file for my mom and for me. And just hoping I am employed, at least… I really want some form of economic stability and, at least have a job because, if I can't have a job, I really can't do much.

Adam aspired to be a doctor and indicated his priority of having steady employment. His goal centered around his sister being able to adjust his and his mother's immigration status.

We found several factors informed students' determination to keep going and remain hopeful about the future. Among these were a sense of responsibility to give back to one's parents for their many sacrifices, as well as a commitment to give back to others for the support that students have themselves received along the way. Viviana and Adam, for example, aspired to professions that help others.

Elizabeth, who has lived in the U.S. since she was one year old, noted, "I hope to give back… somehow give back to the people who helped me get to where I am and give resources to younger generations and be a resource." Elizabeth gave the example of creating scholarship opportunities for the future generation of undocumented students.

Heightened Uncertainty and Determination

At the time of the interview, Elizabeth had recently graduated from high school. Along her journey, she received the support from her mother, counselors, and teachers. She also received mentorship and advice, including information about internships she could pursue regardless of her immigration status. This support in turn motivated students like Elizabeth to continue pursuing their education to one day be able to help others. As we will discuss in the following section, however, not all students received support from their teachers or counselors.

College Access

We also found patterns of dismissive sentiments and behaviors from school personnel towards undocumented high school students, which played a significant role in college access awareness and attainment among participants. Existing research indicates that teachers' interactions with students impacts student success. This is especially the case for students who are traditionally underrepresented in college, such as undocumented students (Clark-Ibañez, 2015; Gonzales, 2016, Stronge, 2013). Our participants were excited about pursuing higher education and had a keen awareness about the lack of resources they were being provided compared to other students at their high school.

"We also found patterns of dismissive sentiments and behaviors from school personnel towards undocumented high school students, which played a significant role in college access awareness and attainment among participants."

While many participants were enthusiastic about college, most lacked knowledge of the various requirements involved in making college choices. Applying to college is no easy task; this is especially true for undocumented high school students who often must navigate extra paperwork (e.g., the California AB 540 certification process) than the general population. As we conversed with participants about their experiences with getting information about college, most of them shared they did not receive adequate assistance from their school counselors. Carlos simply stated: "They didn't really say." Meaning, he never received any guidance from teachers or counselors about going to college as an undocumented student.

The role of school counselors should include mitigating pre-college stress or concerns by equipping students with the appropriate resources to succeed in higher education. In critical education research, school counselors operate like gatekeepers and are supporting the status quo (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Leticia, for example, expressed: "I felt that [my counselor] didn't like me. She was very exclusive. I felt that she was just there...to assign teachers and classes and she really wasn't any help [with college preparation]."

Similarly, Rosa shared that her counselor… "didn't even tell us about opportunities [like] the SAT or like how to write essays for college and stuff." Unfortunately, experiences like these were common and detrimental for students like Leticia and Rosa. Ideally, their counselors should have been sharing potential college resources tailored for undocumented students, but Leticia and Rosa missed out on important college related resources that previous research indicates can make the difference in whether they apply to college or not (Flores, 2016).

Studies have also shown that students who partake in college preparatory coursework, such as AP courses, often are more likely to apply and succeed in college because they are on track to take required classes for university enrollment and can earn college credit while in high school (Shifrer, 2013). Yet, our students felt they were not given equal academic participation and opportunities on campus. For example, Rosa who had not received assistance about college, also shared: Like, if I wanted to choose AP classes, she would be, like, 'Oh no, maybe you should take regular classes because most kids don't do well in AP classes'…She never encouraged [us] to do well or challenge [ourselves].

Rosa described how she was excluded from a class with more academic rigor. Rosa's counselor preconception biases are often what contribute to the academic success gap of underrepresented students in the public school system.

Tellingly, nearly every participant shared a negative interaction related to undocumented immigration and it seems that this anti-immigrant perspective may lead to less support to see the students as viable college going students. Fatima, who had just graduated from high school and had begun her first year at a local university, stated that she wished her high school teachers would "get rid of their nasty comments, their indirects [sic] about undocumented students, one hundred percent keep their political life outside of school." Emilia shared that she thought her teachers might be anti-immigrant and that they are thinking, "Okay, F them! Get 'em out of here!" She continued, "I feel like [teachers should] just be more positive about it. You know? Because we're human! I'm not a dog, you know?! I'm a human! I want the same thing that you do." Emilia powerfully reflected that she demands that her teachers treat her with dignity and that they recognize their shared humanity. As has been noted in other studies, the election of Trump invited more anti-negative rhetoric to be expressed more openly (Andrade, 2017, Muñoz et al., 2018).

Finally, the overall anti-immigrant climate at school results in students potentially being less likely to access resources if they do not have explicit information that the educator is supportive of undocumented students. For example, Leticia described: "My school has something where there's a group and if you ask for material things, they give it to you. It's through the social worker, but I don't feel comfortable talking to her... She's very nice,

but she's just not someone I feel comfortable [with], well, just because she's white and I don't think she would understand and that's just me." Leticia believed that the white social worker may not understand her situation, even though the program is in place to help students who need resources. However, she has not seen outward signs of allyship and subsequently deemed this school personnel untrustworthy.

Though negative experiences were very prevalent among interviews, a few students expressed positive interactions with school personnel. Students identified support from Girl Scout troop leaders, coaches, and other school connected programs that they joined. For example, Imelda spoke about her experience in a robotics club in middle school. She recalls joining the club and seeing many girls drop out due to a lack of interest, but not her. She enjoyed the club very much. In fact, the teacher in charge of the club made a very positive impact on her. Imelda described her as "someone you want to surround yourself with because she's so positive and encouraging." She noticed Imelda's talent for coding and personally invited her to take her talents to a non-profit organization that would further help her develop her skills in coding.

Imelda's positive experience with school personnel demonstrates the powerful, positive role that educators have as positive role models and mentors (see also e.g., Gonzales 2016). Imelda's robotics teacher is someone who introduced students to new social and educational opportunities. Her involvement was not restricted based on immigration status. Because of this positive experience, she decided to pursue a career in STEM, specifically computer science. In a field that is predominately male and white, Imelda knows her journey will not be easy, but her teacher has already planted a seed of confidence in her that will undoubtedly take her far in life.

In addition to individual educators or school related programs, Students Without Limits (SWOL) also stood out as an important resource that participants found incredibly helpful to their growth as valued students. Those involved in SWOL mentioned the regular support in group meetings, one-on-one attention by organizational leaders, and constant stream of resources that mitigated the stress and isolation that they felt at their high school. Maribel shared, "[the Director of SWOL] was a really big help because she's helped us be able to get more opportunities at the school as well as sign up for college. And this has been really helpful for me because I don't have anybody that went through this process. So, for me, everything is new. It helps me because without her I would basically be lost. I wouldn't know where to apply for scholarships or certain things."

The presence of SWOL also led to the creation of high school dreamer clubs where students could be a more integral part in planning, organizing, and advocating as a group. Additionally, SWOL worked with high school Dreamer Clubs to set up workshops,

speakers, and family events. Oftentimes, students reported that it was the only source of support at the high school level. Esteban explained, "The only person that I can think of that you know, that really tried to bring it into the table was [the director of SWOL] that I've been talking about. Her efforts of bringing… speakers to help students or parents…. She created events after school to get parents to get together and then talk about any issues you know, about transferring to a CSU or a community college or a UC." As Esteban explained, SWOL represents a model of collaboration that schools can develop to bring high quality information, resources, and support to students and their families.

In sum, students' legal status is not what is restricting their ambitions. The lack of support from school personnel presents numerous challenges and diminishes opportunities for undocumented students. Previous studies have noted that undocumented students are faced with the lack of institutional support and encounters with discriminatory school personnel as they pursue their college aspirations (Contreras, 2009; Clark-Ibáñez, 2015; Gonzales, 2010, 2016; Mondragon, 2020; Perez, 2009; Valdivia & Clark-Ibáñez, 2018). While our study confirms previous findings about the interactions that lead to lower graduation rates and college enrollment, we also found promising practices through individual educators who understood what undocumented students needed and various extracurricular programs where undocumented students found support and resources.

Conclusion:
Recommendations and A Call for Change

I just really hope that what I said in this interview actually gets considered enough to help the generation that follows me. I hope that the generation that follows me doesn't go through the same struggles that I'm going through. Obviously, there's a beauty in the struggle because you learn, but with learning there's a lot of emotional stress that goes on. So, if I could alleviate that for the generation to come with this information, I hope this is taken into very much consideration.

-Maribel, undocumented high school senior

At the end of each interview, we asked the students what they would like to see changed at their high school and beyond. Maribel hopes that by sharing her story, this research project would help improve the conditions and opportunities for undocumented students. Their direct recommendations coupled with the findings in this study resulted in powerful mandates presented below.

First, resources, information, and support must be provided to both students and educators in a safe manner. School personnel should strive to support and learn about the unique hardships that undocumented students encounter. Our participants found the creation of Dreamer Clubs or AVID programs at their high schools to be instrumental in providing safe and affirming spaces for students to share their experiences. The educators and advisors supporting these

programs were essential to build trust and a sense of community.

Second, students also emphasized the need for educators and staff across campus who "get it" and are willing to act proactively in expressing their support. They described the need for more educators of color as well as for assertive allies. It is critical for educators to establish themselves as a safe and confidential person for students to be able to talk to because some students may not feel comfortable asking for help. Educators must outwardly and explicitly express their support for undocumented students and then follow through with language and behavior to support them. As Clark-Ibáñez and Swan (2019) state, "Being an ally means that you are never done listening and learning" (pg. 92).

Third, students described needing schools to deliver intentional outreach and support. One participant suggested having regular check-ins with school counselors and developing an institutional hotline for students and families to be able to quickly access bilingual support when needed. Another student suggested providing support with getting school supplies, but also items that are often overlooked, such as an alarm clock. Schools should focus on the institutional strategic plan to support undocumented students and their families and not only rely on a few trusted educators or counselors, which leads to burn out with being "the only one" (Valdivia & Clark-Ibáñez, 2018) and cannot possibly extend the reach to all undocumented students.

Fourth, increased support for college access is also critical to develop at the institutional level[3]. Students appreciated workshops designed to help with college applications and financial aid that were delivered in the evenings and weekends so that their parents could also attend. Schools partnering with trusted grassroots organizations or non-profits is a way for schools to capitalize on community resources. These organizations could also provide professional development to educators and counselors, so that the information about college could ultimately be communicated by the personnel from the students' school.

College readiness also includes students demonstrating their participation in extracurricular opportunities. Our participants collectively shared there were few opportunities they could participate in due to financial constraints and/or not being able to stay after school. A student in our study suggested creating opportunities for students to participate in free extracurricular activities during regular school hours so that undocumented students can access supplemental educational experiences.
Sixth, robust community partnerships are essential to provide holistic support for undocumented students. Through these partnerships, information about regional concerns can inform school practices and serve to expand resources for students. In our study, students shared the impact of SWOL,

[3] For additional recommendations on culturally responsive college application advising and support, see Camilo (2021).

for example. Through our ethnography, it was noted that SWOL conducted "Know Your Rights" workshops, provided legal assistance, delivered immigration policy updates, and offered mental health support. High schools in the San Diego region can also partner with non-profit immigration legal organizations, grassroots organizations, and universities to offer similar workshops. We believe that the key to these collaborations is for organizations to also work with students' families. Finally, students' experiences strongly indicated the need for comprehensive, inclusive, and humane immigration reform. Policymakers must also address immigration and policing activities on the ground which terrorize immigrant communities daily. Undocumented students want to be given the same opportunity as everyone else. Sarai implored educators to consider: "I would like them to know not to treat me as a different person. I want to have the same opportunity."

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Ever-Present "Illegality:" How Political Climate Impacts Undocumented Latinx Parents' Engagement in Students' Postsecondary Access and Success

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ABSTRACT

Using the ecological systems theory, this study highlights the significant impact the political climate in the United States (i.e., anti-immigrant sentiments and violence) has on undocumented Latinx parents' engagement in their children's education. Drawing from a larger qualitative, interview-based study that explored how undocumented Latinx parents were involved and engaged in their children's postsecondary access and success (Cuevas, 2019; 2020), this study focuses on undocumented parents' experiences and processing of the 2016 Presidential Election. Findings illustrate how the explicit racist, anti-immigrant, and nativist narratives then-Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump campaigned under and won forced undocumented Latinx parents to (re)evaluate how their undocumented immigration status impacted their parenting behaviors. Specifically, the election results caused parents to (1) increase their hyperawareness of the repercussions of their immigration status; (2) reconsider what their deportation would imply for their children; and (3) reflect what DACA and a college degree meant for their undocumented children. In a time of constant anti-immigrant sentiment and racialized nativism, it becomes important to consider the impact these messages have on parents, and consequently, their children and their educational futures.

Keywords: parent engagement, undocumented immigrants, postsecondary access, undocumented students

Introduction

Parental engagement is one of the most essential and often underutilized strategies to support Latinx students' pathway to higher education. Like other measures of student success—including grade point averages (GPAs), test scores, and college acceptances—research has found that the more parents are engaged with their children's postsecondary aspirations and planning, the more likely students are to successfully apply to, be accepted by, and matriculate into higher education institutions (Savitz-Romer, 2012; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

Parents engage in students' postsecondary access and success by developing and supporting students' college-going identities, monitoring their grades and classes, and having explicit conversations about college (Savitz-Romer, 2012; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Additionally, studies have found that parental motivation for higher education is the most significant factor for students to apply to colleges successfully (Auerbach, 2006; Paulsen, 1990; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Motivational support is especially crucial for children of immigrants and

students whose parents did not attend college in the United States; when parents cannot directly help their children with the college application process, they provide motivation and advice that helps their children persevere through challenges (Auerbach, 2006, 2007).

Immigrant parents and parents of color face several challenges when engaging with their children's postsecondary aspirations. Challenges include language barriers, negative relationships with school personnel, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system (Auerbach, 2006, 2007; Zarate, et al., 2011). Yet, for undocumented Latinx parents, these barriers are further exacerbated—their interactions with American social structures are shaped by the intersection of factors such as race and class and the marginality and stigma created by an undocumented status, or their "illegality" (De Genova, 2002). Given the significant impact undocumented status has on parents' everyday lives, it is important to consider the additional barriers and forms of resilience developed by this status and how these shape their engagement with their children's postsecondary access and success.

While the overall number of undocumented immigrants migrating to the United States has declined over the last couple of years, the number of mixed-status families has increased; mixed-status families are families with at least one undocumented member (Capps et al., 2020). This increase is not only a result of undocumented immigrants having U.S. born children, but also a direct consequence of a volatile and inconsistent immigration system where an individual could have some form of legal status one day and then find themselves undocumented the next (De Genova, 2002; Menjívar, 2011; Sigona, 2012). Roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants currently reside in the United States (Capps et al., 2020). An estimated 16.2 million people live in mixed-status families, with an estimated 6.2 million U.S. citizen children with at least 1 undocumented parent (National Immigration Forum, 2020). Thus, as the number of children raised in mixed-status and undocumented families increases, there is an increasing need to consider their access to educational opportunities, including college access.

Using the ecological systems theory, this paper highlights the significant impact the political climate in the United States (i.e., anti-immigrant sentiments and violence) has on undocumented Latinx parents' engagement in their children's education. Drawing from a larger qualitative, interview-based study that explored how undocumented Latinx parents were involved and engaged in their children's postsecondary access and success (Cuevas, 2019, 2020), this paper focuses on undocumented parents' experiences and processing of the 2016 Presidential Election. Findings illustrate how the explicit racist, anti-immigrant, and nativist narratives then-Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump campaigned under and won forced undocumented Latinx parents to (re)evaluate how their undocumented immigration status

impacted their parenting behaviors. The ecological systems theory illustrates that it is imperative to address the issues and challenges anti-immigrant sentiment creates for undocumented parents. To best support students with undocumented parents, both documented and undocumented, we need to understand the context these parents parent in and the circumstances that shape their engagement.

Literature Review

Parental Engagement in Postsecondary Access and Success

Existing literature has overwhelmingly underlined the importance of parental engagement in children's education for student wellbeing and success (Boonk et al., 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). When parents are engaged in their children's education, and schools and communities develop opportunities for parents to engage, students are more likely to perform better in tests and earn higher grades, pass their classes and grade levels on time, attend school regularly, have better social skills and adapt to school more easily, and graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education. This is true, no matter the family's income or background (Boonk et al., 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Van Voorhis et al., 2013).

Similarly, parental engagement in students' postsecondary planning and success is vital (Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hossler, et al., 1999). Yet, like other exchanges with schools, studies have documented different barriers low-income families, families of color, and immigrant families face when they attempt to engage in their children's postsecondary planning (Auerbach, 2006, 2007; López, 2001; Perna, & Titus 2005; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Zarate et al., 2011). Across this literature, immigrant Latinx parents note that the primary barrier for their engagement in their children's postsecondary planning is a lack of access to resources and information (Oliva, 2008; Tornatzky, et al., 2002; Torres, 2004). When parents did not attend college, they do not have the personal experiences their college-educated peers use to support their children. Parents of first-generation students are often unfamiliar with the requirements needed to apply to college, including required high school courses and examinations and are unfamiliar with financial aid options, which may lead them to over or underestimate college costs (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Nevertheless, Latinx immigrant parents do engage in supportive behaviors that help their children access their postsecondary aspirations. Latinx immigrants support their children by discussing the importance of education and using their own lived experiences and stories of struggle to motivate their children. They also develop their children's dreams and aspirations and provide moral support for their postsecondary goals (Auerbach, 2006, 2007;

Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; López, 2001; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Zarate, et al., 2011). When parents cannot help their children navigate the application process and requirements, they seek resources to support them. Parents reach out to schools and encourage their children to join college access programs (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). While informative about Latinx's differential (and valid) forms of parenting and engagement, available research often categorizes *all* Latinx immigrant parents' experiences together and does not differentiate between those who are undocumented with those who have legal immigration status.

Parenting as Undocumented Immigrants

Just as their ethnic, racial, and economic social locations shape parents' interactions with schools, and thus their engagement with their children's education, it is important to consider how an undocumented status impacts these interactions. Their *deportablity,* or the notion that they are vulnerable to detention and deportation at any time, leads them to live fearful, marginalized, and hyper-vigilant lives. They live in fear of being deported and the repercussions that result such as family separation and loss of family income (De Genova, 2002; Menjívar, 2011; Sigona, 2012). Additionally, undocumented immigrants have minimal access to social services. Studies have found that legal status impacts immigrants' access to health care (Holmes, 2007; Menjívar, 2002), housing (Asad & Rosen, 2018; McConnell & Marcelli, 2007; Painter et al., 2001), higher education (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Abrego, 2006; 2008), and employment (Fortuny, Capps, & Passel, 2007; Walter, Bourgois, & Loinaz, 2004). Even when they are eligible for social services, such as health services at local community clinics, they are not likely to take advantage of these resources for themselves or their children (Holmes, 2007; Menjívar, 2002; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Furthermore, a more recent body of literature has documented how Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and eventual election impacted the lives of undocumented immigrants, heightening stress, anxieties, and fear of deportation, and increasing anti-immigrant discrimination (Andrade, 2021; Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Muñoz et al., 2018; Valdivia, 2019).

As a result of the aforementioned limitations, undocumented parents experience and navigate structures, such as schools, differently from their documented peers (Dreby, 2015; Valdivia, 2019). In addition to barriers they have to navigate as a result of their racial/ethnic and socioeconomic identities, undocumented parents often have to consider how their immigration status may or may not impact their relationships with their children's schools (Dreby, 2015; Valdivia, 2019). This may limit their interactions with them, limiting their access to resources for their children. Often because of their deportablity, undocumented parents are less likely to move beyond their home-work-school perimeters physically (Cuevas, 2019; Dreby, 2015).

In addition to the barriers undocumented parents themselves face, studies have found that the stress and anxiety parents experience caused by these conditions can also be passed on to their children (Brabeck & Sibley, 2016; Enriquez, 2015; Yoshikawa & Kholoptseva, 2013). For instance, undocumented parents' children experience similar manifestations of stress as their parents—migraines, toothaches, high blood pressure (Yoshikawa, 2011). Additionally, parents often have conversations with their children at a young age about what being undocumented means. This further adds stress, anxiety, and trauma to young children's lives (Balderas, Delgado-Romero, & Singh, 2016; Dreby, 2015; Enriquez, 2015; Rendón Garcia, 2019; Valdivia, 2019). Regardless of their immigration status, children with at least one undocumented parent must also learn to navigate this status.

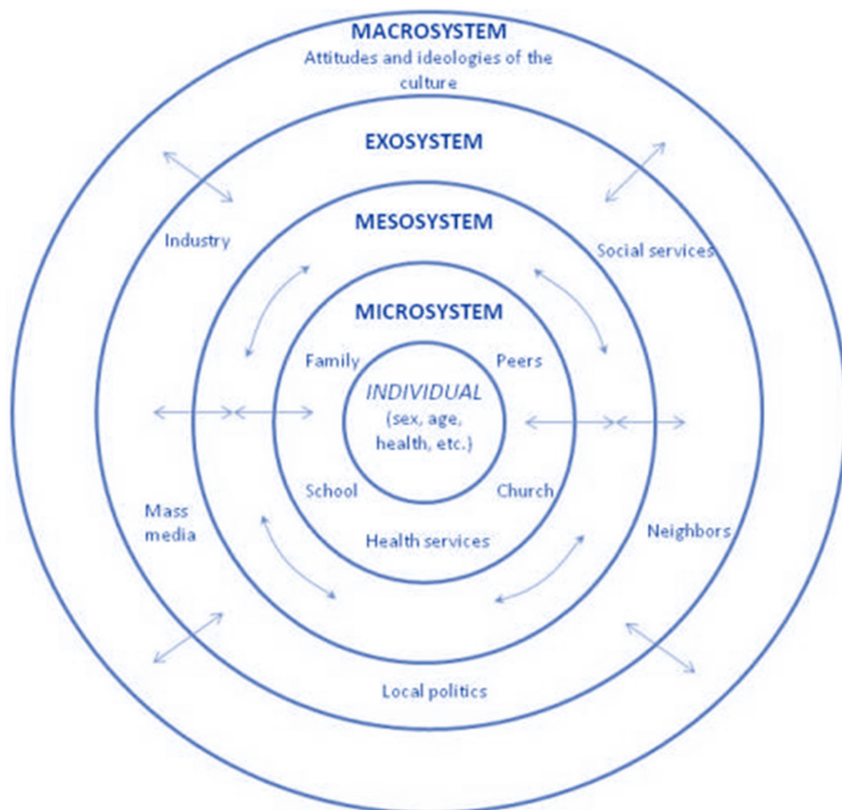
Theoretical Framework

Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1992) posited that children are enmeshed in five different, intersecting ecosystems. According to Bronfenbrenner, the interaction between these different ecosystems inevitably shapes children's lives. Known as the Ecological Systems Theory, this theory (also referred to as a framework) is widely used in education and family engagement research to identify the different individuals, systems, and factors that shape children's lives. Figure one illustrates the relational nature of these ecosystems: (1) the microsystem describes the different institutions and individuals that have the most direct and immediate contact with the child, including family, school, neighborhood, peers; (2) the mesosystem describes the interactions between the different microsystems the child is exposed to such as family-school relationships or school-neighborhood conditions; (3) the exosystem describes interactions or links between social settings that do not directly involve the child but still shape their lived realities, such as parent's job; (4) the macrosystem describes beliefs and values of the society the child lives in and their cultural context, such as their family's socioeconomic status or ethnicity/race; and (5) the chronosystem which takes into account time and the socio-historical context the child is in (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The ecological systems theory helps take into account the context in which children find themselves developing and learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This includes the circumstances their parents and families face. As the literature outlined above illustrates, the context undocumented Latinx parents parent in is significantly impacted by their undocumented immigration status. The ecological systems theory postulates that these conditions inevitably impact children's lives, education, and overall wellbeing. Thus, for this study, as it is focused on the impact of immigration policy and anti-immigrant sentiment has on parental engagement in student's education, I specifically analyze the interplay between the microsystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The family

unit is found in the microsystem, immigration policies in the exosystem, and anti-immigrant sentiment in the macrosystem.

Figure 1.
Bronfenbrenner (1992)
Ecological Systems Theory



Methodology

This study draws from a larger qualitative, interview-based study that explored how undocumented Latinx parents were involved and engaged in their children’s postsecondary access and success. Data were drawn from thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 undocumented Latinx parents. All participants had children enrolled in Coast University (CU)[1], a selective public university in California.

Sample

The study’s sample consists of 15 Latinx parents representing 10 families—10 mothers and 5 fathers—who reside in California and have children enrolled in CU; Table one summarizes the sample’s demographics. All parents interviewed were undocumented and were born in Mexico (n= 13) or El Salvador (n=2). At the time of the interviews, no parents were engaged in legalizing their immigration status. Participants had lived in the United States for an average of 28 years. If families lived in dual-parent households, it was requested that both mother and father be interviewed together. Five of the 10 families interviewed included both spouses (one couple was separated). Two mothers were married, but their husbands were unable to participate in the study. Two mothers had re-married (their spouses were not part of the sample), and one was a single mother. Half of the sample were parents of college-aged undocumented CU students who applied to and received the benefits of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (or were “DACAmented”); the other half included parents of college-aged documented students (e.g., lawful permanent residents, citizens). In addition to their college-aged, CU-attending

[1] All names are pseudonyms. Participants chose their pseudonyms.

children, most families had younger children enrolled in primary and secondary schools.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from May 2016 through January 2017, before and after the 2016 Presidential Election. Each parent was interviewed 3 times—interviews 1 and 2 took place in Summer 2016, and interview 3 took place in Winter 2016. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, per participants' request, and were audio-recorded; the author completed the English translations presented here.

During interviews one and two, the country's political climate was present in conversations with participants. Parents implicitly and explicitly alluded to the racist, anti-immigrant, and nativist narratives then-Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump campaigned under. Since the first two interviews took place before the election, parents mentioned these narratives, noting they believed there was no possibility he would win the presidency. On the other hand, the third interview occurred after the 2016 Presidential Election, which declared Donald Trump as the next president of the United States. Although the election and the election results were not considered during the design of the bigger study and initial interview protocol, due to the election results and their impact on the country's culture, questions about it were included in the third interview.

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis identified when participants discussed the nation’s anti-immigrant political climate and how their undocumented immigration status limited their parenting behaviors. These codes were predominantly descriptive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once the data was identified, it was coded in accordance with the Ecological Systems Theory, noting when parents discussed elements of the microsystems (e.g., describing how they were engaged in their children’s education), the exosystem (e.g., immigration policies) and the macrosystem (e.g., anti-immigrant sentiment and environment). During this stage, it was noted if the interview data was from pre-or post-the 2016 Presidential Election.

Next, codes were refined and similar open codes were grouped and examined, moving beyond descriptive codes to codes that implied a relationship. For example, the open codes "avoiding children's schools" and "distrust of non-Latinx people" were grouped as "avoiding social interactions." This "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) described the relationship between parents' perceptions and behaviors and the anti-immigrant context they resided in. When the axial coding was complete, data from before and after the election was compared and contrasted. The themes presented below are an analysis of this process.

Table 1.
Demographics of Study Sample.

Participant(s) Name(s)	Age, country of origin, year of migration	Location	Highest level of education	Occupation type	Marital status/ No. of children	CU child's name, age, gender, immigration status
Elia	41, Mexico, 2000	Bay Area	College graduate (Mexico)	Service (elderly care)	M/3	Andrea, 22, F, undocumented
Alejandra & Angel	51, Mexico, 1999; 53, Mexico, 1999	Los Angeles	High school (Mexico); middle School (Mexico)	Service (childcare); service (management)	Sep./2	Jessica, 20, F, undocumented
Luz & Ricardo	51, El Salvador, 2005; 54, El Salvador, 2003	Los Angeles	College graduate (El Salvador); College graduate (El Salvador)	Not employed outside home; Service (mechanic)	M/2	Emiliano, 19, M, undocumented
Julie & Mike	52, Mexico, 2002; 56, Mexico, 1986 (back and forth, permanent in 2002)	Bay Area	High school (Mexico); middle School (Mexico)	Not employed outside home; service (sales)	M/5	Gabriela, 19, F, undocumented
Cynthia & Adrian	41, Mexico, 1994; 46, Mexico, 1998	Los Angeles	High school (Mexico); high school (Mexico)	Service (fast food); service (maintenance)	M/2	Diego, 20, M, U.S. citizen
Diana	44, Mexico, 2001	Los Angeles	High school (Mexico)	Service (sales)	S/3	Elias, 19, M, U.S. citizen
Yuri	43, Mexico, 2005	Central Valley	High school (Mexico)	Service (agriculture)	M/2	Rafael, 21, M, undocumented
Maria	43, Mexico, 1995	Central Valley	College graduate (Mexico) & associate's degree (U.S.)	Service (domestic worker)	M/4	Carmen, 21, F, undocumented
Mireya & Javier	52, Mexico, 1992; 55, Mexico, 1992	Los Angeles	College graduate (Mexico); some college (Mexico)	Service (domestic worker); service (maintenance)	M/2	Mateo, 21, M, U.S. citizen
Lily	47, Mexico, 1995	Central Valley	College graduate (Mexico)	Service (agriculture)	M/3	Enrique & Emmanuel (twins), 20, M, U.S. citizens

Limitations

One of the intentions of the larger study was to explore the ways undocumented parents navigated the barriers they faced, including those caused by their legal status, and how those influenced their engagement with their children's education. Yet, the sample successfully overcame these barriers, in one way or another: this study focuses on the experiences and perspectives of undocumented Latinx parents whose children have all successfully applied to, been accepted, and have matriculated into the same institution of higher education. Thus, a limitation of this study is that I am not able to speak to the ways in which the barriers they faced may have prevented their children's academic success, including their postsecondary enrollment. The perspective of my sample is a particular one that helps begin to explain how undocumented status shapes parental engagement in students' postsecondary planning and success. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that this is not the complete story and serves as an invitation for future research. This includes but is not limited to exploring the experiences of undocumented Latinx parents whose children enrolled in community college, enrolled in a less selective public school, or chose to not attend an institution of higher education.

Findings

All parents in this study wanted their children to go to college, graduate, and experience the upward social mobility they associated with a college degree. In other work (Cuevas, 2019), I documented how the parents in this study explicitly shared that they migrated to the United States to provide better opportunities to their children. Furthermore, parents were well aware they would transition into becoming undocumented immigrants and understood its limitations. Yet, they were willing to sacrifice their personal, emotional, and financial wellbeing for their children's education and future (Cuevas, 2019).
The 2016 Presidential Election and the anti-immigrant, nativist, and racist rhetoric it harbored significantly changed how the parents in this study understood their roles as undocumented parents. The election led parents to (1) rethink the limitations of their immigration status; (2) reflect on what their deportability meant for their children; and (3) if they had undocumented children, question their future.

Hyperawareness of Undocumented Status

After the election, parents became more explicitly aware of the limitations of their immigration status. Specifically, the election results changed their perceptions of their personal and family safety. The strong anti-immigrant environment parents experienced led them to limit their time outside their homes and workspaces. Parents avoided traveling beyond their home-to-work parameters. They wanted to avoid interactions with racist people or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. Families also reported an increase in ICE sightings.

Ever-Present "Illegality"

In addition to limiting their interactions and travel outside their homes and work, the political climate and the fear the election created also impacted parents' engagement in their children's education. Parents reported feeling distracted, unable to focus on their parenting responsibilities. Most parents experienced an increase in anxiety, panic attacks, and migraines after the election. They did not have the mindset to help their children with their homework, monitor their extracurricular activities or, more broadly, plan for their educational futures.

Parents also grew paranoid about interactions with K-12 schools. Parents wondered whom in schools they could trust. Before the election, about half of the sample shared they made sure that no one in their children's schools knew about their undocumented immigration status. These families explicitly instructed their children never to disclose this information to anyone. As Julie noted, it was her family's "best-kept secret." The other half of the sample was more nonchalant about their immigration status and what their children's schools did or did not know: they either trusted schools to have their children's best interests or found relief in the fact that public schools could not ask about immigration status.

Yet, after the election, all parents reported growing more paranoid about what their children's schools did or did not know about their immigration status; parents wondered what schools could actually do to protect them from deportation. While some schools did make public statements in support of immigrant populations and declared themselves sanctuary spaces, parents preferred to limit their interactions with them. Additionally, parents also shared they were made aware of immigration checkpoints near schools and ICE officers detaining parents on their way to drop off children in schools. They learned this information from social media posts, including Facebook and Instagram, and from conversations with neighbors. For parents with younger, school-aged children, the possibility of ICE being near schools significantly impacted their in-school engagement: they limited their in-person interactions with schools. Elia, who had a younger, elementary school-aged son, noted, "Schools and the areas around them are no longer safe… [ICE agents] hang around, near schools, and wait to snatch us up. It is scary." Parents were conscious of the change in their parenting behaviors after the election: they were aware that their distracted state of mind and poor mental health impacted their engagement in their children's education. They reported feeling limited in their capacity to adequately support their children's education, expressing guilt and frustration. They wanted to be the best parents to their children as they could but felt that the anti-immigrant sentiment they witnessed and perceived did not allow them to do so. This included their engagement with their children's education.

Impact of Parental Deportability on Children

After the election, parents expressed living in a reality where they perceived that their deportation was more probable. The election results and the political climate thereafter made them realize that, as Adrian put it, "we are not every really safe [from deportation]. To this country, we are disposable." As such, parents often imagined what life would be like if they were deported. While the logistics and finances were stressful to consider, their greatest worry was how it would affect their children. All participants wanted their children, regardless of age or immigration status, to stay in the United States—they wanted their children to take advantage of the country's educational resources. This would be easier for their college-aged children, those who were enrolled at Coast University at the time of interviews, as opposed to their younger children. Their college-aged children were young adults, enrolled in a prestigious university. That in itself was a relief for parents: as CU students and eventually alumni, their college-aged children had access to social networks of support (e.g., friends, mentors) and could obtain a full-time job upon graduation. While their deportation and family separation could emotionally affect their college-aged children, parents believed they would eventually be okay, both emotionally and financially.

On the other hand, their school-aged children, who were still in primary and secondary school, would suffer the most. Parents were willing to separate from their children for them to access American schools and the resources and social services (e.g., health care, after-school programs) available in the United States. Furthermore, parents explicitly stated that they wanted their younger children to remain in the United States to attend college, just as their older siblings had. Parents acknowledged the negative impact on their children's wellbeing this family separation would have. For some, it was a risk they were willing to take. They took comfort in access to technology (they believed that social media and web calls would make the situation a little easier) and in the bonds they had with their children, hoping they would understand their reasoning.

The perception of increased deportation possibilities and the impact this would have on their children led parents to have conversations about possible deportations with each other and their partners (for parents who were interviewed by themselves). Before the election, only a few parents reported having had explicit conversations with their families about the possibilities of their deportation or having "deportation plans," or a plan of action for their children if they were to be detained and put into ICE custody. Nevertheless, when parents were asked the same question—have you had conversations with your family about what would happen if you get deported? —after the election, the answers drastically changed. The election forced a conversation amongst adults about their immigration status: parents explicitly

and implicitly created deportation plans. For instance, Julie and Mike, whose youngest son, Marcos, was 6 years old at the time of interviews, reached out to family members to care for him if something happened to them. Their first preference was that Marcos went to live with one of his two older brothers, who had their own families and children. But since her older sons were also undocumented, Julie had a back-up plan: she asked a close family friend, a U.S. citizen, to adopt Marcos if necessary. Her friend agreed. Other parents reported having similar plans—asking U.S. citizen family members or friends to adopt their children if they were to be deported. Again, parents wanted their children to remain in the United States for the resources and opportunities available, including a higher education degree.

Parents also noticed how the election results and the eventual conversations they had with their children about them impacted their children's mental health. Regardless of age, parents shared their children verbally expressed fear of their parents' deportation and family separation. Some parents reported worries that their children were depressed: after families had discussed the election results together, parents observed their children eating less, seemed distant and thoughtful, and had trouble sleeping at night. Maria's college-aged daughter, Carmen, for example, had nightmares about her parents being deported. Since Carmen was away for college and lived on the CU campus, this concerned Maria. She knew her daughter was having trouble focusing in classes. Carmen told Maria about an increase in headaches and hair loss. Additionally, Carmen was also undocumented. Maria knew the anti-immigrant sentiments and stress these caused also worried her about her safety, wellbeing, and deportability. Similar patterns to those of Carmen were observed in children of all ages. Parents worried the political climate and culture would further make these symptoms worse for their children, impacting their development and schooling.

Parenting Undocumented Students

Parents of undocumented students faced additional stress; they were concerned about how the election results and a Trump presidency would impact their children. Specifically, they worried about the receding and cancelation of the DACA program. Parents associated DACA with better higher education and employment opportunities for their undocumented children. In this study, parents shared that DACA gave them and their children a "small break" from deportation anxiety and a sense of financial security, which they attached to the work permit eligibility. Thus, DACA offered their undocumented children hope for a better future. The idea that this hope could be taken away by the Trump Administration worried parents.

Nevertheless, parents also believed their DACAmented children were less likely to be apprehended and deported than their own circumstances. While the fear that DACA

could be rescinded was present, they noted that undocumented students, as a sub-group of undocumented immigrants, had much more public support than they did. Parents described the "Dreamer" narrative, which places academically high achieving undocumented students as assets to the American society (Gonzales, 2015). Using this narrative, they noted that it would not be in president-elect Trump's political interest to cancel the program: he would gain a lot of enemies. Parents also noted that the U.S. government made a lot of money from DACA applications—the application costs almost $500 every two years (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], n.d.). When their college-aged DACAmented children expressed frustration and fear of deportation and family separation, parents reminded them of CU's prestige and the protection they had due to being students at the university. Protections included student organizations, counseling services specifically for undocumented students, legal clinics and services, and emergency financial assistance access. For example, after the election, Luz and Ricardo noted their son Emiliano grew depressed and often talked about taking time off from school to be at home with his family. While this sounded appealing to Luz, having her son live back home, she refused to let him interrupt his schooling. Additionally, she wanted him to continue to access the resources CU offered him.

Angel and Alejandra, on the other hand, worried about their daughter's response to the election results for a different reason: Jessica wanted to travel to Mexico under the advanced parole premise of her DACA eligibility; advance parole is a permission granted to DACA-holding immigrants that allowed them to re-enter the United States after temporarily traveling abroad.[2] Jessica worried that DACA would be taken away, threatening what she felt was her only opportunity to visit her relatives in Mexico. This included her grandmother, who was very ill. At the time of our interview, Jessica had submitted her advanced parole application. The legal team at Coast University had informed Jessica that she was likely to be granted advanced parole. Jessica planned to go to Mexico for the Christmas holidays with plans to return before Trump's inauguration in January 2017. Angel and Alejandra did not support their daughter's decision to go to Mexico. Alejandra connected her fears of her daughter traveling under advance parole to the anti-immigrant climate she perceived. She worried that an immigration agent might discriminate against her daughter, and upon seeing that she had the "advanced parole" permit with her traveling documents, may deny her re-entry to the United States. While she wanted to support her daughter's life choices, she believed traveling abroad under such

[2] On August 24, 2020, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) released a memo announcing that, under the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) reformed DACA guidelines announced July 28, 2020, the department would only grant parole to DACA recipients for "urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit in keeping with the governing statute (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2020).

conditions was not smart. She and Angel wanted to make sure that Jessica remained in the United States and completed her college degree.

Like other parents, the election results forced Luz and Alejandra and Angel to modify the nature of their support and engagement with their children’s education. Like other parents of DACA recipients, they wanted to make sure their children were safe and able to finish their higher education, regardless of who was president. Further, these examples illustrate the fluidity undocumented immigrants’ experiences and what Golash-Boza and Valdez (2018) calls the “nested context of reception,” or the intersection of local, state, and federal level factors and societal reception. The combination of these contexts shapes how undocumented immigrants experience the repercussions of their immigration status, both in supporting and inhibiting ways (Golash-Boza & Valdez, 2018).

Discussion

This study shows how the interplay between the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem impact student outcomes. Specifically, it illustrates how the country’s anti-immigrant policies and political culture impact undocumented parents' children vis-à-vis their parents; anything that impacts parents' psyche may inevitably impact students (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). While the findings of this study are based on a specific period of time in a particular geographical context—the experiences of undocumented Latinx parents in California before and after the 2016 Presidential Election—findings illustrate how much immigration policy and political climate, or the exosystem and macrosystem respectively, shape parenting behaviors, which are embedded in the microsystem. Put differently, the study invites us to think about the contexts in which parents parent and how these impact student outcomes and wellbeing.

The participants' perspectives and experiences in this study demonstrate the additional barriers that complicate undocumented parents' lives in the United States. Undocumented parents have to organize and navigate their lives considering their deportability diligently. They have to negotiate how much information and details about what their deportability means they should share with their children and often have to decide whom to share such personal and private information. Furthermore, parents' responses to the political climate created by the 2016 Presidential Election are further evidence of how much political climates and ideologies impact undocumented immigrants and their families. Parents' descriptions of their physical manifestations of stress and anxiety, their avoidance of public spaces after the 2016 Presidential Election, and the development of deportation plans are examples of how parents experienced their "illegality" within this particular context.

In addition to the emotional toll the 2016 Presidential Election results created for parents themselves, the parents in this study had to also consider how the results impacted their children. As noted in the findings, parents' main concern was their children, their safety, and their futures. Regardless of what would happen to them under a Trump presidency, the parents in this study wanted the best for their children. This entailed ensuring their children remain in the United States, regardless of what happened to them, and had access a good education. To the parents in this study, educational access included a college education.

To best support Latinx students' postsecondary aspirations, including undocumented students, it is essential to consider the context they and their parents are embedded in. Repeatedly, research has documented that when parents and schools have strong relationships and partner, students are successful (Boonk et al., 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). Yet, as this study shows, the promises of these partnerships are complicated for undocumented parents and their children. Findings show how parental engagement and parent-school relationships are compromised by immigration policies and laws and anti-immigrant sentiment. The interactions between these ecological systems—in the form of parents' fears and avoidance of schools, for example— pose challenges to undocumented Latinx parents.

To support parents as they support their children's education, including their postsecondary access and success, educators must understand the context students are in. In the case of students being raised by undocumented parents specifically, educators must understand (1) how the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem shape their educational opportunities and outcomes, including their postsecondary access and success, and (2) address the barriers these interactions create. Research on family-school partnerships shows that the most successful way to understand students' lives is to develop strong and trusting relationships with their families (Boonk et al., 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). The following section provides recommendations for practice based on these premises and the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Practice

Pro-Immigrant School Culture and Family-School Partnership Work

As the findings show, the anti-immigrant sentiment experienced in the broader society trickles down and impacts how parents perceive and experience their direct contexts, including schools. As such, more than ever, it is essential for schools, including K-12 and higher education institutions, to proactively and unapologetically announce they are in support of immigrant populations. Schools can declare themselves as sanctuary spaces, meaning that they, to the extent possible, will not cooperate with ICE agents (Patel, 2018).

Additionally, they can train their teachers, faculty, staff, and leadership on undocumented immigrants' circumstances (Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017). Known as undocuAlly training, this professional development is essential to ensuring that people working in educational spaces are informed about undocumented immigrants' unique circumstances, including undocumented students, and are knowledgeable of and connected with resources to support them. Increasing capacity around this work benefits individual students and their families and promotes a pro-immigrant culture in school environments. These environments, if developed intentionally, may mitigate some of the fear and distrust undocumented parents face (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). In other words, when there is a strong pro-immigrant culture and environment in school spaces, parental engagement is more likely to be successful.

Consider the Impact of Anti-Immigration Policy on Student Mental Health

This study clarifies how anti-immigrant sentiment and policy impact mental health, both for parents and their children. Additionally, as research has found, parents' manifestation of stress is passed on to young children—even when they are not explicitly discussing it with their parents, children internalize stress (Gulbas, et al., 2016; Yoshikawa, 2011). These conditions and circumstances pose a challenge for educational spaces: what is the responsibility of schools K-12 and institutions of higher education in accounting for and treating students' mental health? Put differently, how are students expected to focus on their schooling when they may be worried about their parents being deported?

There certainly is no easy answer to this question. Schools are both limited in their resources and capacity to respond to possible deportations. Yet, some steps can be taken at the institutional and individual levels. Institutionally, schools should provide access to mental health services. For K-12 schools, this may have to include partnerships with mental health services organizations. For institutions of higher education, this means having enough staff to meet with students. Yet, all entities should be informed and trained in working with students and families who may face the threat of deportation (Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017). Experiencing this threat is traumatic, and therefore trauma-informed practices are required. Mental health providers should be trained on the particular issues undocumented immigrants face and their particular needs.

Acknowledge the Uncertainty of DACA

For the parents in this study with undocumented children, the uncertainty around DACA was particularly pressing. These parents worried that the privileges the policy had provided their children were going to be revoked. At worst, they worried that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had their children's and their family's

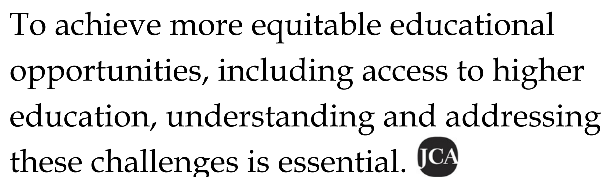
information in a master list of undocumented youth. These fears were significantly elevated after the 2016 Presidential Election. After the election of Donald Trump, parents worried their DACAmented children were no longer safe. The threat of the program ending and the uncertainty this created further enhanced parents' fears.

Educators and other service providers are not expected to have all the answers and solutions for undocumented immigrants' issues and barriers. Instead, they (educators) need to acknowledge the stress undocumented immigrants and their families face, validate it, stay informed with up-to-date information, and use their networks and connections when applicable. Specifically, in regard to DACA, educators need to stay informed with the most up-to-date information, regardless of whether they are aware that they are working with undocumented students. The logistics and sustainability of the program are constantly changing— educators must stay informed and share information with students and families to avoid the dangers of misinformation.

"In a time of constant anti-immigrant sentiment and racialized nativism, it becomes important to consider the impact these messages have on parents, and consequently, on their children, and push back on them."

Conclusion

The educational experiences of Latinx students in mixed-status families are compounded by the repercussion of an undocumented immigration status. While the relationship between Latinx students' postsecondary access and success and their parents' immigration status may initially appear irrelevant, this study shows how context, or the intersection of the microsystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem, shape parental engagement and thus students' educational opportunities and outcomes; this study helps us further understand the way undocumented status influences parenting decisions and educational engagement. Additionally, and most importantly, the narratives presented also illustrate the essential the role of undocumented parents in student success. These narratives contradict negative and vilified portrayals of undocumented Latinx immigrant parents as being the ones "who broke the law," for example. Instead, these stories show the resilience of this population, how parents strategically navigate barriers to support their children. In a time of constant anti-immigrant sentiment and racialized nativism, it becomes important to consider the impact these messages have on parents, and consequently, on their children, and push back on them.



To achieve more equitable educational opportunities, including access to higher education, understanding and addressing these challenges is essential. JCA

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Racist Nativism in the College Access Experiences of Undocumented Latinx Students

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ABSTRACT
This study explores undocumented Latinx students' college access experiences through a racist nativist framework to understand how the ideologies of racism and xenophobia underlie the possibilities of pursuing college aspirations. This article describes five particular ways in which racist nativism underlies undocumented Latinx college access experiences. These included 1) systematic lack of institutional college knowledge, 2) restricted college outreach, 3) instilling fear in pursuing college aspirations, 4) discriminatory financial aid policies and practices, and 5) contradictory rhetoric of "deservingness" of educational and life opportunities. This paper supports an understanding of undocumented Latinx student educational processes at the intersection of systems of marginality, as the practices, policies, and structures in higher education are microcosms of larger societal ideologies and inequities.

Keywords: undocumented students, Latinx, college access

Undocumented students are two percent of all enrollment in United States (U.S.) higher education. In 2019, an estimated 454,000 undocumented students were enrolled in college (New American Economy, 2020). The undocumented community's future is more vulnerable than ever, as Donald Trump's presidential administration implemented anti-immigrant policy that threatens immigrants' opportunities and existence in the U.S. With this overt racist nativist context (Pérez Huber, 2016), it is necessary to explore how undocumented students experience educational processes at the intersection of systems of marginality, as higher education is a microcosm of societal ideologies and inequities. I situate undocumented Latinx students' college access experiences within a racist nativism framework to argue the challenges undocumented students face in higher education manifest from racist nativist ideologies and climate in the U.S. A racist nativist theoretical framework uncovers how racism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant rhetoric and practices intersect and underlie the lives of Immigrants of Color (Pérez Huber et al., 2008).

Pursuing Higher Education

As undocumented students begin to develop their post-secondary plans, immigration status becomes particularly important (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2011). It is not until students begin to prepare to pursue college that immigration status creates evident disparities in Latinx students' educational trajectories, with many undocumented students unable to pursue higher education because of their immigration status (Abrego, 2006). Gonzales (2011) named this critical time

as the "dynamic period" when undocumented youth are between 16-18. In the "dynamic period," undocumented youth prepare to transition into a lifestyle limited by their immigration status (Gonzales, 2011). Gonzales described this transition from leading "legal to illegal" lives as undocumented youth leave the open school system only to face restrictive institutions that control their adult lives.

Research on college-bound students has found undocumented students need access to college-bound resources as they pursue higher education (Garcia, 2013; Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012). Yet, undocumented students cannot access most support services because of their immigration status (Pérez Huber, 2010) or lack of appropriate institutional resources (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012). Certain services, such as college prep programs designed for first-generation and low-income students, are restricted from servicing undocumented students (Garcia, 2013). Another barrier is that many counselors and school personnel lack training concerning immigration status and college access and, therefore, cannot support undocumented students' aspirations for higher education (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012). Existing literature on college preparation demonstrates that institutional agents (Garcia, 2013; Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012), parents and family (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012; Tierney et al., 2005), and peers (Enriquez, 2011; Garcia, 2013; Tierney et al., 2005) are essential sources of information, encouragement, and financial support as undocumented students are restricted from accessing federal funded sources of college outreach and preparation.

Systems and Structures of Marginality Shape College Experiences

Anti-immigrant ideology shapes different U.S. contexts, including immigration policy (De Genova, 2004) and educational institutions (Morales, Herrera, & Murry, 2009; Pérez Huber, 2010). Immigration legislation and the politics of citizenship exclude and dehumanize the undocumented community (Chavez, 2013; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). Undocumented students' lives and educational opportunities are also shaped and restricted by immigration policy (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragón, 2010; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Rincón, 2008). Historical mistreatment and racist immigration policy have targeted Immigrants of Color (Galindo & Vigil, 2006). The fight for educational equity continues as states pass laws to expand undocumented immigrants' rights, which are undermined by federal legislation (Rincón, 2008).

Few studies have explored undocumented Latinx students' college experiences that consider how forms of marginality shape this critical time in their lives. Undocumented students experience this anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment in higher education. Muñoz (2013) explored undocumented Mexicana students' experiences and found

students experience financial stressors due to discriminatory financial aid policies that restrict federal aid to undocumented students and the lack of institutional understanding of their financial needs. Students also experienced anxiety from navigating the campus and political climate, as their lives and educational opportunities are shaped by policy and rhetoric around immigration on and off-campus. Muñoz and Maldonado (2012) critique previous theorizations of college persistence by centering the experiences of undocumented, Mexican-born women. It was clear from the student counterstories that race, culture, immigration status, gender, and language shaped undocumented Mexicana higher education experiences. Students navigated english dominance in higher education, the perpetuity of their outsider status, and traditional gender ideologies concerning women and education.

Theoretical Framework

I address a gap in undocumented student research by situating undocumented students' college access experiences within the intersecting systems of marginality that shape their everyday lives. To do so, I draw from a racist nativism framework to argue the challenges undocumented students face in higher education are manifestations of the racist nativist ideologies and context in the U.S. Research on nativism or fear of the "foreigner" argues historical mistreatment and racist immigration policies have racialized the "foreigner" to target Immigrants of Color (De Genova, 2004; Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Pérez et al., 2010; Pérez Huber, 2010). Stemming from Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) that uncovers how race and racism shape the lives of Latinx people, racist nativism understands how anti-immigrant sentiment, xenophobia, and colonization is a form of racism in the U.S. that has historically framed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as "foreigners" and perpetual outsiders to the lands the U.S. currently occupies (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). Racist nativism can be experienced in the form of microaggressions, "systemic, everyday forms of racist nativism that are subtle, layered, and cumulative verbal and non-verbal assaults directed at Students of Color based on race and perceived immigration status" (Pérez Huber, 2011). Racist nativist microaggressions are daily acts of violence and stigmatization that construct students as "non-native" and remind students of their status as perpetual outsiders in the U.S.

I build on racist nativism applications to the undocumented Latinx experience (Muñoz, 2013; Muñoz and Maldonado, 2012; Muñoz et al, 2018; Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2011) by exploring racist nativism in undocumented student college access and transition. In situating this study within a racist nativist framework, I contribute to an understanding of college processes rooted in the systems of marginality that undocumented students experience in their lives. In doing so, this scholarship situates

broader ideologies and institutions as contributing to the upholding and reproduction of infringed rights, limited resources, and restricted higher education opportunities that undocumented students encounter. To contribute to a just narrative about undocumented Latinx students' educational experiences, a framework that situates college experiences within intersecting marginalities is necessary (Muñoz, 2013; Pérez Huber, 2010).

Methods and Analysis

This study takes a qualitative approach to capture a "holistic account" (Creswell, 2013, pg. 186) of undocumented students' college access experiences. Interviews brought insight into how students experience and navigate accessing and transitioning to higher education. A face-to-face, one-on-one interview was conducted with each participant. These interviews were semi-structured, meaning the interview was guided by core questions, but functioned more like a conversation, allowing for flexibility in the interview process. The interviews lasted an hour and a half and were audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and were then analyzed.

I captured undocumented student experiences as they accessed and transitioned from high school to college. Each student identified as undocumented, Latinx, graduated from a low-resourced, public high school in California, and were in their first year of college in California. Students were recruited through purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed (Creswell, 2013). With purposive sampling, participants are selected because they will help the researcher gain insight into the experiences of a specific community (Creswell, 2013). After obtaining IRB approval, I recruited by conducting a purposive sample of undocumented youth I met while working as a college advisor at various high schools in Southern California. After interviewing the students, I recruited through purposive sampling, I employed snowball sampling by asking each participant to share the recruitment flyer with two or three of their peers that met the eligibility requirements. Participants recruited through snowball sampling initiated contact with me if they were interested in scheduling an interview. The first ten participants recruited were interviewed.

This study includes 10 undocumented Latinx identified students across the public higher education systems in California. During data collection, students were in their first year at a California college or university This presented the opportunity to learn about their recent experiences in navigating the college access process and navigating their first year in higher education. Table 1 describes the demographic information of the participants, including their age at migration to the United States. As indicated in the table, all students provided a pseudonym of their choice that would promote confidentiality of their names and identities.

Table 1.
Participant Demographic Information

Participant (pseudonym)	Enrolled in system of higher education*	Country of Birth	Age at Migration to United States
Graciela	CSU	El Salvador	9 years old
Maria	UC	Mexico	6 years old
Natalia	CSU	Mexico	8 years old
Dianna	CCC	Mexico	9 years old
Jessica	CCC	Mexico	1st: 3 years old 2nd: 11 years old
Christopher	CCC	Mexico	4 years old
Hector	CCC	Mexico	6 years old
Alicia	CCC	Mexico	3 years old
Susan	CSU	El Salvador	5 years old
Marco	CSU	Mexico	7 years old

*CSU: California State University, UC: University of California, CCC: California Community College.

The experiences of the 10 students in this sample provide insight how racist nativism is present in college access experiences of this population of students that are marginalized by race and construction of illegality. The sample is small compared to the large undocumented community in the United States (New American Economy, 2020). Each individual has their own unique experience and story that may not be captured in the stories of the undocumented students in this study. The youth in this study also reside in California, which is one of the states with the largest undocumented population, yet undocumented students reside throughout the country (New American Economy, 2020). Because of the impact of state policies regarding immigration and education, the experiences of these participants may not apply to the different realities of undocumented youth in other states. Yet, as a qualitative study, the findings of this research are not intended to be generalizable (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to the entire undocumented community and instead to provide insight from the lives of undocumented students and the underlying racist nativism they experience in their college access processes.

The interviews were thematically coded for emergent patterns within, across, and between each student experience. The first cycle of coding, initial coding, examined the interviews and compared for similarities and differences within and between interviews (Saldaña, 2013). In the second cycle of coding, focus coding allowed for identification of the "most frequent" or "significant" codes

developed during the first cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2013, g. 213). With focus coding, the researcher develops major categories or themes and establishes the data's patterns and significant findings. A Chicana feminist epistemology informed the student interview data analysis as I made meaning of the data from my Chicana cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as the oldest daughter of Mexican immigrants and a mixed-status extended family. Cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) provides space for Chicana/ Latina scholars to bring our journeys and histories, educational experiences, research training, and experiences of marginality to our research. Cultural intuition argues that as Chicana researchers, we possess a theoretical sensitivity for understanding how systems of oppression shape the Latinx community's experiences because of our own lived experiences and educational institutions in the margins (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In doing so, my cultural intuition is braided throughout the analysis and findings of this research.

Findings

The racist nativist theoretical framework supports an understanding of the college access processes experienced by undocumented Latinx students situated within the systems of marginality that underlie and shape their everyday lives. There were five ways in which racist nativism underlined the college access experiences of undocumented Latinx students. These included 1) systematic lack of institutional college knowledge, 2) restricted college outreach, 3) instilled fear in pursuing college aspirations, 4) discriminatory financial aid policies and practices, and 5) contradicting rhetoric of "deservingness" of opportunities. Each of these is discussed with examples from student interviews.

Systematic Lack of Institutional College Knowledge

As first in their families to pursue higher education, students highlighted the centrality of seeking support to learn about college information, obtain advice about their college options, receive guidance with submitting their college applications, and begin developing an understanding of financial aid opportunities. Yet, each student was confronted with an institutional lack of awareness and understanding about college opportunities and the college application process. Many counselors and teachers did not possess training concerning immigration status and college access and could not support students in pursuing their higher education aspirations. Some teachers even reproduced their own racist nativist biases or misunderstandings. This was Maria's experience when she was in high school. Maria, a biology major at a University of California (UC) campus, was in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) that aims to prepare high school students for college. In this class, Maria experienced racist nativism when her AVID teacher told her that students born outside the U.S. are ineligible to attend college. Maria explained:

Racist Nativism

I was in the AVID program, I felt shut down in class. Can you believe the teacher said in front of the class that I can't go to college since I wasn't born here? She said undocumented people can't go to college! I didn't even say I was undocumented; she went there straight from when I asked if people not born in the country can go to college, and she said students like me couldn't go to college. I was shut down after that, and I wasn't the only student not born here (in the U.S.) in the class. I know that for sure.

Maria described experiencing a racist nativist microaggression in her 11th grade AVID classroom when her teacher assumed she was not born in the U.S. and labeled her undocumented for asking if students born outside the U.S. can attend college. Even though the AVID teacher was unaware Maria was not born in the U.S., the teacher ascribed "non-native" status to Maria because her question fit the teacher's assumption that Latinx folxs are undocumented immigrants and outsiders to the U.S. The teacher also outed Maria's undocumented status to her entire class. This AVID teacher provided misinformation about college and marginalized Maria and the other immigrant students in her classroom. This structural and limited awareness of college opportunities for undocumented students across schools is a form of institutional racist nativism students navigate and must overcome to pursue their aspirations for higher education.

Racist nativism is also present in the scant availability of culturally and linguistically relevant information for students and their families. Students navigated the college access as part of mixed-status and undocumented families, most primarily Spanish speaking. Marcela, a psychology major at a UC campus, described how she shared financial aid information with her family:

I had to tell my mom and dad everything about college. As I was learning, I tried to show them too. At first, my mom and dad didn't want me to apply and put all my information on the applications, and then when I went to the financial aid night at school, I came back with all the information. I felt better, and so did my parents about it.

Marcela's experience demonstrates how undocumented students shared their knowledge about college access with parents. In this example, Marcela discussed confidentiality and the financial aid process with her parents to reassure them the information they provide on applications is safe and critical for her to receive financial support to pay for college. For many students, this required translating college websites, brochures, and handouts into Spanish to make them accessible to their families. Students take on this labor because their families are central to this educational experience, yet racist nativism embedded in rigid availability and accessibility of college knowledge structurally restricts families from this process. The lack of dissemination of critical college information that is culturally and linguistically accessible to undocumented students and their families is reflective of the inferior and marginalized position of undocumented people in the U.S. This

indicates undocumented students' educational opportunities and futures are not considered priority or foundational college information for higher education institutions, schools, and all entities in the college access application process.

Restricted College Outreach

With the limited college resources at most under-resourced high schools, college outreach and preparation programs play a critical role in disseminating information and guidance for college applications. Students have a heightened need to access college resources through outreach because of limited resources and information available at their high schools. Undocumented students are restricted from accessing the majority of these resources because of their immigration status, as certain services, such as federal college prep programs designed for first-generation and low-income students, are restricted from servicing undocumented students (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012). Jessica, a public health major in a California State University (CSU) campus, explained why she did not have support during the college application process:

Just because, like in ninth and tenth grade, I was shut down, I tried to get into a college program they had at the college center, and they told me I couldn't because I'm undocumented. Although by my senior year, they (college center counselors) were a little bit more accepting and comprehensible, like I still had that fear like oh, what if they do that again, you know? So like I would never try to get support anymore because I was shut down. I went in there (the college center) like three times, and they shut me down, so I was like, you know what, I'm just not going to go in there anymore, because every time I would go in there, I would come out crying. I don't want to feel like that anymore, so I just did everything myself by my senior year.

Jessica attempted to access college resources from outreach staff during her 9th and 10th-grade years in high school and was turned away for being undocumented. As a result, Jessica protected herself from further victimization and did not seek support from college supports when it was her time to apply to college. Applying to college was isolating for Jessica, who experienced this process without the support of college outreach programs, a large part of college preparatory services available at her low-resourced high school. Jessica's experience demonstrates that exclusion from college outreach and support can be violent and painful for students as seeking support could result in victimization and impact future support seeking behaviors. Restricted access to college preparation resources shows the lack of federal funding and investment in the undocumented immigrant community in the U.S., reinforcing racist nativist beliefs and opportunity structures.

Fear in Pursuing College Aspirations

Systems of marginality underlie undocumented students' higher education experiences as they matriculate into higher education within a context of constantly changing policy and processes and a

xenophobic political and social climate. Students described how education processes and hostile anti-immigrant context resulted in heightened fear in their families about applying to higher education during their college access process. The Trump presidential administration explicitly targeted and acted against People of Color, Latinx people, and immigrant communities since campaigning for the 2016 election. The Trump administration's rhetoric has been racially charged, targeting immigrants and People of Color and resulting in fear and anxiety for the immigrant community. Marco migrated to the U.S. from México at the age of 7 and attended a CSU as an anthropology major. Marco described his outlook on Trump and the current political context in the U.S.:

It just scares me with Donald Trump. At first, I was like, "Nobody's going to vote for this guy." And then we start hearing he is winning the Republican vote in the primaries. I was like, there's people out there who believe in this guy? They believe in everything he says. Like the whole immigrants are criminals, and he wants to deport everyone. And at first, I was scared, but now I'm like everyone's scared. I have friends born here, but their parents aren't documented; they're scared too. I mean, it's not surprising that there's people out there that believe in what he says.

Marco expressed the additional fear the presidential administration has produced within the immigrant community. Marco is cognizant of anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the country and the threats to his family's presence and community's success.

The racist nativist sentiment has shaped how families and parents feel as they navigate access to higher education. Students shared that pursuing college caused fear for parents and families because college applications required invasive and sensitive information. Students were concerned about confidentiality and their family's safety. Graciela migrated from El Salvador at the age of 9 and was attending a CSU. Graciela shared insight into the fear applying to college within the racist nativist context caused in her family:

For college applications, everything was so new to me. It was okay for me to put all my information down because I knew it was going to be for college, but my parents, I had to talk to them and explain everything to have their information on there. Yeah, my mom, at first she wasn't okay with me putting all her information out there about the taxes and all that stuff because they feel it's not confidential and they can give her information away. I had to explain to her, this is what is going to pay for my college, and after I started explaining it to her more, as I was understanding and hearing from school, I was also telling her this is what's gonna happen, this is how you are going to help me with this, so yeah they got more comfortable with it after a while, but I had to explain it to them how it was going to be.

Graciela shared her knowledge about financial aid with her mom to reassure her the information they provide on applications is safe and critical for her to receive financial support. Graciela's perspective demonstrates how students shared critical college with their families to address the fear, stress, and

anxiety the racist nativist climate and policies in the U.S. cause to their families. Some of the central concerns within their families included confidentiality and safety, college options, moving away from home, financial aid, and expected family contributions. These topics caused distress and fear in their families due to the racist nativist policies, rhetoric, and practices within the U.S. and college access.

Discriminatory Financial Aid Policies and Practices

Federal financial aid is inaccessible to undocumented students, including California students who qualify for state financial aid through Assembly Bill 540 (AB540) and those with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) at the federal level. Students shared the impact of restricted financial aid access and even the complications they experienced when accessing state-level college funding. These restrictions and challenges result from racist nativist ideologies that frame Immigrants of Color as undeserving of federal investment to pursue higher education. Students experience racist nativist financial aid policies and practices through the insufficient funds to cover educational expenses. Hector attended a community college and was required to pay for most of his educational expenses by working multiple jobs because financial aid did not cover them. Hector described his frustration with this situation:

I have little financial aid. I'm hoping next year they have some more for me. I mean, I feel angry, I was disappointed I got very little. You know, I have to work more to achieve what others have for free. That makes me pretty angry. I'm working to pay for school, and at some point in first semester, it was pretty crazy. I had school from 8:30 to 2:30, and then I went to my other job at a high school. I'd be there from 3:30 to 5:30. Then from there, I'd go to the private tutoring job I have, which is from 7:30 to 8:00. I'd be getting home Mondays thru Thursdays around 9:00. Then Fridays and Saturdays, I would go to like a construction job. In terms of working, that's both mentally and just physically hard. Every Sunday, I was drained.

Hector was a full-time college student while also balancing three jobs to ensure he would cover his educational and household expenses. He described being emotionally and physically exhausted as a result of work and school. Undocumented students continue to be restricted from obtaining federal financial aid, making educational costs a challenge for many students. Limited financial aid also impacted students' college choice, such as in Alicia's experience. Alicia attends a community college as a biology major and aspires to be a veterinarian. She shared that she was accepted to various CSU's as a biology major but decided to attend a community college because of restrictive financial aid policies:

The financial stuff made an impact. Humboldt was my dream school. I wanted to go there so bad, and I got accepted, and I was so happy, but then I found out they weren't giving me enough money,

and it's far away, and it was going to be expensive to go there, and I kind of knew it was unrealistic. I had to change my plans. I kind of had to give that up. I don't think it will happen even if I transfer once I saw they weren't giving me much. I'll have to transfer to a closer school I can commute to.

Alicia believes she will not transfer to her dream school because financial aid will not cover housing expenses at the university. Alicia demonstrates that even if students are eligible and admitted to universities, they often do not have the opportunity to attend those campuses because of discriminatory financial aid policies. The restricted access to federal student aid is a form of racist nativism undocumented students experience. Racist nativism treats students as perpetual foreigners and outsiders in the U.S., framing them as unworthy of federal investment in their pursuit of higher education.

Contradicting Rhetoric of "Deservingness" of Educational and Life Opportunities

The college access processes of undocumented Latinx students are surrounded by the racist nativist rhetoric present on a local, national, and societal level. Students highlighted the rhetoric around deservingness as they experienced questions and challenges to their right to access higher education. Racist nativism argues that U.S. society is rooted in upholding white dominance, which situates white people as entitled to resources, opportunities, and hence, a higher education (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). This narrative of deservingness is also upheld when the media, politicians, and educators construct differences between students and their undocumented parents and elders. This framed students as victims of immigration and situate parents as the perpetrators of migration and the obstacles their children face.

Students also experienced policy contradictions through the messages and labels thrust upon different members of the undocumented community. Most of the students were part of mixed-status families, including U.S.-born siblings, DACA beneficiaries, and undocumented relatives who were restricted from qualifying for DACA. Because of the framing of policy, this sent contradictory messages of deservingness within their families. When asked about the limitations of DACA, Hector shared:

I'm protected with DACA, but in terms of my mom not having it, she's still doing everything that she can, she's working. She's doing everything she can to succeed, but I don't understand why she can't benefit from the same things like me, you know? I am a good person, and she is also a good person and has done everything she could to succeed and take care of us. She is why I get to be in college and go to school. She could probably do more for us, if she also had the opportunity.

Hector shared that his mother is a "good person" that has always invested in her children's futures. As a single mother, she works multiple jobs to provide for Hector and his younger sister. Like many of the students, Hector was concerned his mother was

restricted from opportunities he now has due to DACA. Policy is developed to protect and benefit individuals whom society deems as worthy of investment, restricting community members labeled "undeserving" or "unworthy" from opportunities from these benefits. Hector is confronted with policy that categorizes his mother as "undeserving," but he challenges this when describing his mother as successful and hardworking. Hector attributes his success to his mother's efforts, making him only eligible for these policies in part because of his mother's investment in his future. The limitations and restrictions of policy shaped the students' contradictory and complex understanding of U.S. opportunity structures. This rhetoric criminalizes parents and situates only specific immigrants as "deserving" of educational and life opportunities (Abrego et al., 2020). When experiencing the college access processes, undocumented Latinx students grapple with the guilt, contradictions, and complexity of deservingness and the criminalization of their families and communities central to their higher education aspirations.

"These forms of racist nativism treat undocumented students as perpetual outsiders in higher education which students must combat when pursuing their college aspirations."

Central Contributions

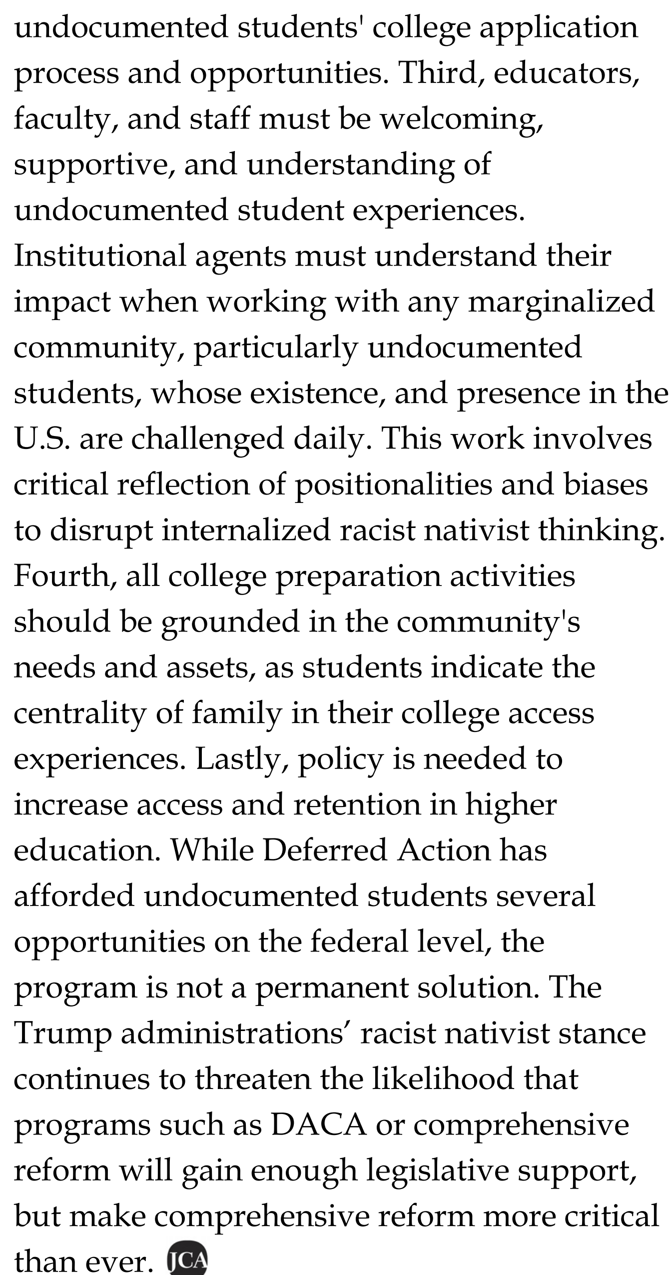
Through this study, I build on previous applications of racist nativism with undocumented Latinx students (Muñoz, 2013; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2011) by exploring racist nativism in college access processes. The narratives of undocumented Latinx students indicate they experience racist nativism in their access to college as racialized and legal others in the U.S. The specific forms of racist nativism in their higher education trajectories include the lack of culturally and relevant college information for their undocumented and mixed-status families, restricted accessibility to college outreach preparation at low resourced schools, instilled fear and anxiety in families of undocumented students concerning college access and transition, discriminatory financial aid policies and practices in higher education (Muñoz, 2013; Muñoz and Maldonado, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2011), and contradictory rhetoric around deservingness of immigrants (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020). These forms of racist nativism treat undocumented students as perpetual outsiders in higher education which students must combat when pursuing their college aspirations.

This research contributes towards a framing of college access for undocumented Latinx students as a process that is complex, contradictory, and underlined by racist nativism. Understandings of college access often depict this time as a linear and systematic experience. Few have considered

the intersecting contexts that shape college access and transition for students (Perna & Thomas, 2006), and even less consideration has been given to the underlying role of race and racism (Yosso, 2006) and immigration and racist nativism in higher education (Muñoz, 2013; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). Yet, these limited understandings of college access do not do justice to Students of Color and Immigrants of Color (Rendon et al., 2014; Rios-Aguilar & Marquez Kiyama, 2013). As college access policy, structures, and practices continue to uphold the legacy of racism and colonialism in the establishment of higher education in the U.S. (Wilder, 2014), it is necessary to understand how these systems of marginality underlie college access to undocumented Latinx students.

Implications

The findings of this work have implications for practice and policy. Critical understandings of the undocumented Latinx student experience are needed to disrupt the reproduction of racist nativist challenges and obstacles in their college access pathways. First, educational institutions should become spaces that welcome and protect undocumented students. K-12 school districts and higher education systems should become ‘sanctuary’ jurisdictions that refuse to collaborate with local, state, and federal immigration agencies. Second, institutional support must be accessible at secondary and post-secondary institutions. Institutional agents must be well-informed about



undocumented students' college application process and opportunities. Third, educators, faculty, and staff must be welcoming, supportive, and understanding of undocumented student experiences. Institutional agents must understand their impact when working with any marginalized community, particularly undocumented students, whose existence, and presence in the U.S. are challenged daily. This work involves critical reflection of positionalities and biases to disrupt internalized racist nativist thinking. Fourth, all college preparation activities should be grounded in the community's needs and assets, as students indicate the centrality of family in their college access experiences. Lastly, policy is needed to increase access and retention in higher education. While Deferred Action has afforded undocumented students several opportunities on the federal level, the program is not a permanent solution. The Trump administrations’ racist nativist stance continues to threaten the likelihood that programs such as DACA or comprehensive reform will gain enough legislative support, but make comprehensive reform more critical than ever.

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Education Equity for Undocumented Graduate Students and the Key Role of My Undocumented Life

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ABSTRACT

An estimated 454,000 undocumented students are enrolled in higher education, with ten percent of these students (45,400 students) studying in graduate school. While the field of higher education has worked to develop equitable policy and practice for undocumented students at the undergraduate level, a focus on graduate school is imperative. In this article, we reflect on what we have learned working with undocumented students in graduate school through our work with My Undocumented Life (MUL), a website with almost two million views that provides up to date information and resources for undocumented immigrants. We discuss the challenges that undocumented students face in pursuing graduate school, such as charting pathways to graduate school in isolation, seeking information specific to undocumented students, decisions around whether to disclose one's immigration status, and lack of financial aid opportunities. We also provide recommendations for universities to build programs specifically for undocumented students in graduate school.

Keywords: undocumented, graduate school, education equity, immigrants

There are 454,000 undocumented students in U.S. higher education institutions today with ten percent of these students (45,400) currently enrolled in graduate school (Feldblum, Hubbard, Lim, Penichet-Paul, & Siegel 2020). While there has been momentum across the field of higher education to improve undocumented students' pursuit of college, the next step of the graduate level has been largely unaddressed. A focus on graduate school is important because the educational landscape for access and support in graduate school has distinct differences from the undergraduate level. For example, while undergraduate level financial aid strives to be uniform across the admitted student population, the process in PhD programs is in part determined by individual professors' sources of funding for students.

To date, few research studies have studied the educational landscape for undocumented students at the graduate level (for exceptions, see Escudero, Freeman, Park & Pereira, 2019; Lara & Nava, 2018). To address this gap in the research literature and lack of programs in graduate school, we describe the impact of My Undocumented Life—one of the largest online platforms with almost two million views providing up-to-date information and resources to undocumented students, families, and the school personnel who work with them. Founded in 2011 by Carolina Valdivia, My Undocumented Life (MUL) provides a sense of community to undocumented students, and extensive programming and resources on numerous topics including health care, access to college, and graduate school. Since 2015, an author of this article, Rachel E. Freeman, has been the

largest contributor to the blog.

To contribute to the literature on undocumented students' pursuit of graduate school, we discuss what we have learned working with undocumented students through My Undocumented Life. In particular, we draw from the unique perspectives of undocumented students whose stories were featured on MUL in two series about graduate school, as well as from our work facilitating dozens of UndocuGrads Workshops and identifying scholarship opportunities open to undocumented graduate school students. We also draw from our experiences creating and facilitating an UndocuGrads National Network (with close to 1,000 members) and providing mentorship to prospective and current undocumented grad students across various institutions. By paying particular attention to the challenges and resources that undocumented students highlighted through their own writing and active participation in UndocuGrads Workshops, key steps that universities can take to better support undocumented students during this key transitional period in their educational journeys were identified.

Educational Landscape for Undocumented Graduate Students

While the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case Plyler v. Doe ensured undocumented children access to free K-12 public education, the issue of access to higher education at the undergraduate and graduate levels remained an open question (Olivas, 2012). Federal and state policies affect admission and financial aid access in higher education. At the federal level, undocumented students are banned from receiving financial aid. However, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) has improved access to higher education by providing students with more opportunities to work and drive to school (Gonzales, Roth, Brant, Lee, & Valdivia 2016). At the state level, some states allow undocumented students to pay the more affordable in-state tuition rates and receive state financial aid, whereas other states require students to pay the more expensive out of state tuition and ban students from enrolling (Dougherty, Nienhusser, & Vega, 2010; ULeadnet.org, 2020).

Access to graduate school often becomes distinct from the undergraduate level in terms of institutional policies and licensure laws (Escudero, Freeman, Park & Pereira, 2019; Qu, 2013). At the institutional level, admissions, financial aid, and support systems differ for undergraduate and graduate students. At the undergraduate level, the same institutional policies for admissions and financial aid often apply to undergraduate applicants. However, at the graduate level, individual departments can determine their own admissions and financial aid policies. Even within these departments, particular professors may offer differing amounts of financial aid to their

[1] DACA is an executive order announced by the Obama administration in 2012 that allows undocumented young adults who meet specific eligibility criteria to receive work authorization and a driver's license, and to have temporary relief from the threat of deportation. While the Trump administration continually threatened to end DACA, the program remains in place as of 2021 under President Biden's administration.

students. Funding structures are also complex because funding from private donors and foundations can have eligibility requirements on citizenship status. It is not uncommon for undocumented students to be admitted to graduate school, only to find out they are not eligible for the financial aid they thought they would receive.

Beyond issues of access, institutional support for both prospective and current graduate students is also critical. Support systems for undocumented students are often organized by the students themselves, with minimal support from the university (Sanchez & So, 2015). As a result of undocumented activists' ongoing efforts, several universities have established support programs for graduate students. For example, some universities have established a full-time staff position dedicated to working with the university's undocumented student population (Cisneros & Valdivia 2020), including graduate students.

Compounding these issues, state laws also restrict access to professions that require a license such as law, medicine, dentistry, teaching, and cosmetology. These licensure laws are important because they can impact graduate school students' trajectories into the profession, and they may influence graduate school programs' decisions to admit undocumented students (Escudero, Freeman, Park, & Pereira 2019; Qu, 2013). For example, some graduate schools may be concerned about admitting undocumented students if their state has not passed a licensure law for that profession.

Moreover, these licensure laws vary by state, and very few states have passed laws allowing access to professional licensure. Only two states, California and Nebraska, allow access to almost all professional licensures. A few states have passed licensure laws in regard to particular professions. For example, Florida, New York, and Wyoming currently offer access to the state's bar so undocumented law graduates can become licensed lawyers (Escudero, Freeman, Park, & Pereira 2019).

Review of the Research on Undocumented Students in Graduate School

Even though the landscape for access and institutional support for graduate school has important distinctions from the undergraduate level, the research literature has largely focused on undergrads. While this research has discussed the barriers that undocumented students face in college (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2016; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Suárez-Orozco, M. Teranishi, R., & Suárez-Orozco, C.), a focus on graduate school is important to uncover the unique barriers experienced by undocumented graduate school students. Recent studies find that undocumented graduate students are particularly concerned about funding and finding a support network (Escudero, 2020; Perez, 2009). In a study with undocumented students considering graduate school in STEM fields, education, social sciences, humanities, and the law, Lara and Nava

(2018) found that undocumented students relied on their peers and mentors for guidance and support in the graduate school process, and were motivated by social activism to promote equity for undocumented immigrants. Through the Immigrant Student Research Project, Escudero et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive study of undocumented graduate school studies. Drawing from 158 survey responses among immigrant and undocumented students in medical and law schools, the study revealed that undocumented students often draw on family savings to fund graduate school and often do not have the support of academic mentors.

Scholars in the medical field have discussed the importance of equity in medical school programs for undocumented students (Anaya, Del Rosario, & Hayes-Bautista, 2014; Kuczewski & Brubaker, 2014; Nakae, Marquez, Di Bartolo, & Rodriguez, 2017). Anaya et al. (2014), discuss barriers to medical school including receiving conflicting messages from the same institution whether undocumented students are eligible to apply. They also discuss the barrier of being ineligible for assistance with application fees from associations such as the Association of American Medical Colleges Fees Assistance Program. They suggest best practices such as providing accurate information about students' eligibility for admission and training staff to be sensitive to students' mental health needs. Kuczewski and Brubaker (2014) relatedly discuss the ethical imperative for medical schools to offer admission and financial aid to undocumented students. Moreover, Nakae, et al. (2017) discuss the positive impact of DACA on undocumented medical students' trajectories including the ability to work while in school. Researchers have also discussed access to law school and the profession. For example, Qu (2013) discusses the legal implications of passing equitable laws that allow undocumented immigrants access to the bar. Moreover, in a study with 33 DACA eligible law school students Muñiz, et al. (2018) found that students were uneasy about Trump's rescission of DACA but were still determined to pursue careers in the legal field. Moreover, participants discussed the important role of their families in supporting their studies, and how they tried to give back to their families by providing information they had learned in law school. These studies in the education, medical, and legal fields provide insight into the experiences of undocumented students in their pursuit of graduate school.

Challenges Pursuing Graduate School

Through our work with undocumented graduate school students, several challenges that undocumented students confront in their pursuit of a graduate degree were identified. In this section, three of these challenges will be explored. Lastly, the role of My Undocumented Life in supporting students' navigation of barriers applying and transitioning to graduate school will be discussed.

At My Undocumented Life, we have worked with hundreds of undocumented students in their pursuit of graduate school for almost ten years. We conducted content analysis of undocumented students' experiences with graduate school from five sources of information.

First, we gathered information from students' testimonials and reflections in a series of posts over the years titled "UndocuGrads," that focuses on the experiences of about 20 undocumented graduate students and their advice to prospective students. Contributors to the series enrolled in graduate programs in multiple states including Connecticut, Texas, and California; and in diverse fields such as nursing, medicine, sociology, education, political science, and engineering.

Second, we reflect on our experiences maintaining the UndocuGrads National Network (co-created in 2015 by Carolina and Diana Valdivia), which provides a support community, networking opportunities, and resources to more than 1,000 undocumented graduate students across the country.

Third, we draw from UndocuGrads Workshops Carolina Valdivia co-facilitated with fellow undocumented graduate students since 2014. The workshops offered specific advice to undocumented students applying to graduate school, as well as information about the graduate school application process, fellowship/scholarship opportunities, and more. The workshops, whether held virtually or in-person, provided great opportunities for former, current, and prospective undocumented graduate students to connect and share information, advice, and key resources. Different campuses have hosted these workshops including California State University Northridge, San Diego State University, and University of California San Diego. Workshop attendees were also encouraged to maintain contact with workshop facilitators who provide ongoing mentorship, encouragement, and support to undocumented students as they work on their graduate school applications.

Fourth, we reflect on information gathered by our MUL team on funding opportunities available to undocumented graduate students. Finally, our discussion stems from our experiences providing one-on-one mentorship to dozens of prospective and current undocumented graduate students across various institutions.

From our analysis of the data through our work at MUL, we find that undocumented students often chart pathways to graduate school in isolation and identify support for undocumented students from graduate schools on their own. While research finds that undocumented students' families are often supportive in their pursuit of higher education (Cuevas, 2019; Nienhusser & Oshio, 2020), the experience of being a first-generation student can make it challenging to navigate graduate school. This process is further complicated by having to secure financial help and making important decisions around disclosure.

Charting Pathways to Graduate School in Isolation

As undocumented students advance in their higher education trajectory, we find they are often the only ones within their immediate network of family and friends applying to and attending graduate school. The experience of being a first-generation graduate student is further complicated for undocumented young adults who must navigate a complicated labyrinth of immigration-related policies and practices at the federal, state, local, and institutional level. For example, many students we work with encounter barriers to entrance exams such as the GRE. To take the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), undocumented students are required to have a passport. In some cases, undocumented students may miss this requirement under the assumption that other forms of government identification (e.g., state-issued driver's license) may be acceptable. Some students may not be able to receive a passport on time for the test or at all (e.g., in the event a student is in deportation proceedings or does not have access to their birth certificate which is required to obtain a passport).

Without personally knowing an undocumented student in graduate school who can provide guidance and support, it can be difficult for undocumented students to know what to expect during the application process, including information about the GRE and its identification requirements for undocumented students.

Once enrolled, undocumented graduate students may continue to struggle with the reality of "being the only one" in their graduate degree program. Karla, who shared her advice about pursuing a law degree on MUL, explained:

> *My first semester of law school created a period of deep regret, loneliness, and restlessness like I had never experienced. Many people had prepared me for law school; giving me practical advice on outlines, exam preparation, and time management. Although much of this advice kept me afloat throughout the semester, no one discussed seeking counseling to cope with stress or anxiety.* ***My second piece of advice for future undocumented law students: know that mental health resources, including counseling sessions, are available for free or at a nominal cost at most universities.*** *A legal career is a stressful one, and it's wise to start good mental health habits as soon as you can. It wasn't so much law school reading assignments that created stressors for me but sadly, the shock of being in a space that isn't particularly welcoming for students of color. I have owned my status as an undocumented person since receiving DACA in 2012 and have been organizing for immigrant rights since then, sharing inclusive spaces with queer immigrants and undocumented people of color. But in law school, I was the only person of color in one of my classes and I overheard conversations defending symbols of white supremacy and the "religious freedom" to deny same-sex couples the right to marry who they love. All the while, I saw my friends being spit on and assaulted in the news as they organized rallies against Donald Trump and his bigotry.*
> (Karla, 2016).

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Karla described the stressors of being the only student of color in her classes, a reality exacerbated by the school and national climate particularly at the time of the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. These circumstances can negatively affect students' emotional well-being and their participation at school. As Karla noted, "I went from being an outspoken advocate for myself and others to feeling disempowered as I sat in my classes (Karla, 2016)." Karla describes how the climate of law school can feel oppressive and exclusionary for students of color.

"When undocumented students decide to apply to graduate school, we find they are also confronted with the task of determining which programs are "undocu-friendly"—a term commonly used to refer to the level of information, resources, and support that are available for undocumented students."

Challenges Seeking Information Specific to Undocumented Students

When undocumented students decide to apply to graduate school, we find they are also confronted with the task of determining which programs are "undocu-friendly"—a term commonly used to refer to the level of information, resources, and support that are available for undocumented students. At this stage, we find students often ask: Does the school or program provide application fee waivers for undocumented students? What type of financial assistance is available for undocumented graduate students once enrolled? Are undocumented graduate students (with or without DACA) able to obtain teaching and research assistantships? Have any undocumented graduate students successfully completed the program before? Are faculty and staff members aware of the unique challenges that confront undocumented students?

Because few graduate programs make information about admissions and financial aid specific to undocumented students readily accessible on their websites, students largely have to make individual inquiries to each program of interest. When inquiries are made, students are often provided misinformation. This underscores the important role of campus staff and faculty who focus on building a sense of trust with undocumented students and their families (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

Juan describes the importance of continuing to look for the right person he can trust who can provide information and resources specific to undocumented students. He states:

Call the school you wish to apply to. I don't mean call once, get a generic answer, and move along. Call as many times as you can, ask for different people, ask them all the questions you need to ask.

Tweet and Facebook the school. Oftentimes, I see students who get discouraged because they face roadblocks by school personnel who do not have the proper knowledge on immigration related issues, hence, why they default on shutting down your inquiries. Someone in the Admissions office for the department you are applying to has the answers, it is just a matter of knocking on the right door.

Decisions to Disclose or Conceal One's Immigration Status

During the application process, we find that prospective undocumented graduate students are also making decisions about whether to disclose their immigration status. The issue of disclosure is key as deciding to disclose one's status can open opportunities for undocumented students that would have not otherwise been accessible (Patler, 2018). For example, although common for graduate schools to limit application fee waivers to those with legal immigration status, exemptions are granted. This in turn not only helps students financially, but also communicates to them the program may have a culture of support for undocumented students. At the same time, disclosure can expose students to school personnel who are discriminatory, misinformed, and/or discouraging—a theme that is widely documented in the literature with respect to undocumented college students (Gonzales, 2015, Negrón-Gonzales, 2017), but which we know much less about with respect to graduate school. Since undocumented students often confront discriminatory school personnel, research speaks to the importance of trainings (often called UndocuAlly tainings) to prepare staff to work with undocumented students (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

Within the UndocuGrads National Network, prospective undocumented graduate students frequently ask for advice regarding whether to disclose or conceal their immigration status in their applications. Some students, for example, wondered how their immigration status may affect their ability to receive institutional funding opportunities and thus felt compelled to disclose their status. However, the fear the receiving person such as a recruitment/admissions officer or faculty member, may respond negatively, was of great concern for students.

Financial Challenges

Across the UndocuGrads Workshops, facilitated over the years, the main concern for students is the lack of financial aid opportunities for undocumented graduate school students. While students, regardless of their immigration status, may be encouraged to apply to multiple programs, undocumented students cannot afford the high application costs. As previously mentioned, graduate school application fee waivers are largely limited to students who have legal immigration status—leaving undocumented students who are from predominantly low-income families to find other means of paying for their applications. Undocumented students may in turn rely on a wide range of fundraising efforts, but not all students have access to a support network who can help spread the word about a

fundraiser and contribute, help to organize fundraising campaigns (online or offline), nor the ability to publicly share their story to garner support because of privacy and safety concerns. The lack of financial assistance available during the application process can limit the number of programs students apply to.

Once enrolled, we find that undocumented graduate students continue to experience significant financial challenges. Unlike their documented peers, undocumented graduate students may not be able to work as teaching, graduate, or research assistants without a work permit. DACA has undoubtedly expanded undocumented young adults' work and education-related opportunities (Gonzales et al., 2016; Patler & Cabrera, 2015; Wong & Valdivia, 2014). DACAmented graduate students, for example, may now be able to accept funding packages that include teaching assistantships. And yet, financial barriers remain for undocumented graduate students with or without DACA. Furthermore, students describe how state policy contexts impact access to affordable tuition rates and opportunities for financial aid. While some state policies, for example in California, expanded access to in-state tuition and financial aid, students in other states, such as Georgia, describe the challenges of navigating state policies that require them to pay the more expensive out-of-state tuition.

First and foremost, undocumented graduate students without DACA are still largely unable to take on paid opportunities to fund their graduate studies. While there are exceptions, such as when graduate programs may allow students to serve as research assistants without formal wages, and instead receive an honorarium or scholarship, these approaches are not the standard and often depended on how supportive and understanding the faculty, graduate program, and institution were of the challenges confronting undocumented students. Indeed, during one-on-one conversations with prospective undocumented graduate students, they discussed difficulties for unDACAmented students to secure financial assistance, especially outside of private institutions. Second, even among students who have access to DACA, growing uncertainty about the future of the program is a source of constant anxiety and stress (Patler & Pirtle, 2019; Valdivia, 2020). During our most recent UndocuGrads Workshops, attendees have expressed growing concerns about pursuing graduate school because DACA may come to an end. They have shared they may need to work instead while they have access to DACA or a work permit in order to save money in case the program is terminated. Third, while at MUL we identified several unique funding opportunities available to undocumented graduate students.

However, it is a fraction of fellowship and scholarship opportunities available for U.S. citizen graduate students. Fourth, a few of the most prominent fellowship opportunities open to undocumented graduate students are limited to only those who have access to

DACA, placing graduate students who do not have DACA at a further disadvantage.

The Role of My Undocumented Life

To address these barriers, My Undocumented Life focuses on building a sense of community for undocumented students interested in and currently enrolled in graduate school. Indeed, since its founding in 2011, the goal of MUL has been to share key pieces of advice and resources with fellow undocumented students so that they do not have to confront similar challenges on their own. MUL has expanded its work by facilitating UndocuGrads workshops to provide an opportunity to connect offline, in-person, with undocumented students interested in learning about graduate school. The workshops begin with a 30-45 minute presentation on the application process, fee waivers, tuition costs, and financial resources. The second part of the workshop features a Q&A segment. Over the years, we have found the Q & A portion of the workshops allows participants to share their concerns and fears about graduate school, and fosters a sense of community. Attendees are encouraged to follow up with panelists if any other questions or concerns arise. The goal of the workshops is to remind undocumented students that they are not alone in this journey and that there are fellow undocumented students who have successfully navigated graduate school and are here to help.

Relatedly, the goal of the UndocuGrads National Network (UGNN) has been to provide a constant and accessible source of support and a sense of community for undocumented students navigating graduate school. As of November 2020, UGNN has over 1,000 network members. The network exists as a private Facebook group and members can connect with others, share their experience or advice, pose questions, or share resources. We find that the network helps to build connections among prospective, current, and former undocumented graduate students as it invites members to share what field(s) they are interested in or what institution they are studying in or applying to. Given that few programs exist for undocumented students specifically pursuing graduate school, My Undocumented Life has been an important community and resource for undocumented students in their pursuit of graduate school.

Institutional Recommendations

Universities can take numerous steps to build institutional support for undocumented students pursuing graduate programs. In this section, we discuss recommendations for universities including supporting the development of community for undocumented students, building funding structures, and making the application process more undocu-friendly.

Connect Students With Each Other

As evidenced in available literature (Muñiz, et al., 2018) and our experiences working with

students at MUL, peer networks have been essential to supporting students in their pursuit of graduate school. To help foster these peer networks, universities can support the development of workshops, panels, and information sessions specific to undocumented students in graduate school. For example, UC San Diego, UC Merced and the UndocuScholars Project at UCLA have hosted conferences specifically for undocumented students interested in graduate school.

Support Student-Led Organizations

In addition to fostering the development of peer networks, universities can also support a sense of community by providing resources to undocumented student-led organizations in graduate school. Student organizations are key to developing a sense of community as students provide peer mentorship and guidance for each other. For example, UndocuNurses at UCLA is a student organization where students at UCLA's nursing school provide community and guidance to undocumented undergraduate students interested in nursing school. Universities can support student organizations by providing a robust budget to run their programs, space for students to meet, and faculty and staff advisers.

Develop Task Forces

Universities can also facilitate community by building task forces of administrators, faculty, and students to build institutional support for undocumented graduate students. Many colleges and universities across the country have been working with these task forces to build institutional support, such as California State University Dominguez Hills in California and Salt Lake Community College in Utah[2]. The taskforces have also played a key role in developing campus wide trainings (often known as UndocuAlly trainings) that help equip staff and faculty to be ready to support undocumented students.

Establish Staff Positions and Undocumented Student Resource Centers

Examples of best practices that task forces can prioritize are institutionalizing a full-time staff solely with undocumented students and establishing an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC). USRCs are physical spaces on campus that provide a sense of community and resources specific to undocumented students. Studies find that USRCs build support for undocumented students because staff have expertise in working with undocumented students and they are seen as safe places (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). Furthermore, research speaks to the important role of staff in building trust with their undocumented students and their families (Nienhusser & Espino, 2017). With respect to graduate school support, Diana Valdivia (former Director of the USRC at the University of California, Santa Barbara), for example, created the UndocuGrad Prep Program. This cohort model program provides support with application materials for graduate school and opportunities to learn

[2] Immigrants Rising is a non-profit organization that provides brochures and recorded webinars with more specific information about how to develop a task force.

from undocumented students currently in graduate school. While many USRCs provide programming to undergrads, universities can provide additional funding to USRCs so these centers can build their programs for graduate students.

Build Partnerships with Nonprofit Organizations

Universities can also strengthen institutional support by building partnerships with community-based and non-profit organizations. Numerous organizations work with undocumented students in their pursuit of graduate school and professional careers. For example, Pre-Health Dreamers works with undocumented students as they pursue careers in the medical fields. Another example is the Undocumented Filmmakers Collective, an organization led by undocumented immigrants in the filmmaking industry. Partnering with non-profit organizations can help build equity for undocumented students in graduate school (Chen & Rhoads, 2016).

Strengthen Funding Structures

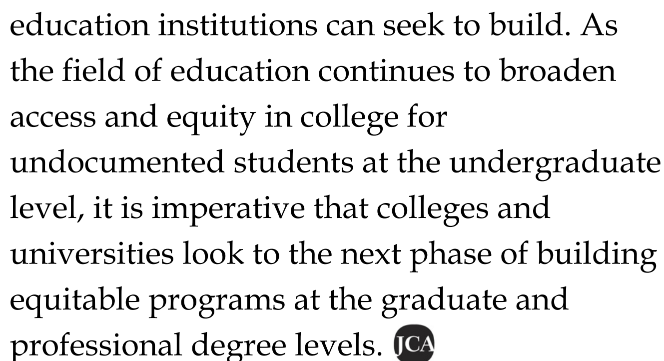
Lack of access to funding for graduate school is often a restrictive barrier that prevents undocumented students from enrolling in graduate school (Escudero et al., 2019). To ameliorate this barrier, universities can allocate funds to provide fellowships and scholarships to undocumented students. The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration has published guides regarding building funding for undocumented students in graduate school (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020). Furthermore, universities can collaborate with foundations that provide funding to graduate students to ensure fellowships are open to undocumented students with or without DACA. Even though many foundations require applicants to be U.S. citizens or permanent residents, some foundations such as the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship have made their fellowships open to undocumented students. Universities can also provide work opportunities for undocumented students such as teaching assistant positions and graduate student researcher positions.

Demystifying the Application Process

Universities can also build equity by providing more guidance with the application process. We recommend universities create and enhance webpages on their university's website with information specific to undocumented students applying to their programs. For example, the University of Washington and the Stritch School of Medicine at Loyola University Chicago have created websites with helpful information specific to applying to their graduate programs as an undocumented student.

Conclusion

This article's focus on education equity for undocumented students in graduate school seeks to address a critical gap in the research literature. Through our discussion of our work with My Undocumented Life, we note the key barriers in the graduate school landscape and important best practices higher



education institutions can seek to build. As the field of education continues to broaden access and equity in college for undocumented students at the undergraduate level, it is imperative that colleges and universities look to the next phase of building equitable programs at the graduate and professional degree levels.

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“They’re in the Shadows”: School Counselors Share the Lived Experiences of Latino/a Undocumented Students

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ABSTRACT

Latino/a undocumented students are among the population of students who are in danger of not graduating or pursuing college due to the unique set of challenges they face navigating education in the U.S. This study aims to understand undocumented students' experiences and the factors that impede them from furthering their education. As professionals in education, school counselors can offer a unique perspective on the barriers that college-bound undocumented students face when pursuing higher education. Using a phenomenological approach, data was gathered from counselors (N=14) across 10 school districts. The findings revealed undocumented students are faced with a myriad of challenges, socio-emotionally, academically, and career-wise, as they prepare to transition from high school to college.

Keywords: undocumented student, student experiences, barriers to higher education, school counseling, high school, college access, educational equity, minority students

There are approximately 2.1 million undocumented immigrant children in the United States (Zong et al., 2019). Of those, nearly 100,000 undocumented students graduate high school yearly (Zong & Batalova, 2019). According to the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, 2020) report that 95% of undocumented immigrants that are active Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients identify as Latino/a. As these students navigate the U.S. educational system without legal status, they experience numerous challenges that limit their opportunities to further their education (Benuto et al., 2018; Kam et al., 2019; Kleyn et al., 2018; Lauby, 2017; Perez et al., 2010). Warren (2015) states that undocumented students are less likely to graduate high school (54%) when compared to U.S-born students (79%). Additionally, historically in the U.S., Latino/a students have lower high school and college graduation rates than other ethnicities and races (Krogstad, 2016). These findings warrant extensive research to understand the barriers undocumented students face when pursuing their educational aspirations.

Recently, several scholars have begun to address undocumented students’ experiences and the specific challenges that undocumented students face (Benuto et al., 2018; Kleyn, et al., 2018; Lauby, 2017; Sahay et al., 2016; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). However, the majority of these studies have focused on the perspectives of the students themselves. Given the critical role of school counselors in supporting students’ academic success (American School Counseling Association

[ASCA], 2019a), counselors can provide an equally important perspective as the personnel in the trenches with their students. In the present study, school counselors provide knowledge as trained educators who focus on academic, emotional, career and post -secondary success. Counselors offer a unique perspective as they are professionally equipped to criticize, analyze, and assess critical issues that impede access to higher education.

Literature Review

The Socioemotional Experience of Undocumented Students

Undocumented students suffer from socio-emotional obstacles that may result in depression, anxiety, fear, depression, and marginalization (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Kleyn et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2010; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Terriquez, 2014; Torres-Olave et al., 2020). The fear due to deportation is a common stressor among undocumented students (Benuto et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2010; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Kleyn et al., 2018; Nienhusser, 2013; Terriquez, 2014). The executive order of 2012 (DACA) provided administrative relief to childhood arrivals with a 2-year deferment from deportation and eligibility to work. DACA offered undocumented students financial opportunities and appeased fears of deportation (Benuto et al., 2018; Sahay et al., 2016; Terriquez, 2014). However, in 2017, the cancellation of DACA has restricted the eligibility of students who would otherwise be at the qualifying age to apply for its benefits. This fear of deportation has put pressure on students to not disclose their status and live with the anxiety of being "outed" and unaccepted by peers or staff. This fear may be associated with the shame from incessantly being referred to in disparaging terms such as "illegal" or "aliens." Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are frequently generalized in the media with descriptions such as "job thieves," "social threats," or "criminals." (Benuto et al., 2018; Kleyn et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2010). These stereotypes propagate the desire from undocumented immigrants to remain hidden to avoid being "discovered." Many of these stereotypes lead to further discrimination, such as racism and violence. (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014; Shi et al., 2018). Negative experiences at school refrain students from disclosing details about their immigration status with school personnel, like school counselors, due to the fear of exclusion and negative repercussions (Gonzales, 2010; Nienhusser, 2013). As these students prepare to transition from high into adulthood or "illegality," they may feel more doubt and anxiety about furthering their education (Gonzales, 2010; Murillo, 2017).

Undocumented Students and the Academic Achievement Gap

Financial barriers can impact enrolling in higher education (Sahay et al., 2016). Since the majority of undocumented families are of lower socioeconomic status (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Lauby,

2017), they must have a small enough expected family contribution (EFC) to qualify for financial aid offered through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, a student who is not a legalized citizen is not allowed to apply for FAFSA. Undocumented students express that these financial limitations leave them feeling "locked out" of the opportunities that make a college degree possible (Murillo, 2017; Gonzales, 2010; Terriquez, 2014). These students' financial strain limits their opportunities to further their education and becomes another psychological, social, and emotional burden to undocumented students.

As undocumented students struggle to assimilate to a new country, they face the difficulty of immersing themselves in a new language (Atkins et al., 2017; Perez et al., 2009). Crawford and Valle (2016) noted the importance of acquiring the English language regarding its influence on student preparedness for the academic content delivered. As students move forward, undocumented families often lack the social and cultural capital that helps students become successful in secondary school contexts (Benuto et al., 2018; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Gonzales, 2010; Lauby, 2017). Since most undocumented students are first-generation, not having access to such resources, guidance, and direction from family members can also influence academic perseverance.

The Obstacles of Career Attainment for Undocumented Students

Federal laws play a role in how challenging it is for undocumented students to pursue a career. In the U.S., it is a federal requirement to show documentation authorizing an individual to be employed (Gonzales, 2010). When President Obama signed DACA into place, students could work while attending college or working with their degree. However, in 2017, after the Trump administration rescinded DACA, their administration pressured Congress to "legalize DACA." Still, as of yet, there have not been any laws or policies set in place. In 2018, the federal court ordered the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) to resume processing (two-year) renewals of DACA, although solely for existing recipients (USCIS, 2019). This left incoming undocumented students ineligible to apply, as they needed to be 16 years old to apply for the first time. The way the policy currently stands, it is probable that undocumented students graduating high school will be faced with the decision to attend college despite the inability to work to help offset the costs and without certainty that they will be able to work in their career or some other bleak alternative.

The Role of the School Counselor

The literature has emphasized the importance of building relationships with school personnel for assisting undocumented students' transition to college (Lauby, 2017; Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014; Sibley & Brabeck,

2017; Torres-Olave et al., 2020). Undocumented students who reported having formed trusting relationships with school personnel who can guide their academic process were associated with student success (Gonzales, 2010). These relationships were a key component for students to get guidance and resources (Crawford & Valle, 2016) to navigate transitioning to college (Kleyn et al., 2018; Lauby, 2017). Perez et al. (2010) suggest that school professionals should recognize the challenges that undocumented students face in their educational experience. School counselors are often referred to as the institutional "gatekeepers" to the futures of undocumented students due to the ability to aid students transition to college (Irizarry, 2012; Kleyn et al., 2018). Furthermore, school counselors have the responsibility of maximizing students' opportunities for academic success through meeting student needs in the socioemotional, academic, and career realms (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors must be prepared to tackle the difficulties undocumented students go through by being aware of their experiences and the factors that hinder their college aspirations (Chen et al., 2010; Murillo, 2017).

The Purpose of the Study

The narratives that undocumented students have shared in the past are imperative in understanding their challenges when pursuing higher education. School counselors' perspectives offer a new approach to how undocumented students' experiences can be examined. The purpose of this qualitative study is to (a) describe how school counselors understand the experiences of college-bound undocumented students and (b) to explore and analyze the challenges that undocumented students face as they contemplate attending college.
A phenomenological approach was utilized to understand each counselor's perception of undocumented students' challenges (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The following research question guided this study: What academic, socio-emotional, and career challenges have school counselors witnessed among undocumented Latino/a students as they begin to transition from high school to college?

Methodology

Participants

The study included six male and eight female (N=14) high school counselors throughout a rural area of the Central Valley in California. As part of purposeful sampling, 34 recruitment emails were sent. Of those, eight counselors corresponded and agreed to participate. Six more counselors were recruited through the use of snowball sampling. Counselors who were chosen to partake in the study had more than two years of experience in the school counseling field, were current high school counselors, and identified as a Latino/a. This criterion was included because of their positionality to answer culturally relevant questions and their

experiences as Latino/a students. Counselors were interviewed from 10 school districts and 11 school sites. The majority of counselors (64.3%) were located in rural areas. The schools with the least number of Latino/a students were 63.6% and 39.8%, and the other 12 schools ranged from 70.6% to 97.6%. (Education Data Partnership, 2019).

Procedure and Data Collection

Following authorization from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), recruitment for school counselors who fit the inclusion criteria began. After each participant confirmed their participation, they chose the time and place that the interview would take place. School counselors were interviewed and presented with an informed consent form that outlined their voluntary participation. During the interview, a semi-structured guideline was used, with open-ended and probing questions. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded, transcribed, and pseudonyms were used to protect each counselor's identity. The questions asked focused on undocumented students' challenges within the educational system that impede college access.

Data Analysis

The research used Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach as the outline for data analysis. Transcripts were read several times to understand how school counselors perceive the lived experience of undocumented Latino/a students. After reflecting on the participant's responses, the following procedure was executed: (1) phenomenological reduction, setting all prejudgments aside and assuring that the external object, the act of consciousness, the experience, and the relationship between the phenomenon and the self are described (2) horizontalization by listing significant statements relevant to the experience, giving them equivalent value; (3) clustered significant statements into common categories; (4) developed individual textural descriptions describing each of the participants' experience; (5) individual structural descriptions were written, the textural descriptions were combined with imaginative variation to construct how the experience occurred and (6) composite individual structural descriptions were written. Lastly, the texture and structure descriptions of all participants were combined to expression that "exemplifies the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (p. 121).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Regarding the authenticity of the phenomenon being studied, the researchers carried out epoché (Moustakas, 1994) to set aside preconceived notions. The researchers bracketed their experiences with both the school system and undocumented students. Additionally, acknowledging biases (Creswell, 2007) was achieved through reflective journaling and consideration of its presence in research. Triangulation of sources (Creswell, 2007) was utilized when gathering data. The school locations assured the

information acquired would include different perspectives from counselors in smaller and larger districts. Additionally, a member check was conducted electronically. Counselors were contacted to verify the study's themes and results with the ability to offer a different perspective if the results did not accurately represent what they had stated. A track record of the data was developed that resulted in eight hours of audio, nearly sixty-five pages of qualitative data, and roughly one-hundred pages of data analysis.

Results

The present study's findings shed light on school counselors' perspectives on undocumented students' socio-emotional, academic, and career-related barriers while transitioning from high school to college. The data analysis resulted in four overarching themes and twelve subthemes presented (see Table 1).

Theme 1: Socio-Emotional Challenges
Study participants indicated undocumented students deal with socio-emotional challenges that their documented counterparts do not face. Ten counselors revealed how the threat of deportation caused fear, anxiety, and stress among undocumented students. Students shared that they were frightened that they or their family could be obligated to leave the country at any instance. Ms. Cardenas shares what one student had disclosed to her:

He's afraid every time his parents have to drive. He's afraid that once parents go to work, that [ICE] might show up there. He's afraid since he's the oldest boy that if something happens, they'll take him too, and his younger siblings.

The uncertainty of being separated from their family, coupled with not knowing if or when they will be deported, causes students to be distraught. Six counselors stated their students confided they were terrified that ICE would show up at school and take them away. Additionally, seven counselors shared that it was difficult for students to concentrate at school with fear that they would not find their parents when they arrived home. Additionally, the fear of deportation caused students to be careful about whom they disclosed their status to. Undocumented students shared that being outed would make them feel like "they're being put on blast." The anxiety of being exposed causes undocumented students to become withdrawn, refuse to have conversations, and fear participating in events. Some students are more hesitant to ask for help, sometimes even embarrassed. Eleven counselors reported that the fear of being outed discouraged students from sharing their status with them. Consequently, it became more difficult to identify them. Many participants indicated they did not find out students were undocumented until they were applying for college or financial aid.

Eleven counselors believed the socio-political climate affected the well-being of undocumented students. During this time,

Table 1.
The Experiences of Undocumented Students Told by School Counselors

Theme	Sub-themes	Descriptive Codes
Socio-Emotional	Threat of Deportation	Fear of being deported Fear of family being deported Causes fear, anxiety, and stress
	Fear of Identification	Fear of being outed as undocumented Do not like to share their status Want to remain hidden Difficulty identifying students
	Socio-Political Climate	Presidential Administration Political Beliefs Fear of the future/new laws being made
	Discrimination	Perceived discrimination from peers Teacher comments/political views
	Fear to Apply to college/ financial aid	Fear of giving information Don’t know how they will pay Afraid of attending
Academic	Students are more driven	Work a little harder Grateful of education in the U.S.
	Losing motivation	Making decisions about college Feeling hopeless Wanting to leave to home country
	Language Barrier	Newcomers learning the language Have difficulty in classes Difficulty communication
	Resources	Students are not aware Counselors’ lack resources
Career	Difficulty Getting Careers	Difficult without work authorization Students are discouraged Counselors are optimistic about career
Counselor’s Perception on School Environment	School is a Safe Place	Students are safe to disclose Conversations about status can be had
	School is not doing enough	School afraid to host events School doesn’t outreach Unwelcoming

negative comments were covered extensively by the media, resulting in uneasiness and fear for their future. Students revealed to their counselors that they felt unwelcome, unsafe, and like they had to "fight to be in this country." Ms. Guzman shared an interaction she had two nights before they had announced the new 2016 president:

We finished our presentation, our grade level presentation in the fall, and one of our students said he was afraid. He was like, 'Man, what's going to happen to all of us? I'm afraid.' And then he just walked out.

Furthermore, six counselors admitted they had seen a rise in what undocumented students reported as discrimination. Ms. Castillo spoke of how undocumented students came to her upset about the negative perspective shared about immigrants during current event debates in class. Mr. Perez shared the discrimination his student had experienced from a teacher who wanted her to take a paid tutoring job:

I knew the student was [undocumented] and was afraid to tell this teacher that they couldn't work. Interestingly enough, this teacher had voiced some opinions before on immigrants. It was interesting to see how much this teacher respected this student and how much this teacher wanted the student to have this job. Yet, this teacher had no idea that some of the things he had said before was impacting the student.

A few counselors revealed that students complained about their teachers being discriminatory or prejudice by sharing their political views against immigrants in the classroom. Others came forward and shared that teachers did not correct the use of discriminatory language towards undocumented people from other students. Mr. Perez also shared that he had many students come into his office saddened by comments such as, "illegals need to go back to their country" expressed by their friends unaware of their status. Students who faced discrimination reported to their counselors feeling depressed, anxious, and feared their information will be used against them.

Theme 2: Academic Barriers

School counselors reported the challenges that affect the academic achievement of undocumented students. Half of the counselors described undocumented students as students who take more initiative. Students shared that they were grateful to have the opportunity to study in the U.S. However, eight counselors mentioned that few students keep this energy. Undocumented students were reported as likely to lose motivation when they have to make decisions about college. As Mr. Medina shared about one student:

He was an outstanding kid academically, but something happened, where I don't know whom he talked to, but he just lost hope. He applied to schools, got accepted, but he didn't show up to any of them. He ended up working in the field for two years, picking grapes.

Counselors reported that although the opportunities and resources are there, thinking about going to college can be so overwhelming that students lose hope. Counselors explained when students feel this way, they refuse to talk about college or their future; some even start to question if graduating high school is worth it. Students felt they would be better off returning to their home country and completing their degree there or attempting to apply for a visa to get an education in the U.S.

Students also disclosed they did not feel comfortable applying to college or financial aid. Counselors communicated that students feared releasing personal information on applications because it could affect their status or lead to deportation. Oher students revealed they believed their status might be affected if they accepted any form of financial aid. Students avoided applying to college because they were stressed that they would be unable to fund their schooling. They also shared their families would not be capable of paying for college if accepted, and scholarships often required social security numbers. Additionally, the Spanish-English language barrier is another factor that counselors believed could influence undocumented students academically. Mainly, counselors focused on newly arriving students expected to take their classes while simultaneously learning English. Counselors stated that students in this position have lower grades.

Another common factor that counselors highlighted was students' unawareness of resources. Counselors reported that undocumented students often knew very little of their opportunities or had no idea how to apply. Four counselors also divulged that they, or their schools, lacked the proper resources to give their students. Some counselors did not know how to provide resources to their students, while others forwarded them to experts who could help them apply to college, reduced-tuition forms, or financial aid.

Theme 3: Career Attainment Difficulties

When school counselors were asked about undocumented students' career options, five answered that students should not be limited and could pursue any career. When counselors were reminded of DACA's current state, some counselors were taken aback later admitted that not having work authorization would prove challenging for undocumented students. The other nine counselors reported that work opportunities were "limited" or "difficult." A few counselors shared that although they hated to admit it, undocumented students would probably have to "start their own business" or work "under the table" or "in the fields." The majority of counselors kept an optimistic attitude, stating that they encourage their students because their status and laws may change, or an employer can sponsor them for a visa. Despite the counselor's optimism, they are often met with resistance from students. The majority of counselors recounted their

students felt their career options were limited, asking, "what if nothing is done in Congress to bring us out of the shadows?" Students felt their job prospects were minimal without work authorization. Students feared what the future held for DACA and laws that would prevent them from working.

Theme 4: Counselors’ Perspectives on School Environment

The majority of school counselors perceived their school environment to be "open-minded," "safe," and "easy to have conversations" with undocumented students about their status and their educational attainment. Most counselors believed their school did an excellent job making their undocumented students feel welcome and secure. Conversely, five counselors indicated that their schools should foster conversations, coordinate outreach to undocumented students and their families, and be more welcoming and open about helping undocumented students. As Ms. Deleon shared, “We don't promote any opportunities [at our school] for [undocumented] kids.” Mr. Ramirez also stated, “I can't say that I have seen a movement where we’re having rallies or assemblies, as a campus, for students [can get information.” Some counselors shared they had seen unsupportive staff as well as a lack of administrative support at their schools. Mr. Hernandez spoke of how he experienced opposition when trying to advocate for his undocumented students at his school, “it's a lot of the you know, what's the potential backlash that will get with hosting something [related to being undocumented] here. I don't think that we’re where we should be as far as making these students feel welcome."

Discussion

School counselors must be aware of how undocumented students' experiences can affect access to college for undocumented students. The findings of this study substantiate previous research indicating undocumented students face a plethora of challenges when transitioning from high school to college (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Gonzales, 2010). First, participants shared how the threat of deportation caused much fear, anxiety, and stress among students. Deportation could mean students would be forcefully removed from the life they have grown accustomed to in the U.S. Additionally, the emotional change seen in students due to the socio-political climate is not surprising considering the negative comments made during the Trump presidency about Latino/a immigrants. The extensive coverage of these statements in the media propagated the imminence of deportation. Counselors observed that students avoided disclosing the details of their unauthorized status because they feared the consequences of being outed (Perez et al.,2010; Shi et al., 2018). Students who did not disclose were less likely to ask for help, thus making it difficult for them to access resources and the guidance needed to pursue higher education. Additionally, counselors

reported students experiencing stigmatization from other students and teachers at school. School counselors are meant to be at the forefront of assisting students to achieve their academic goals; however, students marginalized by school personnel can confirm students' beliefs that they must remain invisible. These experiences also deter students from asking college-related questions proving to be another barrier to higher education.

Moreover, undocumented students were reported by counselors to have more initiative for getting good grades and completing school when compared to other students. This initiative is attributed to undocumented students wanting to maximize their educational opportunities in the U.S. However, as students lost motivation, grades dropped, and they lost interest in continuing to college—at times, even high school. Counselors stated their undocumented students doubted being able to attend or complete higher education and would lose motivation for pursuing college. Furthermore, students were reported by counselors to struggle with learning the English language, which is consistent with previous literature (Perez et al., 2009). Although this challenge applies primarily to newcomers, adverse outcomes include poor grades, lower GPA and recovery courses. This can be an academic setback when students apply for college or scholarships based on meritocracy.

"School counselors must consider how status can affect college access, particularly financial barriers, fear of releasing information, and the fear of attending a higher education institution."

School counselors must consider how status can affect college access, particularly financial barriers, fear of releasing information, and the fear of attending a higher education institution. Undocumented families usually are low income, leaving unrelated financial aid costs such as tuition, textbooks, transportation, and other personal expenditures to be covered by students and their families (Murillo, 2017; Sahay et al., 2016). Counselors also indicated students were concerned personal information entered in applications may be released to entities who may use it against them. This fear can discourage students from pursuing a college degree, limiting their chances of academic success.

As students transition to college, they require help and guidance from their counselors. Undocumented students were reported to be unaware of the resources available to them, likely because they are commonly first-generation students and lack social capital (Lauby, 2017). However, five counselors also admitted that they or their schools do not have the resources needed to help their

undocumented students. Thus, it can be a disservice to students if school counselors are unable to secure resources. School counselors serve as cultural brokers and social capital to increase opportunities for students (Bryan et al., 2011). Students must be able to approach their counselors for questions about their post-secondary options, applying for college, and the policies that assist them. Additionally, school counselors also must direct students to resources when they are not aware of the information themselves.

Although most counselors answered truthfully about the job prospects students have without work authorization, over one-third of counselors believed undocumented students were equally capable of obtaining any job and should pursue any career they desire. While undocumented students have the skills to work in any occupation, counselors overlooked how their status could impact their career attainment. School counselors must be aware of the valid fear students have of the legal limitations that will prevent them from working once they graduate. Perhaps this possibility of being unable to practice their career choice plays a role in the hesitation and discouragement that undocumented students expressed when thinking about their future. The optimism and encouragement that counselors implemented are great techniques; however, if counselors do not acknowledge students' struggle and fear, they might come off as disingenuous and drive their students away. Counselors must use this insight to navigate these conversations appropriately with undocumented students. This way, students can make an informed decision rather than merely resisting what their counselor is saying.

Ultimately, to evaluate its safety for undocumented students, counselors were asked to discuss if they believed their campus culture allowed for conversations related to being undocumented. The majority of counselors thought their school site was welcoming to undocumented students and were comfortable having conversations about documentation status at school. These findings were surprising and somewhat contradictory, considering eleven counselors reported it was difficult to identify their students because they were afraid to disclose. Perhaps counselors believed the campus culture did not incite this fear; instead, it was propagated by external forces like the socio-political climate. Counselors might have also been thinking about students that disclose to them. Another factor that may influence counselors to believe their campus is safe for undocumented students is the possibility that when answering, they are thinking about their counseling office and safe spaces as opposed to measuring the school's environment in its entirety.

Implications for Practice

School counselors must be aware of how undocumented status may impact students academically, socio-emotionally, and career-wise. Counselors should create relationships

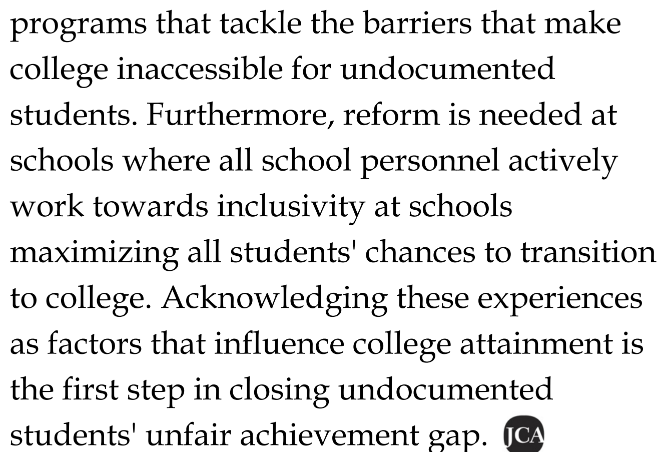
and learn the unique challenges of individual undocumented students. Furthermore, counselors should have an awareness and understanding of the laws and policies affecting college access for undocumented students. Additionally, preservice school counseling programs should develop graduate students' cultural responsiveness. School counselors would benefit from learning and practicing multicultural counseling that respects and acknowledges the specific nuances that undocumented students face as an at-risk population in the education system. Furthermore, counselors need to be taught how to advocate (ASCA, 2019b), not only for their students but for themselves, particularly when the rules set in place in educational institutions are not inclusive. Although school counselors are expected to focus on multicultural issues as it relates to students and families, the topic of documentation status is not discussed frequently in interactions with students. Counselors may not be aware of the policies and explicit ways undocumented students and families are impacted. Due to the severity and vulnerability that comes with exposure of status, students and families may be hesitant to share. By doing so, counselors may be more inclined to overlook this discussion and not provide additional information and resources that may apply to this population.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While the sample size (N=14) for this study was appropriate given the methodology, the findings' generalizability is limited based on this research's geographical location. There are laws in California providing undocumented students with resources that cannot be applied to states with restrictive policies. Additionally, the area focused on is primarily composed of rural areas focusing on agriculture, where schools have many Latino/a students and counselors have more experience working with this population. Future researchers may consider using data from different U.S. regions and capture if undocumented students' experiences differ depending on geographical location. Future studies should include a more representative sample of school counselors. Additionally, a comparative analysis can be conducted with undocumented students and school counselors to see if undocumented students' perception accurately depicts what undocumented students are undergoing.

Conclusion

School counselors who work with undocumented students must be conscious that experiences can shape their post-secondary outcomes. In this study, the school counselors' perspective offers the counseling field a unique lens for analyzing undocumented students' challenges to higher education. The findings suggest that the undocumented students' status affects them socio-emotionally, academically, and poses difficulties in achieving college and career success. This research ultimately highlights how school counselors must implement



programs that tackle the barriers that make college inaccessible for undocumented students. Furthermore, reform is needed at schools where all school personnel actively work towards inclusivity at schools maximizing all students' chances to transition to college. Acknowledging these experiences as factors that influence college attainment is the first step in closing undocumented students' unfair achievement gap.

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Development of an Unorthodox Support Model to Mentor Undocumented Immigrant Students

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the need to better understand impactful mentoring models for undocumented immigrant students (UIS). Based on interviews of 18 mentors of UIS who were college graduates, findings include diverse effective mentoring models, specific mentoring styles and strategies, how mentors identified and leveraged the community cultural wealth of UIS, and the forms of support that mentors used which highlight an unorthodox approach to mentoring UIS. A new model for mentoring UIS is presented with a framework on how to engage in new research. Recommendations are provided for schools, districts, colleges, and universities.

Keywords: undocumented students, mentoring, immigrant, professors, educators, K-12, university, school counselors, mentoring programs, mentoring strategies, unorthodox support

Introduction

Okay, we're going to do something that will sound unorthodox. And it was unorthodox. I mean, that's the reality. When you're undocumented, you have to be unorthodox to get where everyone else gets to without having to be unorthodox, right? Because there's a straight path. And when you're undocumented, there's never a straight path. You have to take all kinds of deviations.
-Benjamin, mentor to Rachel

In the opening quote, Benjamin captured the essence of how mentors of undocumented immigrant students (UIS) often engaged in unorthodox strategies to meet the unique challenges that UIS face. In this paper, mentoring is defined as the formal and informal relationships between capable adults and youth, who receive guidance to gain access to college and in some cases, to graduate from college (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011). Mentoring includes a sharing of knowledge and time that leads youth to the resources, skills, and networks which allow them to achieve their personal and educational goals. Formal mentoring typically follows "a structured and intentional approach" to providing guidance as part of a program (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011, p.2). Informal mentoring exists outside, but not necessarily independent of, formal programs. This type of mentoring evolves from existing relationships that youth may have with educators, family members, community members, or other adults in leadership roles, such as coaches and religious leaders.

Prior research emphasizes the importance of "school-based supportive relationships" for students from immigrant backgrounds (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009, p.726). Clark-Ibañez (2015) found that undocumented students rely on support from teachers and counselors in high school in order to learn about ways to access higher education. Research on school counselors recommends ways for them to support undocumented students to pursue their goals of attending college or starting careers (Groce & Johnson, 2021). That support needs to continue at the college level since undocumented students' struggles do not end when they are accepted to college (Lauby & Heaney, 2020).

Challenges Faced by Undocumented Immigrant Students

UIS face multiple challenges when adjusting to life in a new country. Those who enter schools in the United States encounter specific difficulties related to education, including confusion about the pathway to college and lack of academic preparation for college coursework (Cebulko, 2014). During K-12, some UIS need more time to develop academic proficiency in English but may be limited due to the selection of classes available to students who are learning English. If they attend schools in underserved areas, many of the students, regardless of their immigration status, do not receive instruction that provides them with the academic skills to be successful in college (Erisman & Looney, 2007). Crawford, Aguayo, and Valle (2019) report that school counselors pointed out discriminatory practices targeted towards undocumented students and their families as another challenge that UIS face.

In addition, parents of undocumented students may not be familiar with college pathways and what their children need to do to prepare (Allen, Zhang, & Romo, 2020). The students sometimes feel conflicted about going to college if their families are encouraging them to focus on finding full-time work after high school (Valadez, 2008). Even when high schools provide extensive support and information about college, Murillo (2021) found that undocumented students still faced financial obstacles if their financial aid was not enough to cover the costs of college attendance. Programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have specific restrictions and are not available to all undocumented students. Even with DACA, undocumented students cannot access federal financial aid (Murillo, 2021).

As they transition to adulthood, UIS become more aware of how little they can participate in the typical rites of passage to adulthood, such as obtaining a driver license, holding a part-time job in high school, attending college, and gaining full-time employment in desirable jobs (Cebulko, 2014). UIS experience feelings of shame and lack of belonging among their peers due to their legal status, which prevents them from participating in

activities that their documented peers can explore, such as studying abroad (Suarez-Orozco & Lopez Hernandez, 2020).

When they are in college, UIS also worry about whether their family members and loved ones could be deported (Flores Morales & Garcia, 2021). Suarez-Orozco & Lopez Hernandez (2020) found that concerns about money continue to impact UIS who have fewer financial aid options and sometimes also need to provide financial support for their families.

Need for Mentoring of Undocumented Immigrant Students

Due to these diverse challenges, UIS often mention the importance of mentors and yet research also points to the lack of mentors who understand how to help their UIS mentee navigate college in a holistic way (Perez, 2014). Other scholars provide support for this idea in their findings that UIS, along with those who have DACA, succeed in college due to "mentors, individual resiliency, and the *ganas*" to achieve academic success (Gamez, Lopez, & Overton, 2017, p.144).

The report *Mentoring for First-Generation Immigrant and Refugee Youth* highlights the lack of extensive research on this topic and reinforces that immigrant students need academic guidance from adults and peers outside of their families (Oberoi & Garringer, 2016). However, the authors also note that these young people usually enter mentoring relationships by coincidence, rather than through a formal channel.

Existing Mentoring Models

Informal mentors and role models have been found to have a positive impact on the lives of immigrant and subsequent generations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina, 2003). Spencer (2007) states that more than half of young people have a natural mentor, who may be a family member or a non-family member. She highlights the unique aspect of natural mentoring as a relationship that combines the best of what youth gain from interacting with peers, but also includes the guidance of a capable and knowledgeable adult. Sánchez, Esparza, Berardi, and Pryce (2011) focus on natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) which develop outside of a formal mentoring program. They found that students who had mentors during high school and college had extensive social connections, which are important for achieving college and career goals.

Although the existing research about mentoring for immigrant students and UIS focuses on less formal relationships, Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) studied a formal mentoring program that was established for migrant students, the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Migrant students worked with resource teachers on their school campus outside of the classroom. The authors concluded that the guidance of the teachers

was effective because they provided the social connections and "institutional resources" that the students needed to finish high school (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009, p. 702).

Another mentoring model, known as youth initiated mentoring (YIM) is based on relationships that begin when a mentee approaches a potential mentor for help. In a study about YIM, Schwartz, Kanchewa, Rhodes, Cutler, and Cunningham (2016) concluded that college-bound students from immigrant backgrounds need to initiate and develop nurturing relationships with knowledgeable adults, who help them to increase their knowledge of social capital as it relates to college-going.

While there are positive findings about the impact of mentoring, Goldner and Ben-Eliyahu (2021) reviewed 123 studies about formalized mentoring programs and found most mentoring models took a deficit approach to mentoring. In other words, models viewed mentees as lacking positive qualities and therefore needed mentors to help them correct any undesired qualities. Now, mentoring models are shifting towards a more asset-based approach, in which mentors recognize the positive qualities of mentees and help them leverage those qualities to achieve their goals. The authors found that scholars of mentoring need to develop the theories used in mentoring and in measuring outcomes. To do this, one of their recommendations is to gather information that provides viewpoints of "experts, parents, mentees, mentors, practitioners" and others (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2020, p.20). Jean Rhodes (2020), a leading scholar in the field of mentoring, published extensive findings on mentoring in the book *Older and Wiser*. She emphasizes that the mentoring data yields "decades of disappointing findings" and that there is a need for scholarly work that supports "targeted, evidence-based approaches" paired with "a caring relationship" (Rhodes, 2020, pp. 41-42).

The mentoring literature reveals an ongoing need for research-based information to improve mentoring practices. The scholarly work in the field focuses attention on formal mentoring programs and little is known about what is truly effective in the informal mentoring relationships, which UIS appear to engage in more frequently than formal programs. However, Rhodes (2020) confirms that schools provide the most opportunity for students from historically excluded backgrounds to have regular interaction with adults who are familiar with the college pathway. This connection is important: Hagler and Rhodes (2018) found that students who had a mentor at school or a mentor with ties to an educational institution had "higher educational attainment and higher household income" in the future (p. 182).

Purpose of the Present Study

There is a lack of research on the mentoring practices that are successful for UIS. As a result, there are no existing models in youth

mentoring which address this population of students. The lack of successful models makes it more challenging for high schools and colleges to launch support programs in the face of limited resources. The current study gathered detailed insights from the mentors of UIS with college degrees to learn how these mentoring relationships are initiated, nurtured, and sustained during high school and college. Mentors revealed the types of support and strategies they used, which will inform the development of a mentoring model for UIS that includes unorthodox approaches to supporting UIS.

Methods

The larger study on UIS mentoring began with identifying 12 adults who were or still are undocumented and who have graduated from a four-year university in the U.S. (Chin Goosby, 2020). At this stage of the study, UIS participants completed a demographic questionnaire which asked them to identify at least two mentors: one who helped them gain access to college and one who helped them to graduate from college. Mentors were defined as any adult who provided support that was critical for the student's transition from high school to college or for their completion of college. Most of the questionnaire participants listed more than two mentors in their responses, resulting in a total of 48 named mentors.

Interview Process

Of the 48, eighteen mentors agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview. Whenever possible, interviews took place in-person. Mentors who were unable to meet in-person due to geographic or time constraints, agreed to an online meeting via Zoom. Seventeen of the eighteen mentors gave permission to record the interviews. In-person interviews were recorded using the Rev app and online interviews were recorded on the Zoom platform. Most interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes.

The methods and data presented will focus on the semi-structured interviews with the mentors. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to ask open-ended questions that allow participants to respond freely and with as many details as they wish. This form of data collection allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions to probe for more information about details that are intriguing and may help to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2015). The interview questions asked about mentors' backgrounds, mentoring they received, and specific kinds of mentoring, support, and practices that they used when guiding the students. Some of the interview questions included the following:

1. How did your relationship with (name of UIS) begin?
2. Did you share stories about your own experiences growing up, being in high school, and going to college?

3. What are some things you said or did to help them feel comfortable talking to you, asking for help, taking your advice, etc.?
4. What are their strengths?
5. What did they need help with?
6. What were some of the ways that you were most helpful to them?
7. How did you help them to identify their strengths?
8. How much did you learn about their prior experiences/background?
9. What do you know about their family? What do you know about their background?

Mentors provided in-depth answers to the interview questions. Additionally, it is important to highlight the intangible information that emerged from the interview experience. This data collection method incorporated the dynamics of human interaction that is really at the heart of mentoring. Each mentor shared information about their educational experiences and any mentoring that they received along the way. Many spoke in depth about the key people who helped *them* to navigate their education and career paths. They expressed deep gratitude for the investments that their mentors made in them and explained how that fostered their own desire to help others. The mentors in this study have been mentored and expressed an ethos of "paying it forward," which highlights a type of ripple effect of mentoring.

Data Analysis

Transcripts with initial coding notes were uploaded to the Dedoose platform. Following qualitative analysis guidelines by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), the next step was to conduct a second reading of the transcripts. During the second reading of the transcripts, re-coding, combining, or eliminating codes guided the identification of findings. Summarizing the data using tables, charts, and lists provided a visual representation of answers in the form of a findings roadmap.

Analysis of the data included reviewing the findings roadmap for answers to the research questions, exploring possible explanations for the findings, and making connections to the literature. After drafting summaries of each interview, I sent the summaries to each mentor for review to ensure that the narratives captured their experiences accurately (Creswell, 2014).

Study Participants: Mentor Demographics and Backgrounds

Demographic information includes age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the mentors. Pseudonyms were used to replace the actual names of the mentors and the UIS. See Table 1 (on the next page) for a summary of demographic information about mentors. The median age of the mentors at the time of the interview was 47 years and the average age was 48.3 years. Eight mentors identified as males, nine mentors as females, and one mentor as queer.

Table 1.
Mentor Demographic Information.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Educational or Professional Role	Immigrant Background	First Generation College Graduate
Armond	55	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born	Yes
Anna	51	Female	White	Scientist	No	No
Benjamin	44	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born*	Yes
Carla	33	Female	White	Lab assistant	No	No
Caroline	60+	Female	Latinx	Foundation president	Foreign born	Yes
Connie	39	Queer	White	High School Counselor	No	No
David	60+	Male	White	High School Counselor	No	Yes
Fernando	47	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born	Yes
Diane	43	Female	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Child of immigrant	Yes
Dominic	40	Male	Black	High School Teacher	Foreign born	Yes
Ginger	47	Female	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born	No
Jenny	68	Female	White	Higher Ed Faculty	No	No
Kevin	63	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Staff	Foreign born	Yes
Kim	58	Female	White	High School Teacher	Child of immigrants	Yes
Levi	42	Male	Latinx	High School Counselor	Child of immigrants	Yes
Mariel	43	Female	API	High School Teacher	Foreign born*	Yes
Michelle	24	Female	Latinx	Undergraduate Student	Foreign Born*	Yes
Robert	52	Male	White	Higher Ed Faculty	No	Yes

* Denotes formerly undocumented immigrant or current DACA recipient.

Nine mentors identified as Latinx, seven mentors as White, one mentor as Black, and one mentor as Asian/Pacific Islander. Eleven mentors identify as a non-white race or ethnicity, so the majority of mentors in this study are people of color.

Seven mentors were professors in higher education, three were high school counselors, and three were high school teachers at the time when they mentored a UIS. Three mentors held a professional role in a non-educational organization where they met the UIS. Of the remaining two mentors, one was a director of admissions at a university and one was an undergraduate peer. The majority of mentors held a professional role in education when they met and mentored a UIS.

Thirteen mentors are first-generation college graduates. Nine mentors are first-generation immigrants to the United States with three of them being formerly undocumented. Eight mentors are first-generation immigrants *and* first-generation college graduates. Of the 18 mentors, 14 were either first-generation immigrants and/or first-generation college graduates. The majority of mentors in this study shared some similar life experiences with the UIS they mentored.

Findings

The major findings in this study bring to light new approaches to mentoring. First, the mentors and the UIS mentees had diverse types of mentoring relationships and none began through formal mentoring programs. Second, mentors drew upon the community cultural wealth (CCW) of the UIS and their families as an asset-based source of mentoring. In addition to drawing upon Tara Yosso's (2006) CCW framework, the mentors also demonstrated leadership capital (Ulrich, 2015) and a form of capital that I have termed *persistence capital*. Third, mentors detailed specific and successful approaches for mentoring their UIS mentees, which included an approach that I call *unorthodox support*.

Mentoring Models

The findings indicate that some mentoring relationships involving UIS do not fall into the current categories defined by mentoring literature. Rather, the majority of mentoring relationships in this study developed between UIS and mentors as a result of the contact that they had with each other in an educational institution, not as part of a formalized mentoring program.

Institutionally-Mediated Encounter. Eleven mentors developed mentoring relationships with a UIS as a result of an institutionally-mediated encounter. In these cases, the mentor met the UIS in the context of their professional role in an educational institution. For example, mentors who worked as high school counselors met the UIS when they met to discuss progress towards graduation and post-high school plans. Mentors who worked as college professors met the UIS in a class that they taught or through student advising.

Peer Mentors. Two mentors were peer mentors. Carla met Kayla when they both worked at the same company after Kayla graduated from high school and had not yet started college. Michelle met Gina on the college campus that they both attended.

Peer-Mediated Encounter. Two relationships began as the result of a peer-mediated encounter. In these cases, the mentor and the UIS met when a peer introduced the UIS to the mentor. Benjamin met Rachel after her sister introduced him to her and asked if he could help her to apply to college. Caroline is the president of a foundation that raises money to provide scholarships to low-income students. The founder of the organization introduced Caroline and Erin to each other after Erin applied for one of the foundation's scholarships.

Mentor-Initiated Encounter. Two of the relationships were mentor-initiated. These relationships began when the mentor approached the UIS. Armond met Erin in his American Government class at the community college where he taught. He spoke to her about the Honors program at the school and encouraged her to join student government after she achieved the highest scores on the first two quizzes in the class. Fernando met Emma when she took one of his Economics classes. Due to her high academic performance in his class, he approached her with the idea of double majoring in Economics.

Student or Youth-Initiated. One of the relationships was youth-initiated. The relationship began when the UIS approached the mentor. Kevin met Sophia when he was the Associate Director of Admissions at his current institution. She contacted his office after her acceptance had been rescinded due to falling grades. She revealed her status to him right away and he invited her to meet with him in-person to discuss a plan of action.

There were diverse ways that mentoring relationships were formed. Additionally, not all the mentoring relationships were established through the students' immigration status. Yet, immigration status become significant to the mentoring relationship due to the challenges experienced by the UIS.

Identifying and Leveraging of Community Cultural Wealth of UIS

Mentors identified and leveraged the CCW of their mentees. This study draws upon Yosso's (2006) theoretical framework of CCW, which describes the assets that exist in Chicano communities. She posits that the following capital are gained through community and family life: aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, resistant, and navigational capital. Yosso argues that while students come to school with these forms of CCW, educators often do not capitalize on them or see them as assets. The best mentoring programs and relationships – as the mentors in this study

attest – should utilize CCW in their mentoring practice.

Mentors named multiple forms of CCW that UIS possess. More than one mentor named the following qualities: gifted, dedicated, brave, hard-working, organized, mature, persistent, authentic, humble, respectful, ambitious, and determined. These descriptors were each named once across the 18 mentors in their descriptions of the 12 UIS: eager, empathetic, caring, resilient, accountable, well-composed, hungry, resourceful, appreciative, collaborative, adaptable, health-conscious, goal-oriented, outgoing, creative, proactive, responsible, patient, and helpful. Nineteen of the descriptors were unique to a single UIS while twelve of them were shared by two or more of the UIS. This extensive list of descriptors that mentors provided in describing twelve UIS confirms that UIS possess a great deal of CCW.

"Data analysis revealed that mentors identified and leveraged six forms of capital most frequently: familial, aspirational, navigational, resistant, persistence, and leadership."

Data analysis revealed that mentors identified and leveraged six forms of capital most frequently: familial, aspirational, navigational, resistant, persistence, and leadership. The first four forms of capital are derived from Yosso's (2006) community cultural wealth model. *Persistence capital* is what I describe as a form of capital emerging from the data that demonstrated how UIS continued to pursue their higher education goals in the face of adversity. *Leadership capital* describes a form of capital, also evident in the data, that UIS set examples for their younger peers through their persistence (Ulrich, 2015).

Familial capital. Seven of the mentors explicitly described the families of their UIS mentees and the ways in which they were a source of capital for them. Five of the mentors met with parents and other family members at some point during their mentorship of a UIS. David met Denise's parents and learned that they had trust in the education system. He also spoke about how proud her father was of Denise. Knowing these things about the family, David viewed her family as an asset and expressed how much he valued their impact on her.

Aspirational capital. Nine mentors discussed the aspirations that UIS and/or their families had for them and the ways in which those aspirations worked as a form of capital to help them achieve their educational goals. Levi was one of Emma's high school mentors and described her as someone who was eager to learn. He captured her thirst for learning as a desire to "make something of her life, something greater" and said that "she was very passionate about helping her family in any way that she could." He validated her aspirations and provided deadlines for her to prepare and

gather her college application materials. He noted it was a successful strategy because he began to notice she would meet the deadlines ahead of time.

Navigational capital. All the mentors acknowledged that their mentees (and their families) had developed navigational capital through the process of migration, learning educational systems and other social institutions in the United States. Seven mentors shared the direct ways that they helped UIS to navigate the world of higher education, thereby enhancing their mentees' navigational capital by providing their mentees with important "backstage" insights into college. For example, Benjamin mentioned that he spent time helping Rachel make sense of what she saw and heard in higher education spaces:

A lot of our conversations are almost always about that decoding. Right? Like this is what you saw, now let's actually look at the code. It's kind of like The Matrix, the film. You see reality, but the people that have been able to step out of that artificial reality can actually see the code that creates that reality. And so if you understand the code, then you understand why that reality means something to people because you know the code. Right? I mean, the elites, they know... I mean, the codes, they learn it from birth. Those of us who were not born into wealth, we have to learn how to decode that and keep up that decoding process because that's always evolving and changing.

Benjamin described the way he helped Rachel make sense of conversations between colleagues and peers on her college campus.

Resistant capital. Seven mentors described ways that UIS resisted the legal, educational, and financial barriers that they faced. Kevin highlighted Sophia's involvement in starting a group for undocumented students on her college campus during her first year there. Not only was she present on campus as an undocumented student, but she also worked to define an explicit space for undocumented students since the institution had not.

Carla described Kayla's explicit actions of resistance while she attended college. Kayla shared her undocumented experience publicly on her campus and became an "advocate of others" who was "vocal about her status and how she got to where she was". Carla described Kayla's actions saying that she used her voice and her passion for journalism to advocate for other UIS "in a more meaningful way" by participating in a TED Talk and writing articles for publication.

Leadership capital. Some of the examples of resistant capital also demonstrate ways that UIS emerged as leaders among their peers and/or on their campuses. Six mentors described examples of UIS leadership that are part of a form of capital that has not been previously used in the CCW framework: leadership capital. Leadership capital has been used to assess how well an individual is prepared to lead a company to meet their

goals (Ulrich, 2015). Ulrich proposed an index to determine leadership capital that is more complex than the scope of this study. Here, leadership capital refers simply to the individual characteristics which indicate leadership potential.

Mentors spoke about the example that UIS set for siblings and peers. Caroline said that Erin paved a way for her younger brother to go to college. She also commended Erin for writing a manual for future interns who would assume her position when she left her work at the foundation. Connie noticed that Stacy "was an influence on peers who maybe were less outgoing. She kind of brought them along with her and, um, was a branch to other students who could use that connection" to adults who could help them.

Persistence capital. Six mentors shared stories and examples that are characterized in a new form of capital that has not yet been explored in the literature: persistence capital. This form of capital emerged from the data and describes the ways in which UIS persevered on their educational pathways in the face of numerous obstacles. UIS develop persistence capital over time in direct response to systemic barriers by creating strategies to navigate and resist those barriers. Some UIS demonstrated persistence capital independent of their mentors, while others needed encouragement from their mentors to develop this form of capital.

Armond helped Erin to develop persistence capital by pushing her to continue pursuing higher education. He emphasized the way that her individual success can lead to success for other undocumented students. He said to her, "What's the best thing you can do? You can succeed as an individual. You can get the diploma. You can do what you can." Armond encouraged her to achieve her educational goals by affirming her persistence.

Kevin recalled that because Sophia didn't qualify for DACA, she had fewer financial resources than the students who did. Yet she finished her undergraduate degree and earned a graduate degree immediately after that. He described her persistence by saying, "She could have given up at any time but chose not to." Even in graduate school when she didn't qualify to receive graduate assistantships, which many graduate students depend on for funding, she found funding through a non-profit organization.

Diane shared that Stacy would think about leaving college multiple times each time her family faced a new challenge. There were several times when she had to encourage her to stay in college and finish her undergraduate degree. In one case, Diane told her, "You will be able to do more for your family with a college degree than without." She helped her understand that it was important "to think more long term right now" even though it was hard for her not to leave school considering significant challenges at that time. This is an example of

how mentors help UIS develop persistence capital.

Forms of Support

The following discussion addresses the ways that mentors transform the CCW of UIS to capital through specific forms of support. The data revealed five forms of support used most frequently by the mentors: academic, encouragement, affirmation, professional, and unorthodox. *Academic support* includes teaching and providing feedback or other resources to improve grades. *Encouragement* took the form of reminding UIS that they can accomplish their goals. *Affirmation* means reinforcing the abilities of the UIS. *Professional support* means giving advice regarding career and work options. Finally, *unorthodox support* refers to the use of methods and strategies that are atypical for the mentor's professional role or used in response to a unique challenge.

Academic support

Eleven mentors shared examples of the academic support that they provided to UIS. Kim supported Emma in high school and remembers that they had conversations about the classes that she should take in high school in order to be prepared for college. Benjamin, who supported Rachel during pre-college and college years, chose her to be his research assistant during the year that passed between her high school graduation and acceptance to college. He provided this form of support as a way to boost her academic profile since some of her high school grades suffered due to an ongoing health condition. Similarly, Armond recommended that Erin join the community college honors program at her two-year college in order to increase her chance of acceptance to a four-year college. He told her that she would also learn about additional opportunities, such as scholarships, that may not be shared widely with students who were not part of the honors program.

Encouragement support

Twelve mentors described the encouragement they gave to UIS throughout their educational journeys. During Emma's high school years, Kim spoke to her about the college experience. Emma would ask her to describe college and what to expect. She told her that college is "what you make of it" and that it would be necessary for her to "seek out things that will help you" achieve goals. Kim now realizes that sharing her viewpoint about college encouraged Emma to take the college pathway.

Ginger and Grace spoke about the value of a college degree. Ginger emphasized the permanence of the degree and the fact that it cannot be taken away once it is granted. She told Grace, "No one can take it away from you. It's yours…and it might intersect with possible pathways you know, to residency, citizenship…". When Grace received initial rejections from graduate school, Ginger encouraged her to continue pursuing the path to a Ph.D. by getting a Master's degree first. This paid off when Grace was accepted to

several prestigious doctoral programs upon completion of her Master's program.

Affirmation support

Eleven mentors provided specific examples of the affirmation support that they gave to UIS. Affirmation refers to the confirmation of one's strengths, ability to overcome challenges, and worthiness of academic achievement. Mentors encouraged UIS as they worked to overcome obstacles in pursuit of higher education. However, they also found it necessary to remind UIS that they were making good decisions and could achieve their goals.

Armond was one of Erin's professors at the two-year college that she attended following high school graduation. Prior to meeting him, she declined an offer of admission to a public four-year university because she didn't have enough funding to cover the costs. Knowing this, he continuously reminded her that she should transfer to a four-year college. He suggested that she apply to competitive four-year schools and to consider some of the private institutions near her home. By doing this, he affirmed that she was a competitive candidate and taught her that her outstanding profile could lead to a generous financial aid award from a private institution. Erin applied, was accepted to, and attended one of the highly selective institutions that Armond recommended.

Professional support

Ten mentors spoke about the professional guidance that they gave to UIS. Benjamin spoke to Rachel about some of her specific strengths and interests and how they aligned with academic and administrative careers. Armond and Erin discussed her interest in psychology and family therapy. He helped her understand the ways in which the fields overlapped and diverged. Ginger drew upon her experience as a college professor when she and Grace talked about the professoriate as a career option for her.
Kevin's professional support of Sophia focused on entrepreneurial paths. Without DACA benefits, she had fewer career options than some of her peers and he told her to consider business opportunities as an independent contractor or by forming a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC). Caroline also exposed Erin to alternative career options by giving her the chance to work on various projects for her foundation. This gave Erin professional experience that she could draw upon in the event that she did not transfer to a four-year college.

Unorthodox support

Not previously identified in the literature on mentoring, unorthodox support refers to the actions that mentors took that were outside the scope of their professional roles or actions that are not typical of the way to guide someone to and through college. This form of support emerged from mentors' willingness to find solutions to challenges that UIS faced. Some of those challenges, such as inability to access federal financial aid, had no clear solutions. Current mentoring research has not explored the unique strategies that mentors

use to support mentees who face such challenges. Most of the mentors provided examples of support that would be considered unorthodox. In his interview, Benjamin used the term "unorthodox" to describe the kind of support that he provided to Rachel. Benjamin described his thoughts and what he said to Rachel at the start of their relationship:

Okay, we're going to do something that will sound unorthodox. And it was unorthodox. I mean, that's the reality. When you're undocumented, you have to be unorthodox to get where everyone else gets to without having to be unorthodox, right? Because there's a straight path. And when you're undocumented, there's never a straight path. You have to take all kinds of deviations.

In Rachel's case, the unorthodox action came in the form of her deciding to take a gap year after high school to take specific steps to increase the likelihood that a college would accept her with full financial funding.

Some UIS lacked other resources needed to attend college. Mariel recalled lending a tablet to Lisa so that she could work on her college applications at home. Caroline's foundation gave Erin a computer that she used to complete her college and financial aid applications. In addition, they created a paid internship so that she could earn money for the work that she did for the organization. Caroline said that they "incorporated her into the foundation work" since she was the kind of young person they sought to support.

When the Obama administration announced the DACA program, Anna drove Kayla to complete the fingerprinting step. Then, she went with Kayla to visit the college that she wanted to attend. After she was accepted to that college, Anna drove Kayla to college to help her move into the dorms. Robert is another mentor who provided unorthodox support to Kayla. He was her initial academic advisor but when she declared a major outside of his field, she was supposed to select a new advisor. However, she asked Robert to continue to advise her and he agreed to learn her program requirements in order to fulfill that role.

Kevin was another mentor who played an instrumental role even before Sophia began attending the college where he worked. She contacted him after her offer of admission was rescinded due to a decline in her grades. He met with her and her family members and designed a plan for her to regain admission. When she began attending the college, he continued to support her. He described his role as one of a "father figure" because he knew that her father wasn't involved in her life and she sometimes sought from him the kind of advice that other students would have sought from their fathers.

Diane also offered gestures that were familial in nature. She lived near the college campus where she taught and invited students, including UIS friends Rachel and Stacy, to her home. She interacted with UIS in spaces outside of the institution so that their

relationship grew in multi-dimensional ways. She gave Stacy advice when she faced family struggles and spoke about rising tension between her and Rachel when they had a difficult conversation about a project that Rachel wanted to end. During that difficult conversation, Rachel wanted to leave but Diane encouraged her to stay with it until they reached a solution.
Connie supported Stacy by stepping outside of her traditional role as a high school teacher. She noticed that written notices for families were only available in English, and she advocated for them to be translated into Spanish for Spanish-speaking families. She also pushed her high school to have additional translators available for meetings with parents so that they could have better access to the information shared in those meetings.

Levi provided unorthodox support in the way he included the family as well. He took Emma and her mother to visit a college campus and explained to her mother the ways that higher education would provide additional opportunities for Emma's future. He described the targeted search he made for a college that would provide full financial support for Emma. Once he identified that campus, he contacted several people in his professional network to help ensure her admission and full funding. He described his persistence in that process by saying, "I was fortunate enough to, to just have open and honest conversation with some of my colleagues at State University at the time. So they guided me to the right people. It took two conversations and then it took a visit."

These examples of support are atypical because they do not fall into the job descriptions and duties of the mentors in the study. Most of them were faculty or staff in a high school or college. Several were co-workers and/or peers to the UIS who identified them for this study. Their examples of unorthodox support occurred in response to the unique challenges that UIS face and in the absence of defined solutions for them. In summary, the mentors of UIS engaged in high quality allyship for undocumented students, where they leveraged their privilege, status, and position in diverse, creative ways (Clark-Ibáñez & Swan, 2019).

Discussion

There are three categories of findings presented from this study: mentoring models, mentors' identification and leveraging of CCW of UIS, and forms of support. While no two mentors engaged in identical practices, one-half of the mentors in the study used strategies that can be described as three specific styles: intentional mentoring, proactive mentoring, and/or use of an informal mentoring team (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Intentional mentoring refers to the conscious decision to offer ongoing support to the UIS. Proactive mentoring describes the mentors' anticipation of challenges and pre-planned strategies for coping with those challenges. Some mentors

developed an informal mentoring team when they reached out to their professional networks to gather additional resources and assistance for the UIS. Two of the mentoring models, institutionally-mediated and peer-mediated have not been explicitly named as mentoring models in prior research. The institutionally-mediated mentoring model applies to most of the relationships in this study. This suggests that UIS who pursue college rely on education professionals for support.

Mentors used styles and strategies described as intentional and proactive, and made use of an informal team. Previous studies examined intentional mentoring and support the explicit decision that mentors make to provide support for students (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). They also encourage mentors to use proactive measures (Espinoza, 2011). This was a useful strategy for mentors in this study as they could anticipate future challenges that UIS would face and help them to prepare solutions or alternate plans. The use of an informal team aligns with current research which shows that mentees benefit from having more than one mentor (Christensen, Raposa, Hagler, Erickson, & Rhodes, 2021). What is unique about the team mentoring effort in this study is that mentors used their professional networks to support their mentoring efforts, not for those individuals to become direct mentors to the UIS.

In this study, mentors recognized and nurtured UIS' CCW which led to the growth of multiple forms of capital. Previous studies indicate that natural mentors increase the social capital of young people (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Mentors identified more than 30 CCW descriptors of UIS. Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, and Cooper (2009) emphasize the importance of educators who "continuously strive to know their students, their families, and their communities well" (p.542). Mentors were able to identify these assets because they actively built relationships with UIS and sustained those relationships for one or more years.

Most mentors of UIS in this study provided academic, affirmation, and encouragement support. Mentors tailored support based on the strengths and the needs of the UIS who they mentored. Since the majority of mentors held a professional role in education, they had the capacity to give UIS academic support through tutoring, feedback, and counseling. However, mentors in this study did more than just perform the normal duties expected for their professional roles.

Mentors recognized the need for affirmation and encouragement support at various times in their relationship with UIS. By paying attention to what UIS shared, they reminded UIS that they were worthy of being in the educational space and that they could reach their academic goals. Mentors offered affirmation support to reinforce their belief in the UIS's ability to go to college and graduate from college.

Encouragement support was related to affirmation support, but went beyond the academic realm. Mentors recalled challenges that UIS had related to finances, family, health, relationships, peers, and career choices. They encouraged UIS by helping them to put their challenges in perspective and to develop concrete solutions to some problems. If some challenges could not be resolved, the mentor's encouragement was still necessary to help the UIS persist in spite of the challenges. These findings contrast with a prior study of documented and undocumented students who hid their concerns and often relied upon themselves to cope with stressful situations (O'Neal, Espino, Goldthrite, Morin, Weston, Hernandez & Fuhrmann, 2016). Socio-emotional support that mentors provide is both valuable and necessary. In this study, mentors knew about the stressors that UIS had and provided support to help them manage their stress.

When the UIS transitioned to college, mentors provided professional support as part of preparation for life after college. Six out of eight mentors gave UIS professional support. This finding is not surprising due to a greater focus on career planning at the college level for all college students. It is even more critical for UIS who have fewer career options due to legal barriers that prevent them from working in some fields (Suárez-Orozco & López Hernández, 2020). In addition to finding innovative ways to understand how mentors support UIS, this study also revealed a new type of mentoring approach which will be theorized in the next section.

Toward a Mentoring Model Based on Unorthodox Support

Unorthodox support emerged as a form of support that best describes the atypical but necessary strategies that mentors of UIS use. Some form of unorthodox support was mentioned in every interview.

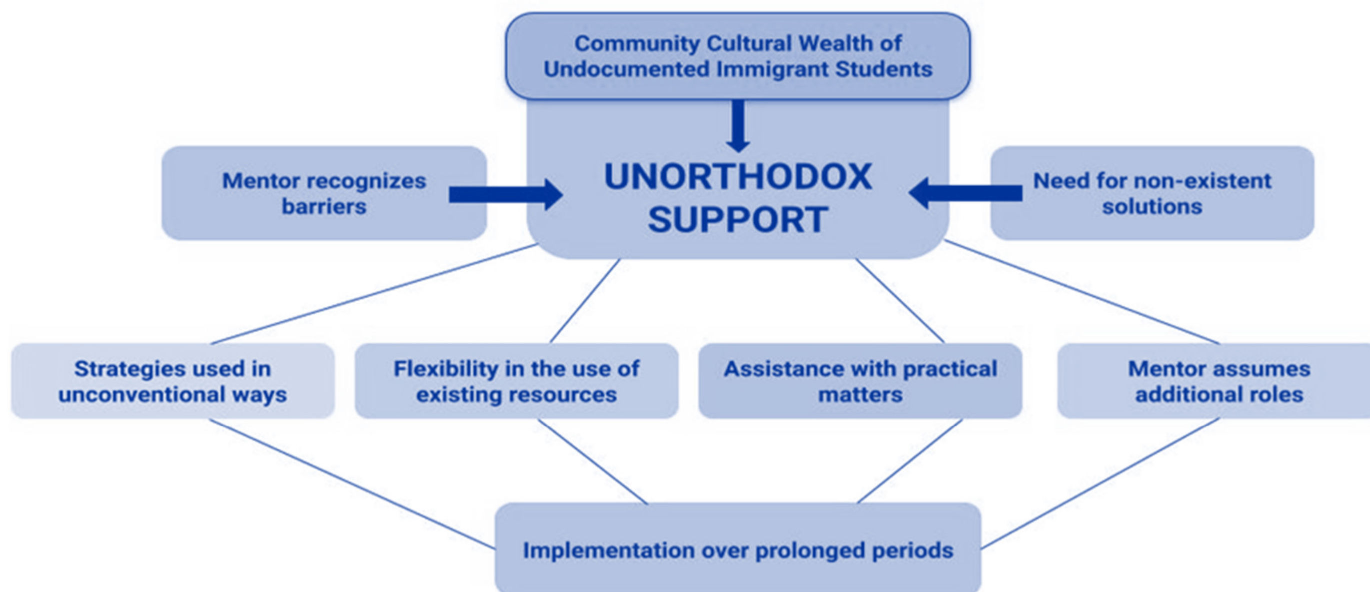
The data revealed seven components of unorthodox support:

- Emerges when mentors recognize barriers and seek ways to overcome or confront them
- Derives from the need to develop solutions that do not exist
- Incorporates existing strategies in ways, contexts, or with intentions that are different from the ones for which the strategies were designed
- Requires mentors to identify flexibility in the use of resources
- Includes mentor assistance with practical matters that may be routine matters for others
- Leads mentors to assume informal roles and duties that are outside the scope of their formal roles
- Takes longer to implement than "orthodox" forms of support

The idea of persisting in the face of problems that had no apparent solutions influenced the support category that mentor Benjamin termed, "unorthodox." The examples of

unorthodox support in this study emerged from the need to respond to unique challenges, such as the inability to access

Figure 1.
Unorthodox Support Model.



federal financial aid. In addition, each mentor developed unorthodox methods based on two factors: the specific needs of the UIS and the resources that the mentor could access. Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, and Cooper (2017) point to the importance of "high-stakes information networks" comprised of "knowing adults who are effective in mentoring students and provide them with" information that leads to college attendance (p.550). Mentors in this study had access to a range of resources which they used to develop unorthodox methods to support UIS.

The literature review established the lack of a mentoring model that addresses the needs of UIS and data analysis revealed the need to develop additional frameworks for studying this type of mentoring. The emergence of unorthodox support as the primary form of support in this study provides a potential new framework, depicted in Figure 1, to examine mentoring of UIS.

The mentor must first recognize the barrier(s) their mentee is facing and understand there could be no clear existing solutions to overcome those challenges. They must also view their mentees from a CCW framework, identifying experiences and skills that could be part of a creative solution. There are four essential elements found in unorthodox

support: mentors using existing strategies in unconventional ways, mentors using existing resources in a flexible manner, mentors assisting mentees with practical matters, and mentors assuming additional informal roles that are outside the defined scope of their official duties. Finally, the unorthodox support model recognizes that this form of support is likely to occur over a prolonged period. Creating a survey scale or set of qualitative interview questions will be the next step in developing this model. Researchers deploying this model will be able to focus on the strategies and supports that are most effective in the mentoring of UIS and other youth who face unique challenges brought about by the current systems that are not designed for their success.

Recommendations

To better support UIS, educators can create a network of allies who provide needed resources and services for undocumented students. UIS and mentors in this study often had to spend time searching for resources. This is time-consuming and can lead to missed opportunities and/or extended timelines to accomplish academic goals. Establishing a network that includes sources of financial aid, extraneous funding, legal services, mental health services, and a family liaison will relieve the burden on a single mentor to try to provide multiple resources. To enhance campus climate, there is a need to increase visible signs of support for UIS on campuses and in community spaces. Signs of support include messages to the campus community about the legal rights of undocumented students, resources available for them, and a way for them to request assistance while maintaining privacy. Sharing messages in community spaces ensures that family members also have access to information.

Institutions also need to implement physical space for UIS. It is in those spaces that students should be able to access resources. One resource should be the ability to initiate a mentoring relationship with teachers, counselors, staff, and community members who agree to provide support. This would provide an entry point for mentoring relationships to begin. If UIS have already established a mentoring relationship with a teacher or other school staff member on their own, they can use the space as a place to create networks of support with other campus allies. Networks of support are important for both UIS and their mentors, who often hold other professional roles and mentor UIS in addition to fulfilling their typical duties. Increasing institutional support will remove some of the burden on individual mentors, like those in this study, who often worked alone to support UIS. Indeed, the lack of institutional support affects mentors, who develop intentional, proactive, and mentoring team approaches and use unorthodox methods in response to the lack of structural supports. Institutions can contribute to effective mentoring for UIS by providing clear resources and strategies that mentors can

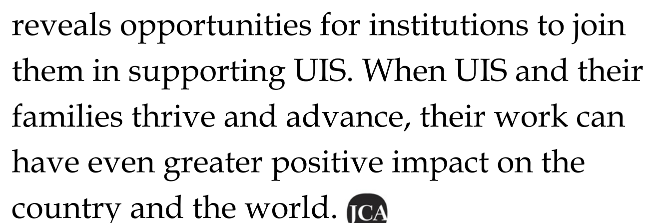
access and use to guide UIS. When there is an established structure of support, mentors will also be able to connect with each other and form a network of allies beyond their personal networks.
Multiple high schools and college campuses have established student groups or centers to support UIS. This is another way that schools can create symbolic and physical spaces where UIS can request help and form a supportive community on their terms. Mentors who join these established groups will be able to focus their efforts on building relationships and supporting UIS rather than having to create solutions for institutional gaps.

According to the participants in this study, formal mentoring organizations and programs did not provide mentoring that is specifically tailored to the needs of UIS. While informal and natural mentoring relationships will continue to benefit UIS, formal programs can provide needed support as well. Based on insights shared by informal mentors in this study, there are several points that formal programs can consider. The work of mentoring UIS is political in nature and changes rapidly based on lived experiences and legislative policies. Since policies and policy changes are unpredictable, it is necessary to implement new solutions at the micro level.

The first step in doing this is to identify the needs of UIS by inviting them to play an active role in the development of any type of support system. Weiston-Serdan (2017) calls upon mentoring programs to broaden their ideas about youth participation. Mentoring programs need to recognize that they are not currently serving the needs of UIS and invite them to provide input and leadership in the development of programming. When programs have established support based on the input of UIS, they can begin to offer an entry point in the form of explicit invitations for UIS to find mentors who are qualified to support them.

Since UIS and their mentors in this study developed relationships outside of a formalized program, it will be helpful for structured mentoring programs to provide additional entry points into the program for mentors and UIS who have established a relationship but need structural support. This would need to occur after programs have increased their capacity to support UIS. In addition, programs will need to share this opportunity within schools and communities so that UIS and their mentors know that they can seek formal support with specific organizations.

UIS continue to live in uncertainty regardless of the political party of the current administration. Tens of thousands of UIS struggle to move forward in their education in the face of continued uncertainty for themselves and their families. Mentors like those who participated in this study are instrumental in helping UIS, who are active participants in our society. Mentor insight



reveals opportunities for institutions to join them in supporting UIS. When UIS and their families thrive and advance, their work can have even greater positive impact on the country and the world.

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Enhancing Institutional Undocu-Competence through Establishing Undocumented Student Resource Centers: A Student-Encompassed Approach

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ABSTRACT

In response to the barriers that undocumented students face in postsecondary education, some colleges and universities are striving to enhance their undocu-competence – the capacity to serve, support, and advocate for undocumented students. One way that institutions are demonstrating this is by establishing Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs). This qualitative study examined the ways in which USRCs support undocumented students and contribute to institutional efforts at enhancing undocu-competence. Findings indicate that USRCs are student-encompassed spaces that provide customized and comprehensive care for undocumented students. Moreover, despite being under-resourced, their impact is campus-wide, largely through building and sustaining undocu-allies. Implications for research and practice are included.

Keywords: undocumented students, identity-based centers, Undocumented Student Resource Centers, student centered, diversity, inclusion

Undocumented immigrants continue to make immeasurable, positive contributions to schools and communities (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Gonzalez, 2008). Yet, with respect to postsecondary education, this population of students faces a number of unique, structural barriers at the federal and state policy levels as well as at the institutional level. The most pressing barriers relate to college access as undocumented college students are unable to receive federal financial aid (Higher Education Act, 1965), and, depending on the state of residence, may face exclusionary in-state resident tuition (ISRT) and/or state aid policies (Ali, 2017). Additionally, undocumented students have reported navigating unwelcoming and, in some cases, hostile campus climates (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Moreover, the precarity of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program serves as a source of stress for undocumented students and their families (National Immigration Law Center, 2019).

Considering these barriers, there is a growing body of scholarship that aligns with immigration activists' urgent calls for colleges and universities aim to increase their undocu-competence (Tapia-Fuselier, 2019; Valenzuela et al., 2015). For the purposes of this paper, undocu-competence refers to the capacity to serve, support, and advocate for undocumented students. One of the most tangible results of the call for undocu-competence is the emerging trend of Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs).

Undocu-Competence

This concept was introduced by Valenzuela and colleagues in 2015 in their conceptual article that proposed institutional undocu-competence – an institutional capacity framework that community colleges can utilize to strengthen their support for undocumented students. This framework challenges institutions to actively reduce barriers and support the success of undocumented students in a variety of ways. In addition to institutional undocu-competence, scholars are also examining undocu-competence at the individual level. For example, Neinhusser and Espino (2017) found that community college professionals had disparate levels of comfort, ease, and understanding respective to serving the undocumented student population, prompting them to propose the Undocumented/DACAmented Status Competency (UDSC) as a framework to be "systematically incorporated into higher education professionals' practice" (p. 11).

There is still room for continued examination of undocu-competence. Although some institutions have established training programs for faculty and staff, publicly advocated for undocumented students, and created space and support for undocumented student groups, researchers assert that colleges and universities could do more to institutionalize support for undocumented students (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Muñoz, 2018; Tapia-Fuselier, 2019; Tapia-Fuselier & Young, 2019).

Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) are an embodiment of undocu-competence because they represent an institutional commitment to serve, support, and advocate for undocumented students. Cisneros and Valdivia (2018) released the first substantial report on USRCs on college campuses, published through the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions. In their exploratory study, they defined USRCs as "physical structures on campus designated as centers that provide a space for undocumented students and students of mixed-status families to obtain institutionalized support" (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018, p. 2). Currently, there are 59 established USRCs in the United States (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

USRCs, despite their relatively new and emerging nature, follow a long tradition of identity-based centers on college campuses (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). Black Culture Centers (BCCs) began to emerge on college campuses in the 1960s and 1970s as spaces of support for Students of Color (Liu et al., 2010; Lozano, 2010; Patton, 2006; 2010). This is important, because despite the values of diversity and inclusion held by many colleges and universities in the United States, higher education institutions were not built with the success of marginalized students in mind. The emergence of these centers onto college campuses was largely a result of activism "rooted in a struggle for students to hold institutions of higher education

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accountable" (Patton, 2010, p. xiv). The birth of the Black Culture Center gave rise to other identity-based spaces, such as Latino Culture Centers, Asian American Culture Centers, LGBT Centers, and most recently, USRCs.

Patton (2010) wrote that the student activists who led the charge to establish BCCs "were resistant to the lack of change and extremely active during this period of unrest. In order to practice resistance, they galvanized to form coalitions and identified spaces where they could continue resistance" (Patton, 2010, p. xiii). The same could be said for the emergence of USRCs. The development of these spaces is largely attributed to the activism and advocacy of undocumented students and undocu-allies, demanding that their institutions create a more welcoming climate and intentional spaces of support (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). USRCs have emerged and developed in the last decade as the socio-political climate regarding immigration, particularly undocumented immigrants, has evolved.

Cisneros and Valdivia (2018) explained that USRCs have four essential goals: (a) providing access to college opportunities for undocumented high school, transfer, undergraduate, and graduate students, as well as students from mixed-status families; (b) create a welcoming and supportive environment that will enhance students' college experience; (c) promote undocumented students' civic and community engagement; (d) enhance undocumented students' mental health and well-being (p. 2). USRCs do this by facilitating a wide range of student services that are customized to the needs of undocumented students. It is important to note that many of these services are collaborative efforts with USRC affiliates in a variety of functional areas. (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018).

The research on USRCs is emerging but remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to this growing body of scholarship by examining the role that USRCs play in building undocu-competence on four-year college campuses by answering three research questions:

1. How do USRCs support undocumented students?

2. How do USRCs contribute to institutional undocu-competence?

3. What challenges do USRCs face in contributing to undocu-competence?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study has two components. First, I considered the Weick's (1976) concept of institutions as loosely coupled systems. Departments within a college or university are inherently connected, yet that connection is often weak, allowing each individual unit to maintain a sense of individual identity in addition to some semblance of separation from other

units (Weick, 1976). Because of this, large-scale changes, such as establishing diversity and equity initiatives, are hard to achieve (Kezar, 2001; Weick, 1976).
Second, I leaned on the aforementioned concept of institutional undocu-competence (Valenzuela et al, 2015). Institutional undocu-competence challenges institutions to actively reduce barriers and support the success of undocumented students in a variety of ways. There are eight categories within this framework: policy and assessment; training faculty and staff; visible advocacy; outreach and recruitment; financial aid; institutional support for student groups; health and psychological services; and welcoming campus environment (Valenzuela et al., 2015).

Taken together, this conceptual framework allowed me to understand the ways in which USRCs support undocumented students and contribute to institutional undocu-competence. Additionally, this lens allowed me to explore the limitations that USRCs may face in working to enhance institutional undocu-competence.

Methods

I designed an exploratory qualitative study to answer my research questions. I determined eligible USRCs based on Cisneros and Valdivia's (2018) report, in which they identified 28 USRCs on four-year college campuses. Acknowledging that USRC professionals are valuable sources of knowledge relevant to the purpose of the study, I recruited USRC professionals to serve as participants via email and eight USRC professionals participated in the study.
I collected data through in-depth semistructured interviews conducted virtually. All data collected was protected to maintain confidentiality, an issue of critical importance given this topic. Pseudonyms are used for each participant to present findings.

Analysis

Analysis was ongoing throughout the process of data collection (Hesse-Biber, 2017). During each interview, I took notes of initial impressions and spent time reflecting after each interview. Thematic analysis techniques were utilized to derive findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). First, the data was coded using open coding strategies. Then, initial interpretation began through analytical coding. Finally, categories were constructed to represent themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to establish trustworthiness, I relied on peer review, engaged in member checking, and achieved data saturation. Importantly, member checking including giving the participants an opportunity to confirm transcript accuracy as well as review and comment on preliminary findings.

Positionality Statement

Prior to and throughout the data collection process, I was engaged in critical reflexivity in order to account for my own positionality to the study (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). I am a U.S. citizen, so I do not

have the lived experience of being undocumented. I am also white, which is important to name as today's anti-immigration rhetoric is inextricably linked to racism and white supremacy. I not only acknowledge this privileged social location but continue to wrestle with how my identities may have posed potential limitations to my research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. I treat this task with great seriousness. My critical reflexivity practices included written reflections as well as conversations with like-minded colleagues. I believe that I was able to establish trust and rapport with each participant as all were engaged in our interviews with openness, vulnerability, and generosity.

Findings

At the conclusion of the data analysis process, and after member checking, final themes were identified. The findings are presented here with respect to each research question.

RQ1: How do USRCs Support Undocumented Students?

In order to understand how USRCs contribute to undocu-competence at the institutional level, I had to first understand the functions of the USRC. As indicated in the first research question, I aimed to learn how USRCs support students and found that there were two salient themes related to student support: being student-encompassed, and providing customized, comprehensive care.

Student-Encompassed

One of the most compelling findings of the study was that all of the participants described USRCs revolving around students in critical ways. Students were not only being supported through the work of the USRC, but were integral to the establishment, evolution, and current function of the USRC. In analyzing the data, it was clear that USRCs were operating in a way that was beyond "student-centered." In fact, I found that USRCs were "student-encompassed." I use the framing of student-encompassed to indicate that students were not simply being passively served by the USRC. Rather, students played a critical role in the inception and creation of the USRC, participated in carrying out the mission of the USRC, and were included in USRC operations in meaningful ways. Students both surround the USRC and exist within the functions of the USRC; they are included comprehensively. Moreover, the word encompassed can be used to describe the cause of something to take place or be brought about. This is exactly what every participant described – students played a large, important role in the origin of USRCs. For example, when asked about the origin of their campus's USRC, Martha stated, "I think it's very important to recognize that the [USRC] exists because of student activism."

Similarly, Cristina said:

This would not have happened if it hadn't been for that student group approaching our president... As staff, we had seen the need for this, you know… but unless the students make the case for it and make their voices the loudest, then, you know, it's not going to happen.

In addition to students being the impetus for the USRCs, they continued to play a role in the evolution of the USRC. For example, Natalia described that the students who pushed the administration to create a USRC on her campus continued to hold the administration accountable to fulfilling promises and giving the USRC resources. Moreover, the work of USRCs is incredibly focused on meeting the needs of students. As Alexandra described, "we are proud to work with and for undocumented students, and so it's really important that in every phase, in everything that we do, it's based on what students need and what students are asking for." All of the participants described students being incorporated into the work of the USRC in formal and informal ways. For example, Laura noted that some student leaders within the USRC on her campus help to coordinate and facilitate campus and community presentations. Other USRCs work with and support student organizations to host events, workshops, and trainings.

All in all, the participants made clear that the purpose of the USRCs is directly related to student needs. Brenda made this clear, saying the purpose of the USRC is to:

Serve the students and their needs, whatever their needs might be. I don't want to specifically say like, "Oh to help the students find scholarships" or things like that, because that's not the need for everybody... It all depends on the needs of the student, and that's how we're going to help assist the student.

Customized and Comprehensive Care

Although housed within various divisions and structured in different ways depending on the institution, USRCs were found to provide customized and comprehensive care to students. I use the word "care" with intention here, as it was clear that the participants in this study went above and beyond simple service provision. Rather, they demonstrated a level of sincere care in the ways in which they support undocumented students. Overwhelmingly, the USRCs were described to be a safe space for students. Said another way, Brenda described that the USRC she coordinates is really "a home for students… they build community, they get to know each other." This kind of space is critical for students because, as Martha described:

The [USRC]… for some of them, it's the first time that they're experiencing a space on an educational campus… to have a space to just be real, to be free, and to not have to hide or be ashamed of their undocumented status.
Laura echoed this, noting that her aim is to ensure that the students who use the USRC can "experience their full humanity."

There are many offices on campus that provide general student support. However, considering the unique barriers that undocumented students face in higher education, USRCs can deliver, or collaborate to deliver, the same support in a relevant way. Cristina said, the USRC is "a place for our students to come and feel safe and be able to have access to any of the resources that they would already, but in a way that removes those extra barriers."

USRCs also serve as a space for customized one-on-one work with undocumented students. One component of providing customized care is attending to the diverse immigration statuses of students. The findings indicated that USRCs pay great attention to the diversity of immigration statuses, crafting resources and services for undocumented students with DACA (sometimes referred to as DACAmented), undocumented students without DACA (sometimes referred to as unDACAmented), and students from mixed-status families (e.g., student is a U.S. citizen and parents are undocumented). DACA allows for students to be able to work without fear of deportation. However, undocumented students without DACA are often ineligible to work and receive a paycheck from a public institution; they must be paid through stipends or scholarships. USRCs often take on the role of figuring out creative ways to ensure undocumented students without DACA are able to secure on-campus employment. For example, Natalia described getting external funding to create a USRC internship program that pays student staff members through stipends. This is an opportunity that undocumented students without DACA are eligible for.

Despite the USRC professionals' enthusiasm and interest and supporting undocumented students, providing comprehensive support is a complex task as student needs stretch across various institutional functional areas including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, legal services, student organizational support, etc. Natalia explained this, saying, "I had to be an expert in every step of the way that the students have to navigate, from the moment they apply to the moment they graduate." In many cases, the programs and resources USRCs provide are a result of necessary collaboration with on-campus and off-campus partners. All of the participants described the importance on on-campus collaboration in order to provide financial, academic, and co-curricular support to students. Additionally, most of the USRCs represented in this study house book lending libraries, support student organizations, provide various programming for students (e.g., welcome week programming), and work collaboratively with on-campus mental health services to ensure that undocumented students' wellness is supported. Martha summed up the overarching goal of USRCs, asserting that they are meant to empower "holistic undocu-success."

RQ2: How do USRCs Contribute to Institutional Undocu-Competence?

In addition to the function of serving undocumented students, USRCs help to enhance the undocu-competence of the institution of which they are a part. The impact USRCs have on the overall campus is widespread and is largely a result of building and sustaining undocu-allies.

USRC Impact is Widespread

All of the participants explained that undocu-ally trainings are a major part of their work. Undocu-ally trainings range in size and scope, but essentially are trainings put on for staff, faculty, students, and community members in order to increase awareness around the issues impacting undocumented college students. These trainings are often offered for general attendance or are requested by individual campus units. Each participant described the utility of these of trainings and how they contributed to a more welcoming campus climate. Cristina said, "I think it's really changed the way people think about immigration… rather than as this black and white thing, really helping them see the gray. And so, it's created a lot more empathy on campus than there was before, as well as interest." Martha echoed this, noting that the undocu-ally trainings have positively impacted the campus. She described:

Even just in my one year here, [I've heard] countless stories of when allies really went above and beyond, and when a student was able to get an answer immediately, because the person they talked to was like, 'oh, yes, I know what that is.' And if they didn't know the answer, they know where to get the answer. So, it has really created a campus climate that is far more supportive and far more welcoming.

USRCs become the point of contact on campus for, "anything and everything [related to] undocumented students," according to Laura. Therefore, USRC professionals assist units across campus in evaluating and revising existing policies and procedures in order to ensure they are inclusive of undocumented students. Cristina described collaborating with the admissions and financial aid offices to ensure that undocumented students are coded correctly in internal systems. This was critical to undocumented students receiving accurate information and being treated within state law that affirmed undocumented students' eligibility to receive in-state resident tuition. Brenda also shared an example of collaborating with an academic department to ensure their scholarship opportunities were not excluding undocumented students.

Some participants reported that support has come from unlikely places. In part, this is due the current political climate that has been hostile, in both rhetoric and policy, towards undocumented immigrants. For example, Antonio described this happening particularly after the Trump administration attempted to rescind DACA in 2017. He explained that an academic department worked with the USRC to put on a fundraiser in order to raise funds to support

undocumented students on campus.

Building and Sustaining Undocu-Allies

Participants also described the importance of having undocu-allies across campus in order to best serve undocumented students. As mentioned, the USRCs offer undocu-ally trainings as a way to build undocu-allies. Generating the necessary knowledge, awareness, and skills to serve undocumented students is critical. Martha commented on this task, noting that any kind of trainings conducted by the USRC serve to "knock down myths" around immigration and clarify misconceptions. In addition to building undocu-allies, USRCs work hard to sustain their engagement. Laura described one strategy that USRCs use to do this is. She described that they frame allyship "as a verb and not a noun… in order to be an ally, you have to do things."

In one case, Natalia described an unsuspecting faculty member who reached out to the USRC to start a scholarship for undocumented students in the name of an undocumented student who had tragically passed away. "That's what allyship is," Natalia said. She went on to say that her relationships on campus are critical to her being able to support her students. She described, "at every department, I have my one… person… that I like pick up the phone and I'm like, 'Hey girl, how's it going?! Good?! Listen – I have this student issue…' (laughs). That's literally how I'm able to do my work…" Although these relationships, and the support that comes as a result of these relationships are critical, it shows the limits of the campus's efforts to institutionalize undocu-competence. This is evident as Natalia continued. "If I didn't have those relationships, the students would have to go downstairs to the window where they're not trained on supporting undocumented students and they come back to me crying because they were told the completely wrong thing." Without an ally in the department, an undocumented student could receive wrong information and potentially be treated poorly.

Sustaining undocu-allies also relies on relationship building across the campus. Some USRCs can facilitate this more easily depending on the structure of the center. For instance, centers that are housed alongside other identity-based centers may find relationship building to happen organically. This was how Martha described the USRC on her campus, as it is physically housed alongside other identity-based centers. She said:

So, it has this feel of like its own little neighborhood, right… because students come in, and usually what happens is they go to the one center they identify with. And then they're like, 'wait, what's going on next door? What's happening over there?' And so, there's a lot of mixing… and that was intentional… it allows for students who don't identify [as undocumented] to be supportive and to be allies. So, all of the centers are open. You don't have to identify with the community to use it. You just have to be willing to learn.

She went on to describe how this structure has helped sustain undocu-allies across campus. By having the USRC open, accessible, and situated within a larger network of cultural centers, students and staff who might not have been aware of the unique issues facing undocumented students are now aware and committed to advocating for undocumented immigrants.

Ultimately, sustaining undocu-allies is incredibly important given the current political climate with respect to immigration. Courtney explained this, saying:

The student group [that helped to establish the USRC] dropped off. They're no longer active and it's really unfortunate, you know… I think that they experienced some burnout… and then because of family separation over the summer, it created a lot more anxiety. It really exacerbated the issue. As well as the fact that now DACA's been back and forth in limbo for over a year. I think that fatigue is just catching up with everyone. So, it's really important at this point, at this junction, that we get our allies to step up… our faculty, staff, and student allies.

RQ3: What Challenges do USRCs Face in Contributing to Undocu-Competence?

In addition to understanding the ways that USRCs support students and contribute to institutional undocu-competence, it is important to understand the challenges these centers face. All of the participants made clear that their USRCs face a capacity challenge related to financial and human resources. This underfunded and understaffed reality posed limitations to the USRCs achieving their goals and fulfilling their missions. Moreover, participants described being limited in terms of their power to affect systemic change, acknowledging that this type of work is ongoing and never fully complete.

Limited Resources

Most notably, all participants described the need for increased financial and human resources support. The centers are often operating on small budgets, even when compared to other identity-based centers at their institutions. Antonio described how frustrating this can be, explaining, "the institution is having a really good time highlighting the work that we're doing, right, which is awesome... But at the same time, our operating budget for the entire year is $5,000." This sentiment was expressed by all of the participants. For example, Martha stated that the USRC she coordinates "is still very much underfunded." Similarly, Laura said the center "needs more permanent funding." In the absence of being fully funded, USRC professionals reported gaining formal and informal fundraising skills in order to bring in money to the center.

In addition to financial resources, USRCs are often limited in human resources as well. Many of these centers only have one professional staff member. Some of the centers have part-time graduate student or undergraduate student support staff. Yet, considering the amount of work these centers are responsible for, the current staffing

situations are simply unsustainable. Cristina described the limitation of her human resources as a one-staff member center, explaining that she often has to turn down opportunities to conduct trainings in the community, even with critical community partners such as local school districts, because there is simply not enough bandwidth to engage in those opportunities.

The Work is Never Done

USRC professionals described the frustrating, but realistic feeling that the work is simply never complete. Particularly in today's political climate, the participants described a "fragile" environment full of "pervasive uncertainty." They also made clear how difficult it can be to work with a student population where some student issues cannot be simply resolved by a USRC. For example, Alexandra said:

It's like, you want to do more for them, but sometimes it's out of your control, right… like, you can feel, to some extent, helpless because I mean… I can't just get you papers, right, or I can't help with very specific things. If you don't qualify for the [state's in-state resident tuition policy], like, I can't change that. We create such a big impact, but at the same time, you can't change the systemic issues… I can't, on my own, change the system.

Additionally, as the USRCs continue to emerge on campuses across the country, there are still issues in getting buy-in from campus stakeholders. Teresa explained that sometimes:

There's still a lack of understanding… from people who are above me. So, I think that's tough. It's tough to also have to educate someone, you know, on and on and on, or having have this discussion as to why – why do they deserve this, and why do they need this.

When asked about long-term goals of the USRC, Martha echoed this point:

As far as the [USRC's] role on campus goes, I think getting to a place where the center is accepted and valued by the majority of the campus. And not just the liberal part of campus, right… like, a true understanding that these are students first and they deserve the experience of any other college student.

Additionally, this type of buy-in can be difficult to achieve in the community outside of campus. Cristina described being out in the community for an event and was approached by a community member who asked, "Well, won't your center just close if DACA is fixed?" She explained, "No, it won't because they're still half of our students are unDACAmented, and even beyond that, you know, we have our refugees and TPS holders… mixed-status families… it's not going away anytime soon." Other participants commented on this issue as well. For example, Laura has had to push back on conversations in which people say, "once we have a progressive president, we are going to be okay… or, once we have the Dream Act, we'll be good to." These examples of oversimplifying immigration issues and debates about whether or not USRCs will be

needed long-term are challenges that USRC professionals will likely continue to navigate.

Discussion

The findings from this study affirm some of the emerging literature on USRCs. For example, Cisneros & Valdivia (2020) found that students themselves are the driving force behind USRC development on college campuses. This study builds upon that and asserts that students are not only the impetus to establishing USRCs, but that they are integrated into all facets of the center including its origin, evolution, and function. USRCs are beyond student-centered; they are student-encompassed. Additionally, this study affirms that USRCs provide a myriad of support mechanisms for undocumented students (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018), deploying customized and comprehensive care in order to empower undocumented student success.

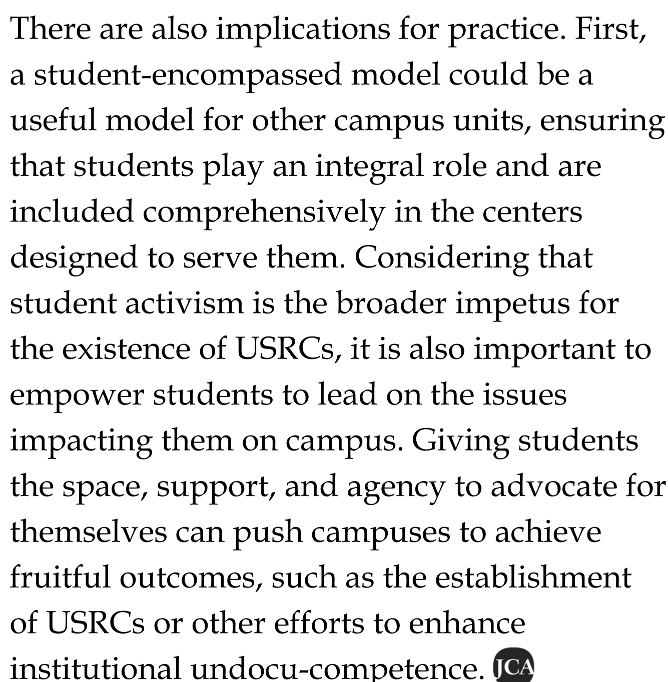
"This study...asserts that students are not only the impetus to establishing [Undocumented Student Resource Centers] (USRC), but that they are integrated into all facets of the center including its origin, evolution, and function. USRCs are beyond student-centered; they are student-encompassed."

Additionally, this study contributes to the body of scholarship on undocu-competence, demonstrating that USRCs positively contribute towards enhancing institutional undocu-competence, but still face challenges in being able to do this work. The primary challenges are being underfunded and understaffed. Institutional undocu-competence, as a framework, is helpful in empirically examining undocu-competence on a campus and, based on the findings in this study, USRCs contribute to all eight areas identified within the model. However, the findings from this study also illuminate the fact that institutions are loosely-coupled systems. Although the USRC is dedicated to serving, supporting, and advocating for undocumented students, not all units within the institutions share and operationalize that mission in consistent or sustained ways. Even for campuses with USRCs, undocu-competence does not seem to be fully institutionalized in the sense that it is "embedded in the actual value system of the organization" (Kezar, 2014, p. 168).

Implications

There are several notable implications for research based on this study. It is evident that USRC professionals have an important perspective and can serve as a valuable population to learn from as USRCs continue to emerge on campuses across the country. Future research might examine the personal and professional experiences of the professionals in these roles. Additionally, it was abundantly clear that USRCs are underfunded and understaffed. A comprehensive study that would examine the financial and human resources of USRCs

would be beneficial in gaining a clear picture of the current status of these centers. Moreover, this kind of study could potentially generate a compelling argument for institutions to increase the funding and staffing of USRCs.



There are also implications for practice. First, a student-encompassed model could be a useful model for other campus units, ensuring that students play an integral role and are included comprehensively in the centers designed to serve them. Considering that student activism is the broader impetus for the existence of USRCs, it is also important to empower students to lead on the issues impacting them on campus. Giving students the space, support, and agency to advocate for themselves can push campuses to achieve fruitful outcomes, such as the establishment of USRCs or other efforts to enhance institutional undocu-competence.

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Undocumented Students' Perceptions of Institutional Support

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ABSTRACT

This study employed phenomenological, case study inquiry to provide an in-depth exploration into eight undocumented students' perceptions of campus supports to answer the research question: What are undocumented students' perceptions of the type, nature, and effectiveness of institutional programs and support services that contribute to their persistence? Findings include undocumented students' perceptions of limited institutional support systems, impact of student organization involvement, and funding challenges. Implications for supporting retention and graduation of undocumented students are provided.

Keywords: undocumented students, support, engagement, financial challenges

Undocumented college students, who are approximately 2% of the college student population (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020), face significant academic, financial, emotional, and social challenges in American higher education (Contreras, 2009; Pérez, 2014). Undocumented students may also be members of other underserved student populations (e.g., low-income, first generation, underrepresented racial groups), which further compounds challenges associated with their citizenship status. Many undocumented students came to the U.S. with their families seeking better education and career opportunities and the ability to earn a college degree best positions these students to meet these aims. However, the challenges threaten their ability to access and persist through higher education.

Over the last two decades, the needs and lived experiences of undocumented college students have been illuminated through research (Abrego, 2006; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). Yet, aside from the passing of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012, the federal government has failed to address the postsecondary educational disparities that undocumented immigrants face. In the absence of federal legislation, policies at the institutional and state levels have begun to provide additional support and resources to meet their unique needs, including institution-based financial aid and legislation for in-state tuition rates (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Teranishi et al., 2015).

Additionally, supportive faculty and staff are key resources in undocumented student success (Chen & Rhoads, 2016). As a result, some institutions have focused on educating faculty and staff about the needs and

experiences of undocumented students by increasing their "undocu-competence" (Tapia-Fuselier, 2019). That is, some college campuses have started to invest in enhancing their institution's capacity for serving undocumented students (Valenzuela et al., 2015). Finally, an equitable and undocufriendly (Suarez-Orosco et al., 2015) campus climate and adequate peer support provide additional layers of support. In an effort to do this, Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) and other forms of dedicated safe spaces have been established at a small number of institutions in states with higher populations of undocumented immigrants (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

Although certain aspects of the undocumented student lived experience in higher education have been explored in the extant scholarship, there are still gaps that warrant examination (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). For instance, colleges and universities are beginning to respond to the demonstrated needs of undocumented students by providing intentional physical, emotional, social, financial, and legal support. Yet, the undocumented students' perceptions of and experiences with these support services remains unclear. Understanding undocumented students' perceptions of the resources offered that are designed to contribute to their persistence through higher education is needed to better support them.

This study employed phenomenological, case study inquiry to provide an in-depth exploration into eight undocumented students' perceptions of campus supports to answer the research question: What are undocumented students' perceptions of the type, nature, and effectiveness of institutional programs and support services that contribute to their persistence?

Theoretical Framework

Persistence has been well-explored through models to understand why college students stay at, or leave, their chosen institution (e.g., Nora, 2002, 2003, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Utilizing Nora's (2002, 2003, 2006) Model of Student Engagement, a theoretical framework for college student retention, this study focused on academic and social experiences explicated in the model and how they contribute to undocumented students' persistence. The academic and social experiences include formal and informal interactions with faculty, involvement in learning communities, social experiences, campus climates, validating experiences, and mentoring experiences (Nora, 2002, 2003, 2006). For the purposes of this study, student engagement encompasses all aspects of engagement with an institution of higher education, including but not limited to involvement in organizations, utilization of resources, and development of relationships with other campus supports, such as faculty, staff, and peers. Nora's (2002, 2003, 2006) model is useful in the understanding of undocumented students' perceptions of campus resources as it has also been applied

to experiences of STEM students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

Research Design and Methods

The phenomenological case study was conducted at a regional comprehensive HSI in the southwestern U.S., which we refer to as Norteno University. We collected data by conducting two in-person individual interviews with each participant as well as collecting journal entries. In particular, we sought phenomena from the participants' lived experience that disclosed the significance of everyday experiences that aided in constructing their social experiences (Dillon, 2015). By using methods consistent with phenomenological inquiry, an understanding of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions were gained (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Additionally, our utilization of case study methods allowed us to focus on the cultural, institutional, and organizational characteristics as an HSI. Moreover, our methodological approach enabled us to translate our findings into practice in ways that improves and reinforces the strategies, processes, and structures already in place to more effectively serve undocumented students (Cummings & Worley, 2008).

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2006) served as the sampling procedure to meet the study needs. The participants were self-identified first-generation (in the U.S.) undocumented traditionally-aged (18-24 year old) students who had completed at least one year at the institution. The goal of selection was to represent a variety of experiences at the site, decipher generalizations, and identify differences with regards to institutional supports and student experiences.

Considering that students' citizenship status was not systematically collected at the site, we recruited potential participants through flyers distributed on campus bulletin boards, email listservs, Facebook, residence halls, cultural and diversity centers, and classroom announcements. Additionally, snowball sampling from initially interested participants encouraged other students to volunteer to participate in the study. It is understandable that students who identify as undocumented may be apprehensive about participating in a study of this nature. We took these concerns seriously and worked to build trust and rapport with participants. We also engaged in practices to ensure that participants' identities and undocumented status would remain confidential, including assigning pseudonyms to all participants, and collecting data in a private location.

Participants

Ultimately, the study included a sample of eight students who met the study criteria. Table 1 provides age, academic standing, major, method of entry to the U.S., years in the U.S., and country of origin.

Table 1.
Participant Demographics.

Name	Age	Academic Standing	Major	Years in the U.S.	Country of Origin
Rogelio	22	Junior	Engineering	20	Mexico
Jadir	23	Junior	Business & Spanish	18	Mexico
Isabella	24	Sophomore	Nursing & Spanish	12	Mexico
Raul	24	Senior	Business & Spanish	20	Mexico
Rubi`	22	Junior	Social Work & Spanish	18	Mexico
Cesar	20	Sophomore	Spanish & undecided	16	Peru
Anjana	20	Sophomore	Spanish	5	Mexico
Alberto	24	Junior	Business & Spanish	11	Mexico

Data Collection

In congruence with a phenomenological approach, data was collected through interviews, which provided a rich, in-depth description of the contextual experiences and perceptions of undocumented students on campus (Stake, 2000). Interviews allowed for probing with profound questions while exploring the context in which undocumented students navigate their institution. A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was utilized during two 90-minute individual interviews with participants to provide structure as well as the opportunity to explore specific responses in depth based on each participant's approach to the questions (Creswell, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participants also journaled during data collection and submitted them between the two interviews so that the content of the journals could be utilized to further inform the structure of the second 90-minute interview.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, the coding process began by segmenting and labeling the data using an open coding process that allowed us to see the links between experiences. The researchers also used open coding when reviewing and analyzing the journal submissions that were completed by each participant. Following initial open coding of both data sources, themes began to emerge from commonalities among participants' experiences. In order to further explore the emergent themes, questions for the second round of interviews were developed to gain further insight and explore the accuracy of this initial analysis approach. Data analysis for the second interviews involved a deductive approach as the first round of coding and themes provided a framework to analyze the second interview data. To ensure that all participants remained anonymous, all identifiers collected, coded, and analyzed were removed from the data.

Trustworthiness

Engaging in validation procedures is necessary to provide accuracy in data collection and reporting. This study followed Creswell's (2012) validation procedures by having external reviewers and participants provide evidence that the information collected and disseminated was accurate and concise. Once the initial interview was completed, participants received a copy of the transcript for member checking (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation (Creswell, 2010) supported the confirmability of the findings as data collection involved the use of two interviews and journal data.

Findings

Although undocumented students share a parallel experience, each has a unique story and it is important to represent their varied experiences in the findings. Their stories present the intersectionality of their identities, their varying needs, and the importance they attached to institutional support they received which enabled them to persist. When asking each participant what persistence meant to them, it was clear that persistence was not only from year to year; it was also from semester to semester. Moreover, their short-term goals, which led them towards their end goal of attaining a degree, included on-going attendance and involvement on their campus. We sought to understand their persistence by examining their perception of supports on campus which ultimately influenced their experiences as undocumented students at Norteno University.

Despite the risk involved with being identified as an undocumented student, participants showed interest and enthusiasm in sharing their stories. The interest in sharing their experiences was driven by their desire to create positive change for current and future undocumented students. The themes that emerged were 1) limited institutional support systems, 2) impact of student organization involvement, and 3) funding challenges.

Limited Institutional Support Systems

Participants found that campus faculty and staff served as both supports and challenges to their persistence. While limited faculty and staff knowledge of undocumented students' needs and restrictions frustrated participants, the presence of trusted and invested campus faculty and staff, once identified, were major supports. Unfortunately, not all faculty and staff provided the same level of knowledge and support, which led participants to have to navigate who they could rely on instead of experiencing universal support throughout campus.

While an institution may promote inclusion through policies and communication, the participants perceived inconsistency with faculty and staff members' knowledge and ability to provide support. For example, Isabella was struggling academically in her nursing program and also financially with an inability to meet deadlines for on-time payments. As a non-native English speaker,

the material was hard to grasp at times. She shared:

I am facing a problem currently in my program in college which is my GPA. Sometimes, I think I should tell my advisor my story, but I, deep down, know that won't help because they won't understand and may not support me. Isabella, Anjana, and Alberto all stated that they also do not talk to anyone about their status.

Jadir took the opposite approach and disclosed his status, but did not perceive that the faculty member understood the importance of his status on his college experience. He shared, "I disclosed my situation to a person in my department, and they just didn't seem to really pay much importance to it." Jadir was vulnerable and sought validation of his identity as an undocumented student, but did not receive it. These faculty attitudes were also experienced by Rubi: "There are some people who try to ignore it. Most of the time, they just pretend like it's not a problem. To this day, students and staff think that there aren't problems for undocumented people." Raul found both sources of support and sources of disconnection with different campus entities:

I feel like I'm connected to certain departments like the School of Business, the Hispanic Student Union, and the Foundation, but then at the same time, I feel like I'm not connected at all to other departments. Like, Student Engagement, I don't know Student Government, honestly, and I don't think they care to know me.

Cesar did not feel that the campus supported him. He lived in fear that he would be deported and wanted his university to provide more support. "I don't think that they do enough to help us through school. I have my student group, my cousin, and some staff who do. If they were not here, I don't think I would be here." Jadir found gaps in staff members' knowledge of how to assist undocumented students:

I don't believe that they were prepared at all. People in financial aid, you tell them you're a DACA student, and they have no idea what that is. There hasn't been anything that says, hey, if you're an undocumented student, we have a meeting to help you out, to get the resources you need to come to college, and to stay in college, and to be successful in college.

Rogelio reiterated that individuals on campus are not educated enough on how to support students when he stated, "We do not have the same needs as other students, and people in departments such as financial aid don't understand that."

The participants only mentioned four people who they saw as advocates on campus. Two were Chicana/Latina administrators in student affairs and two were Chicana/Latina faculty members in social science disciplines. Raul shared:

I think there are certain people on campus that are super-resourceful like Magdalena, Violeta, and Dr. Dominguez, and people that are on that side of the school, but for the most part, I feel like the system

doesn't really have the resources, or doesn't have all the answers to my questions.

In addition to the limited staff and faculty support, there were also limitations to spaces of support. While Rubi saw herself as a student just like any other ("I'm a 21-year-old girl, like anybody else, but without documents"), there are unique experiences that come with being undocumented and having an undocumented identity requires additional safe spaces, both physical and emotional. Norteno University, the site of this study, had a cultural center, but it was not specific for undocumented students.

Cesar stated, "I know we have a cultural center on campus, but if there was a center for undocumented students, which had staff that could help us, we can feel more support and like we belong." While Rubi agreed and sought to "have an office where we could go that we wouldn't feel so different." Anjana reiterated, "If we had a space we can go to talk about our struggles with other people who understand, it would be a way to find others like us, and know we are not alone." Jadir went on to say, "Safe spaces are important because we can be a collective and feel more connected to the campus, and hopefully find more resources on campus." Despite having minoritized identities along with their peers, the participants viewed their undocumented status as salient and needing an additional layer of support in a physical space. Cultural centers provide avenues for students to not only feel safe while on campus, but the ability to connect with other students, who may look like them or have similar backgrounds and experiences.

Impact of Student Organization Involvement

All eight participants were engaged in culturally-based student organizations, which provided them opportunities to develop relationships with students from similar backgrounds and feel a sense of belonging on campus (Rendón, 1994). Extensive research demonstrates the connection between student involvement and academic success (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995) and the participants emphasized the importance of their involvement in their persistence in college.

In deciding to become involved, several participants shared their reasons and how they learned about the organizations. Raul stated: "I decided to join my student organization to be a part of something that represented my culture," so the presence of organizations that represent their cultural identities can begin the process of validation through visibility. Cesar's previous family connections at the institution quickly engaged him with the organization: "My cousin was the one who told me to join because it would help me meet new people."

Anjana shared how her co-curricular involvement helped her develop community and understand her situation as an undocumented student as well as the persistent struggles of her peers:

Perceptions of Institutional Support

I didn't know anybody else, but, once I started HSU and my Greek organization, it was like, oh, my God, there is more than just me on campus because I felt like I was the only one. It's another side of motivation and I realize there's more stories, and there are worse stories than mine, but people achieve where they want to go, and there are other dreamers, too, so I know I am not alone.

Anjana's engagement allowed her to see her experiences in relation to others, which provided a sense of strength knowing that others had even greater struggles but persisted.

Because participants recognized the value of involvement on campus, they also shared their desire to be even more involved, but barriers prevented it. One of the barriers noted by Rubi was travel restrictions for undocumented students. A challenge that student organization leaders need to address is how international travel limits and possibly alienates engagement of undocumented students. Rubi stated:

I love being a part of HSU because I am able to give back to the community and be more connected as a student to my campus. Unfortunately, because of my status, I am not able to do many of the things my peers do, like attend the Mexico trip we fundraised for.

Cesar also noted the value of involvement, but also the limitations he had:

Had I not been involved with HSU I wouldn't feel connected or that I belong on this campus. Although I can't be involved the way I would like to, I try to do what I can…Had it not been for me reaching out and joining organizations I don't think I would be as successful on campus.

Rogelio shared a similar experience with limitations on his time despite his desire to engage more fully in his organizations. Rogelio's level of involvement on campus was impacted by his priority of earning financial resources to attend school:

I just don't have time for anything. I don't even have time for myself. I have to work to pay for my school out of pocket. If I didn't have to work, I could be more involved and get the support that I need.

Cesar acknowledged the conflicts between paying for his education and simultaneously trying to fully engage in the opportunities available as part of the education:

Since I have to pay for school right away, I have to mostly try to work as many hours as I can. Then, it limits me from trying to volunteer other places, to try to, maybe, get hours to apply for scholarships, which they mostly require you to volunteer for an organization.

For the participants who were involved on campus, the positive impact of that involvement was made clear. Yet, for other participants, there were limited opportunities

for involvement because of external financial and documentation issues. These tensions are difficult to navigate and ultimately necessitate that undocumented students consider how to best maximize their time available if they are to engage with student organizations.

Funding Challenges

Undocumented students' academic abilities allowed them to access to higher education, but the financial barriers and inability to utilize funding resources available to other students was a major difference in their experience and perception of support. Even prior to the financial relationship with a campus, participants were concerned with how to secure financial support from their families. When it came time for Isabella to continue her studies onto what, in Mexico, is university, she had to ask her parents as it was no longer free:

When I was going to ask my parents about continuing my education past high school, I was really scared. I was scared that they would tell me no. My parents allowed me to keep studying, and I began my journey two hours from home to keep going with my education. Unfortunately, it became really expensive and we could not afford it, even though my mother really tried.

Isabella then became financially responsible for her education without her family's ability to contribute.

Undocumented students may also incur additional costs to achieve their degree because of additional academic development needed. Alberto had to spend the first year in college learning English with foreign exchange students from around the world. He was not ready for that extra expense of the English class, but he knew he could not give up "because you, as an immigrant, you can't be like the other students. You have to study harder at your class. You can't fail any class because you know you can't afford it." However, in attempts to pay for their education, some participants noted that their work detracted from their ability to be successful academically. Raul stated:

I was working and I had to take a full-time job because there were no part time jobs that would work with my schedule. I had to take a full-time job at a call center overnight. I started failing my classes just because I was running on three hours of sleep every night. And then I did end up failing that semester. If I had more funding that would not have happened.

Cesar also stated "I have to work a lot to pay school and pay my cousin who lent me money for school. That affects my classes because I can't get to class or do my homework all the time." Rogelio also experienced Cesar's pressures.

I don't do some homework. I'm fine taking a zero, I'm kind of satisfied sometimes because I'd rather sleep. I don't want to go to sleep until three, two in the morning every night. As I have to come home late from work and then have to wake up in the early in the morning.

Another confounding financial concern arose for Isabella who wanted to pursue a degree that would require additional credits and thus additional funds. She felt her academic goals were impacted by her financial ability. Isabella stated, "Yes because of my major, the cost is going to affect me and I'm going to have to drop it. I have to take a lot of credits and it's costly."

The funding challenges created barriers to involvement and to accessing academic resources because of the time spent balancing work and being a college student. Rogelio stated that he did not feel academically prepared because he was not working to his full potential putting the effort in to do well. While there are programs such as TRiO that are designed to help students, particularly first-generation college students by offering academic preparedness workshops, tutoring, and study skills, undocumented students are not eligible for these services as they are funded through federal grant dollars. Moreover, the availability of alternative tutoring services on campus often conflicted with the limited amount of time working students have to be on campus.

"The findings of this study further demonstrate the importance of hiring faculty and staff with an understanding of undocumented students' experiences or the ability to train faculty and staff to transform their perspectives to support undocumented students proactively and intentionally."

In many ways, these types of financial challenges are unique for undocumented students because they are ineligible for federal financial aid opportunities that are granted to other college students (Federal Student Aid, 2021). As the participants shared, the lack of financial means to pay for college led to concerns about being able to achieve academic goals, missed opportunities to utilize academic resources, and having to make decisions between work and study time.

Discussion and Recommendations

The themes align with the social and academic experiences in Nora's (2002, 2003, 2006) Model of Student Engagement, which should be used more frequently to understand aspects of the college environment that contribute to the persistence of undocumented students. Participants highlighted the importance of campus community and advocates to help them engage, gain the strength to tell their stories, and discover their own resilience to contribute to persisting through college. The supportive staff and faculty experiences of participants emphasize the following aspects of Nora's (2002, 2003, 2006) model: staff and faculty interactions, campus climate, and validating and mentoring experiences. However, while the institution had policies in place for undocumented students, participants did not view the support as campus-wide, but rather with specific entities they could count on one hand. The findings of

this study further demonstrate the importance of hiring faculty and staff with an understanding of undocumented students' experiences or the ability to train faculty and staff to transform their perspectives to support undocumented students proactively and intentionally.

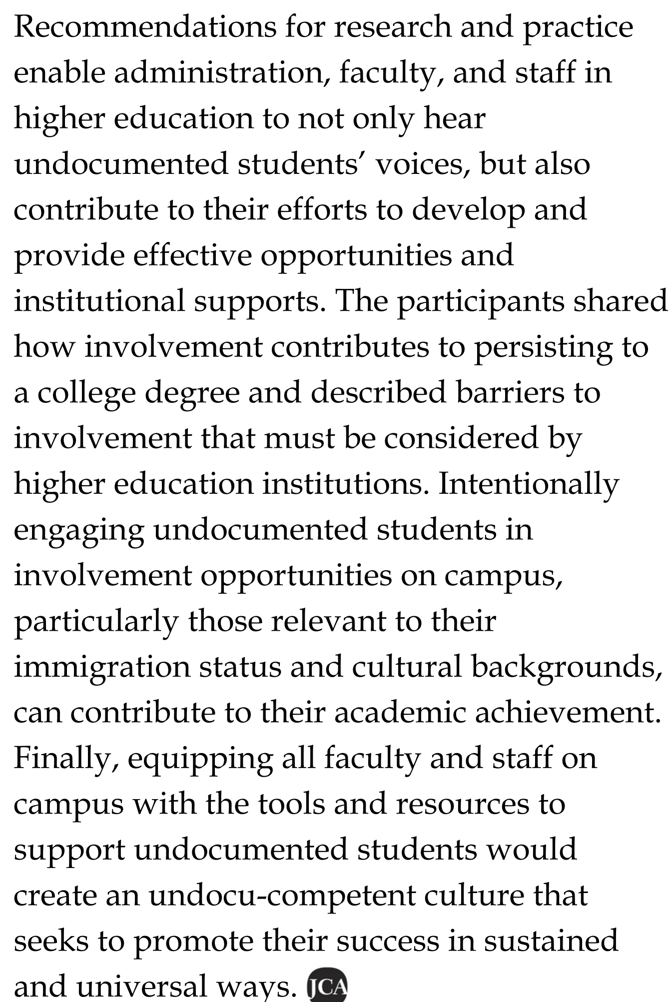
According to Southern (2016), "Student affairs professionals, faculty members, and other campus representatives play key roles translating policies set at the state and federal levels into the conditions undocumented college students experience" (p. 308). Therefore, when working with the undocumented student population, it is important that staff, faculty, and administrators are informed of resources and policies that assist these students reach completion. Gaps between policy and practice related to the needs of undocumented students must be closed to promote their persistence. Creating a culture of educating faculty and staff to meet these needs can contribute to undocumented students' persistence by extending their network of support (Nienhausser & Espino, 2017). Enhancing institutional undocu-competence (Tapia-Fuselier & Young, 2019; Valenzuela et al., 2015) can help provide an understanding of the diversity of undocumented students' backgrounds and experiences, financial support opportunities and restrictions, and legal structures inhibiting their academic experience.

Participants' involvement with various student organizations led to stronger connections to the campus, which contributed to persistence towards their degree. Specifically, culturally-based organizations provided participants with meaningful connections, which validated their presence and allowed them to create connections with others with an undocumented status. The main characteristics of student organization gatherings that support undocumented students can be extended to physical spaces. Cultural centers provide avenues for students to not only feel safe while on campus, but the ability to connect with other students, who may look like them or have similar backgrounds and experiences. Safe spaces on campus can range from cultural centers to administrative staff or faculty members' offices. Once these locations are identified, undocumented students begin to garner services at these locations that aid in the persistence. Information about safe spaces and people was shared informally among the network of undocumented student participants. Information necessary for undocumented students' persistence must not be haphazard; institutions should seek out safe and non-threatening opportunities for undocumented students to self-identify their status to ensure they are connected to resources, services, and supports early in their transition to the institution.

Considering the funding challenges explained by the participants, it is important to note that this study was conducted in a state where

eligible undocumented immigrants can take advantage of in-state tuition. Still, the participants made clear that financial barriers are pervasive. If the study had been conducted in a state where undocumented students could not receive in-state tuition, we expect that this finding may be even more pronounced. With finances already a major issue related to access to higher education by historically excluded populations, the lack of available federal funding for undocumented students was a major issue identified as a barrier to their success in post-secondary education. Funding concerns impacted participants' abilities to engage with campus resources and involvement opportunities that are integral to their persistence.

This study emphasizes how undocumented students' financial need to work to support their education while in college further disadvantages their likelihood to persist as they must then sacrifice involvement opportunities due to limited time. Undocumented students strive to contribute to their institutions and communities, so institutions should develop opportunities to combine involvement with earning funds for their education. Future research should focus on how to create financial structures that comprehensively meet undocumented students' needs for support, connection, and learning.



Conclusion

Recommendations for research and practice enable administration, faculty, and staff in higher education to not only hear undocumented students' voices, but also contribute to their efforts to develop and provide effective opportunities and institutional supports. The participants shared how involvement contributes to persisting to a college degree and described barriers to involvement that must be considered by higher education institutions. Intentionally engaging undocumented students in involvement opportunities on campus, particularly those relevant to their immigration status and cultural backgrounds, can contribute to their academic achievement. Finally, equipping all faculty and staff on campus with the tools and resources to support undocumented students would create an undocu-competent culture that seeks to promote their success in sustained and universal ways. JCA

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Building Critical Bridges: The Role of University Presidents in Collaborating with Undocumented Student Activists

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ABSTRACT

Undocumented students across the country have powerfully organized for the development of equitable programs and policies for undocumented students in higher education. Presidents of colleges and universities play a key role in working with undocumented activists to influence the development of these programs. Our research team with The UndocuScholars Project at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) spotlights university presidents who have been leaders in the field in working with undocumented students through the documentary film series College Presidents with Undocumented Students. In this article, we discuss the second film in the series showcasing President Elsa Núñez of the public university, Eastern Connecticut State University, and her work with the undocumented student organization on her campus, Freedom at Eastern. We discuss the nuances of collaboration between undocumented student organizers and university presidents, and provide recommendations to university leaders such as seeing student activists as their colleagues.

Keywords: undocumented students, student activists, university presidents

Undocumented youth[1] have been powerful and effective leaders in advancing higher education equity for undocumented students. Across the country, thousands of undocumented youth and students have formed organizations that advocate for policy and program change at the federal, state, and institutional level (Nicholls, 2013; Perez, 2016). College and university presidents can play a powerful role in collaborating with undocumented student activists to influence the development of these programs and policies. Our research team with The UndocuScholars Project at UCLA sought to highlight university presidents who lead the field in advocating for education equity for undocumented students in the short documentary film series, College Presidents with Undocumented Students. We captured the nuances of how university administrators can collaborate with undocumented student leaders to build change on college campuses. The first film in the series highlights President Brian Murphy of De Anza College, a community college in California. The second film, which we focus on in this article,

[1] We refer to undocumented students with and without DACA and TPS as all being undocumented.

features President Elsa Núñez of Eastern Connecticut State University, a public liberal arts university in Connecticut.

While research informs the field of education's understanding of undocumented youth's organizing for education equity, little research explores how university administrators work effectively in collaboration with undocumented student activists. This article addresses this gap in the literature by highlighting the case study of President Núñez's collaboration with the undocumented student group Freedom at Eastern. Through a discussion of our film and additional examples, we showcase how a university president can support student leaders in their advocacy efforts to collaboratively build equitable programs.

The national landscape of access to college for undocumented students is complex. Since few federal policies expand access to higher education, state context matters in determining access for undocumented students (Olivas, 2012). (See next section for more information on federal, state, and institutional policies.) Some states offer access to the more affordable in-state tuition and financial aid. However, in other states, students are banned from accessing in-state tuition or are barred from enrolling in their public universities, states we refer to as "locked-out." The states with the most restrictive policies against undocumented students are in the South (Nienhusser, 2018). Most students attending our case study site, Eastern Connecticut State University, are from Georgia and North Carolina. Georgia is one of the few states in the country that bars both financial aid and enrollment into public universities, making it one of the toughest states for undocumented students to enroll in a higher education institution (Soltis, 2015). President Elsa Núñez of Eastern Connecticut State University, a public university, believes it is the responsibility of college and university presidents to address equity for undocumented students across state lines and to work with partner organizations to build access to college for undocumented students in all states. President Núñez partnered with TheDream.US program, a national non-profit organization that has a program called "Opportunity Scholarship" specifically for undocumented students who live in "locked-out" states. TheDream.US program is the nation's largest college access and success program for undocumented students. They have worked with over 75 partner colleges to ensure financial and academic support for over 4,000 undocumented students. Eastern worked with TheDream.US to welcome their first cohort of "Opportunity Scholars" in 2016 and have served over 200 undocumented students from outside Connecticut through the program.

Many undocumented students who come to Eastern through TheDream.US program were involved with community organizations in their home states. For example, many students were part of Freedom University in Georgia, a modern-day freedom school for

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undocumented students. Freedom schools were originally organized by Black Americans to offer a liberatory education to their community during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s when Black students were banned from some public universities (Soltis, 2015). Drawing inspiration from these freedom schools, Freedom University was founded by undocumented students and professors in 2011 in response to the state's banning of undocumented students from public universities. Freedom U. offers courses in social justice, literature, science, and art, all with an aim of empowering undocumented youth and fulfilling their human right to an education. Freedom U. collaborates with veteran Black organizers of freedom schools to address equity for both Black and undocumented student populations (Soltis, 2015). Upon arriving at Eastern, many students from Georgia drew on their experiences with Freedom U. to found Freedom at Eastern, a student led organization that advocates for undocumented students and creates a safe space for undocumented students. They organized rallies, workshops, and trainings, and provided information and mentorship to undocumented students from their home states—effectively creating a youth-run pipeline of support between their home states and the university.

The production team for this film was led by Rachel E. Freeman (PhD candidate at UCLA), Brenda Y. Lopez (PhD candidate at UCLA and professional filmmaker), Mohammad Tavakoli (professional filmmaker), Daniela Iniestra Varelas and Daniel Castillo, (student leaders with Freedom at Eastern), and Professor Robert T. Teranishi. Daniela and Daniel were key members of the coproduction team as they led the process of building a narrative around the importance of collaboration between student activists and university presidents. In this way, our team "studied up" from students' perspective to better understand how university leaders can work with student activists.

Policy Landscape at the Federal, State, and Institutional Level

While the Supreme Court case Plyler v. Doe in 1982 ensured access to free public K-12 education for undocumented children nationwide, the federal government has done little to expand access to higher education. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), an executive order announced by the Obama administration in 2012, expanded access to higher education by providing some undocumented youth with opportunities to work (Gonzales et al., 2016). Moreover, the TPS program provides similar opportunities as DACA to immigrants from particular countries that have experienced environmental or political crises. However, neither DACA nor TPS directly address equity in higher education. With the lack of clear direction from the federal government, states determined their own policies. About 15 states offer both the more affordable in-state tuition rates and financial aid; about four

states offer in-state tuition, but do not offer financial aid; several states only offer more affordable tuition to students with DACA; and about 15 states exclude undocumented students by requiring them to pay the more expensive out-of-state tuition and prohibiting their enrollment in public universities (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2021).

Our case study is located in Connecticut, which has more equitable policies for undocumented students compared to other states. In 2015, thanks to undocumented activists' mobilization particularly from the organization Connecticut Students for a Dream, Connecticut House Bill 8844 allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. Furthermore, Connecticut Public Act 18-2, enacted in 2018, provides access to institutional financial aid for undocumented students. While these state policies in Connecticut expanded access for students who went to high school in Connecticut, students who went to high school outside the state are required to pay the more expensive out-of-state tuition. Many similar state policies across the country only apply to undocumented students who went to high school in the state. Therefore, university leaders play an important role in working with programs such as TheDream.US program to expand equity to out-of-state students.

Literature Review on Undocumented Student Activism

As of 2020, about 454,000 undocumented students are studying in higher education in the United States (Feldblum et al., 2020). Undocumented students face xenophobic barriers in pursuing a college education including hearing messaging from college counselors that undocumented students cannot go to college (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). After surmounting barriers to access college admission, undocumented students continue to face challenges in college including exclusionary campus climates and high levels of stress and anxiety in part linked to the constant fear of deportation and concerns tied to financial difficulties (Perez, 2009; Gonzales, 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Abrego, 2006; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017).

To ameliorate these barriers, undocumented youth and students have advocated for equity for undocumented students in higher education (Nicholls, 2013; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). The contemporary movement of undocumented youth organizing for the past twenty years builds on a tradition of immigrant youth organizing for equity in the education system for more than 100 years. For example, in the 1970s, the Young Lords, a group of mostly Black Puerto Ricans, pushed for more Black and Latina/o faculty and the development of courses on racial and ethnic studies on university campuses (Ogbar, 2006).

Building on this history, researchers have explored how the contemporary undocumented youth-led movement organized for change in educational policies and programs at the federal, state, and institutional levels (Escudero, 2020; Muñoz et al., 2014; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Muñoz, 2015; Nicholls, 2013; Soltis, 2015). Scholars have focused on undocumented youth's organizing for federal policies, such as numerous iterations of the Dream Act since 2001 that would provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented young adults (Galindo, 2012; Nicholls, 2013). For example, Galindo (2012) documents undocumented youth's acts of civil disobedience in 2010 in Tucson, Arizona where they sat in Senator John McCain's office on May 7, 2010 to demand McCain support the passage of the Dream Act. However, the Dream Act has never been passed. At the state level, researchers explored how undocumented youth advocated for state governments to pass legislation allowing undocumented students to access the more affordable in-state tuition and financial aid (Negrón-Gonzales 2014).

At the university level, scholars explored how undocumented students organize for institutional support (Galindo, 2011; Galindo, 2012; Nicholls, 2013; Chen & Rhoads, 2016). Undocumented students advocated for administrators to develop institutional support (Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020), staging actions just to get a meeting with an administrator (Sanchez & So, 2015). For example, in 2010, UC Berkeley undocumented students had a nine-day hunger strike to demand a meeting with the university's chancellor to discuss the importance of building programs for undocumented students. Following the students' action, the Chancellor formed a task force composed of students, staff and faculty that worked to develop institutional support (Sanchez & So, 2015). Undocumented students have also built community on campus by forming student organizations (Galindo, 2011; Galindo, 2012; Nicholls, 2013). While students have done most of the work to build institutional support, administrators, staff, and faculty play a key role in leveraging their influence to implement programs (Sanchez & So, 2015; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

Legacy of Media Activism

Our team made a film showcasing President Núñez and the students at Eastern Connecticut because documentary films can be powerful tools for inspiring activism. The goal of the film is to inspire university leaders to work in collaboration with undocumented student activists. Researchers have explored how films can be influential mediums for storytelling about human and civil rights because they can incite strong responses (Hinegardner, 2009; Cizek, 2005). Films are also powerful tools as they portray humanizing stories in the first person and films can reach a wider audience than other mediums.

Since our film was born from a collaboration between undocumented student leaders and allies, we seek to honor a powerful tradition of immigrant and undocumented activists and artists who produced films to reclaim how undocumented immigrants' stories are told. We drew inspiration from Tam Tran (ie: Lost and Found), Set Hernandez Rongkilyo (COVER/AGE), Rahi Hasan, Nancy Meza, Linett Luna, Luna X Moya, Julio Salgado and Jesus Iñiguez (Dreamers Adrift), Armando Ibañez (Undocumented Tales), Ju Hong (Halmoni), Jose Antonio Vargas (Documented), and Marcos Nieves. We also drew inspiration from the film The Unafraid, co-directed and produced by Anayansi Prado and Heather Courtney, about three undocumented students with DACA from Georgia who organized for immigrant rights with authors of our article. While many documentary films portray the experiences of undocumented immigrants, few documentaries capture the complex relationship between university presidents and undocumented student activists. Seeking to build on this legacy of undocumented filmmaking, our film addresses the nuances of collaboration between university leaders and student activists from the students' perspective.

Co-Production Team of Undocumented Student Leaders and Allies

The production team of the film was designed to reflect our values of centering and honoring undocumented student leadership. Rachel E. Freeman, a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA's Graduate School of Education, led the development of the production team with support from Professor Robert T. Teranishi. Then Brenda Y. Lopez, a fellow Ph.D. candidate at UCLA and professional filmmaker, and Mohammad Tavakoli, a professional filmmaker, were brought onto the team for their professional filmmaking skills and experience in producing films about social justice.

Rachel, Brenda, and Mohammad then sought to connect with undocumented student leaders at Eastern Connecticut State University. Through Rachel's experiences working with undocumented youth from Georgia, students at Freedom University suggested that Rachel connect with Daniel Castillo and Daniela Iniestra Varelas, leaders with Freedom at Eastern, to co-produce the film. All members of the production team were compensated by The UndouScholars Project at professional rates.

Rachel first met with Daniel and Daniela to tell them about the goals of the film and to ask if they endorsed uplifting President Elsa Núñez as a model leader in the field. Both Daniel and Daniela felt that President Núñez had supported their advocacy and were keen to highlight President Núñez. Upon completing filming, Rachel, Mohammad, Brenda, Daniel, and Daniela wrote a storyboard for the arc of the narrative. Before finalizing the film, we showed it to President Núñez and her communications team to make sure the film resonated with them. The resulting film is ten minutes long: short

enough to be viewed over social media and just long enough to capture the nuances of this story.

Upon completing the film, we posted it to YouTube on February 27th, 2019 (UndocuScholars IGE, 2019) and published the film with a corresponding blog post on My Undocumented Life, a website with almost two million views that provides up-to-date information and resources for undocumented immigrants. Sharing the film on a platform with such a large viewership allowed the film to reach a wide audience of undocumented youth and educators with almost 800 shares on social media. With the goal of reaching university leaders, the film was also showcased at a conference hosted by the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, an "alliance of American college and university leaders dedicated to increasing public understanding of how immigration policies and practices impact our students, campuses and communities (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2021)."

The film received positive responses from students, staff, and university leaders. We received feedback from undocumented youth in Georgia that the film inspired them to consider leaving the state to pursue college. In addition, several college and university presidents contacted us to inquire how their work and institution could be featured in future films in the series. Moreover, many college professors across the country reported sharing the film, along with the corresponding blog post, in their college classrooms.

Portrait of an Impactful University President

President Núñez has worked alongside students, community groups, and legislators to bring equity in education. She is available to meet with students directly in person which makes students feel valued. Furthermore, President Núñez allocates resources and staff for the "Opportunity Scholars," undocumented students who attend the university through TheDream.US program. Not only did she open Eastern's doors to undocumented students, but she advocates outside the university by fighting for equal access in Connecticut and supporting in-state tuition rates and institutional aid. In this section, we discuss examples of President Núñez's collaboration with undocumented student activists showcased in our film and additional examples beyond our film.

Pilot of New Program

Before her undocumented students through TheDream.US program even arrived to campus, President Núñez supported access to higher education for undocumented students. She played an influential role in advocating for the passage of Connecticut Public Act 18-2 allowing undocumented students to access institutional financial aid, collaborating hand in hand with Connecticut Students for a Dream to support this bill. President Núñez

says in the film, "I knew that we could make a reasoned argument to the American public in Connecticut that they were worthy of getting these dollars and so we made not only the political argument but we also made the important argument on moral grounds." She used this same argument when proposing the collaboration with TheDream.US.

While in search of potential universities to lead the Opportunity Scholarship, TheDream.US contacted several state governors. Immediately, Connecticut's former Governor Dannel Malloy took interest. The governor then worked with Connecticut State Colleges & Universities President Mark Ojakian to find the most suitable college for the program. President Núñez took initiative and requested that the Opportunity Scholarship be piloted at Eastern Connecticut State University. She argued that Eastern, being the only public liberal arts college in Connecticut, would be the best option because the philosophy behind a public education is its availability to everyone no matter their immigration status. Eastern became one of only two universities nationwide to initially partner with TheDream.US and successfully launch the Opportunity Scholarship on their campuses. President Núñez and her team discussed what they needed to do to set the students up for success. In the film, she describes how it was a multiyear process to build institutional support on campus. She says, "There's a culture on every college campus—a university campus—and that culture is in many ways shaped by the leadership of the institution. We weren't pushing people into accepting undocumented students, we were asking them to consider the political, economic, and moral arguments that I was making. And eventually everybody came on board."

Institutional Response to Student Need

President Núñez and her team were committed to undocumented students' success and realized the importance of cultivating a community around inclusion. However, the first cohort of Opportunity Scholars presented new challenges and needs to Eastern that had never been considered before. Such challenges included the need for mental, emotional, financial, and academic support. President Núñez ensures that staff working directly with scholars receive proper training pertaining to their issues, as well as workshops to better understand and support the diversity undocumented students bring to campus.

She appointed a full-time staff member on campus, Maribel Sanchez, as the key go-to figure. Maribel is knowledgeable about the ever-changing policies for undocumented students and cares deeply about her students' success. She is also at times the facilitator between the students and administration. The students trust Maribel as she is willing to work for the students against any form of prejudice on campus as well as work with other staff members to provide resources for the students. The students at Eastern call

Maribel their "Connecticut Mom," for she is also the motherly figure for many whose parents are hundreds of miles away. Maribel not only works as an avid supporter for her students, she has also taken her advocacy off campus and participated in direct actions in Washington, D.C.

Many of the students who came from Georgia were involved with the organization Freedom University. Being graduates of the organization, they saw the need to create their own safe space and replicate that foundation where undocumented youth are able to share their mental, emotional, and academic thoughts with each other. There was debate among the students on whether they should move forward with creating their student-led club as it could risk exposing themselves under the Trump Presidency. After much discussion, the students agreed that although they might face backlash, they would not go back into the shadows. Rather they realized there was an even more compelling need to start the club. The students who began Freedom at Eastern understood the complications and feelings of their fellow peers following the election and realized all the scholars would have to lean on one another to be able to advocate and care for each other. They effectively created a peer network to share ideas about how to navigate their upcoming years at Eastern and their troubles that would soon start with Trump threatening to end DACA and TPS.

Freedom at Eastern has garnered a great reputation for providing a welcoming and supportive environment for undocumented students. Their mission is to use dialogue, education, and activism to raise awareness about immigration issues on campus. This is done through organizing rallies, hosting events which bring exposure to the Eastern population, and working alongside administrators. The students active in Freedom at Eastern have proven themselves as leaders who will not stop bringing their shared vision with President Núñez of creating equity for all. With over 205 Opportunity Scholars on Eastern's campus at the time of writing this article in 2021, the students are some of the fiercest voices on campus- voices that are necessary in order to ensure the needs of the scholars are being met.

Supporting Student Activism

President Núñez thinks deeply about how to continually support her undocumented students in being successful as they engage in political and civic activism. Most higher education institutions that are active in supporting undocumented students have issued public statements of support, but President Núñez does much more to support undocumented students.

After President Trump's inauguration, undocumented students on campus experienced high levels of anxiety and stress as their protection from DACA and TPS was constantly under attack. Upon the Trump

administration's announcement to rescind DACA in September 2017, Freedom at Eastern immediately began organizing. They called on all students, allies, and media to join them on campus to "Defend DACA." For many undocumented students, this was their first time involved in a direct action, but they saw this as a fight for their lives. With Freedom at Eastern, the students realized the power of their voices and how they must never remain silent. Their small group was a reflection of their community and everyone they were fighting for. They gathered at the student center, painted posters, and made huge banners. A student's father designed shirts with a butterfly on the back, symbolizing the beauty of migration. That evening they rallied across campus. President Núñez stood alongside the scholars and gave a fiery speech that empowered everyone to keep fighting, a moment showcased in our film. When the rescinding of DACA went to the Supreme Court in June 2020, a time beyond the production of our film, Eastern Connecticut State University hosted a press conference in support of DACA. The press conference included Connecticut Attorney General, President Mark Ojakian, President Núñez, and three Opportunity Scholars, with the purpose of voicing their support for the DACA program on a united front. President Núñez also signed a letter along with other presidents of universities in Connecticut in support of DACA.

Leaders at Freedom at Eastern believe the butterfly knows no borders, but it knows survival. The Trump administration was tirelessly trying to dehumanize the scholars, but they could not crush their spirits. The government can take DACA away, but they will never take away the students' dreams.

Direct Resources for Students

President Núñez helped foster opportunities for the scholars to network with scholars at other partner universities, an example of support beyond what we showcased in the film. Since the students who founded Freedom at Eastern were the first cohort from the Opportunity Scholarship, they sought to connect with additional cohorts at Delaware State University, Trinity Washington University in Washington, D.C., and Christian Brothers University in Tennessee. They organized together across the four universities to have an "Opportunity Conference" for the cohorts to learn from each other how they organize at their respective campuses. The students at Eastern sought to find out what knowledge they could take back to Eastern and implement on their own college campus. Organizing a conference at this scale was something very new to them. In 2016, they began planning for the conference two years in advance. They had a budgeting committee in charge of raising funds, a media team which created an itinerary, a logo, and name tags, and a third committee that communicated with the other universities to see if they needed financial assistance.

President Núñez provided the majority of the financial support for the conference. Upon

speaking to her about the conference, she decided it was an opportunity worth investing in. President Núñez asked where the most support was needed, and the scholars responded they would like help with transportation because they wanted the majority of the scholars at Eastern to be able to attend since the conference was in Delaware. She provided all the finances for a charter bus and the Vice President of Student Affairs, Walter Diaz, provided additional financial support totaling $15,000 for the entire conference including lodging for hotel rooms. Freedom at Eastern fundraised for the food and Delaware State University provided the space. A co-founder of TheDream.US, Donald E. Graham, was the keynote speaker for the conference. Following the conference and the networks built, Freedom at Eastern was further driven to improve resources for upcoming scholars.

Compassion in Times of Crisis

With the onset of the pandemic in 2020, after we published our film, the spring semester was very harsh for the scholars. This was the graduating semester for the pioneering cohort of the Opportunity Scholarship. President Núñez's administration acted fast to protect the students. Following spring break, they decided to continue with virtual learning for the remainder of the semester. Many of the scholars are from out of state and since everything changed so suddenly, it was hard for students to get plane tickets and make travel arrangements to go back home. President Núñez and her administration provided travel and financial support by allocating finances to students to get plane tickets back home. Freedom at Eastern worked with President Núñez to facilitate the move out process and helped coordinate rides. If students had a car with extra space, they coordinated to take additional scholars home. Furthermore, President Núñez and her staff hired moving companies to carefully pack everyone's belongings so the scholars would not feel pressured to return to Connecticut to retrieve their belongings. Even though President Núñez was not able to support all the scholars at this time because of limited funds, she and her administration tried their best to support all scholars in getting home safely.

Ultimately, when provided with the opportunity to receive a college education, TheDream.US scholars have proven that they are able to succeed. The evidence of support can be seen in the retention and graduation of the students. Of the original 47 students who started with the Opportunity Program in the fall of 2016, 46 graduated in 2020. The first cohort excelled in classes with an average GPA of 3.5. Scholars were additionally inducted into honor societies as an acknowledgement of academic merit and prestige. They also attained high positions of student leadership within the campus with the Student Government Association, the Center for Community Engagement, the Senior Class Committee, the University Residential Outreach Council, and the Unity Wing. Thanks to President Núñez's advocacy

for undocumented students, this pioneering cohort leaves a legacy of inclusion and academic excellence.

Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

President Núñez provides an example of how university leaders can take action to work with undocumented student activists. We hope these recommendations empower university leaders to make change on their campuses:

1. See Student Activists as your Collaborators.

Much of the time when undocumented students start their college careers and become involved with activism, they are seen as an issue, especially in today's world where immigration remains a controversial subject. It is necessary to understand these young activists need to be heard and be seen in order to build equity in a system that was intentionally designed to function against them. No one will be able to better educate on the needs of undocumented students than undocumented students themselves.

2. Better Understand Your Undocumented Student Population.

Undocumented college students are a diverse and heterogeneous group. They are Latinx, African, Caribbean, Asian, European. They arrived in the U.S. from the age of a few months to over 40 years old. They speak over 30 languages (The UndocuScholars Project, 2015). Talk to your undocumented students to get to know them better.

3. Research the Policy Landscape in Your State.

Research policies in your state to better understand how these policies might impact your undocumented students. The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration has an online portal with a comprehensive map of state policies.

4. Take Action.

Work with student activists, staff, faculty, and administrators to provide resources to undocumented students such as a physical space on campus specifically for undocumented students (for example, Undocumented Student Resource Centers) and full-time staff positions for working with undocumented students. Colleges and universities can also provide meal packages, financial assistance with DACA applications, and funding for traveling back home. Explore partnerships with non-profit organizations such as TheDream.US program and the Presidents' Alliance on Immigration and Higher Education.

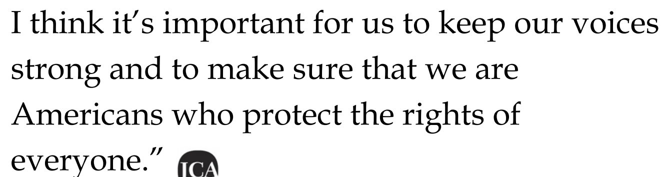
5. Advocate Beyond Your College/ University.

Use your platform to influence state and national level policies. Be aware there are undocumented students in numerous states who are banned from higher education altogether. For both private and public colleges and universities, see what you can do to build equity for students in locked-out

states.

Conclusion

Undocumented college students have been fierce in organizing for increased institutional support for undocumented students on college and university campuses. University leaders play a key role in leveraging their power and influence to work in collaboration with these student activists to build equitable programs and policies for undocumented students. In our film series College Presidents with Undocumented Students, we highlight university presidents who have led the field in building equity with undocumented students. We focus on President Elsa Núñez of Eastern Connecticut State University, telling from the students' perspective how she supported student activists. President Núñez provides a model example for how other university leaders can follow in her footsteps to work with and for undocumented students. As President Núñez says, "It is really important in this political climate where people are expressing points of view that are hateful, that are filled with anger, and displaced fear.



I think it's important for us to keep our voices strong and to make sure that we are Americans who protect the rights of everyone."

"It is really important in this political climate where people are expressing points of view that are hateful, that are filled with anger, and displaced fear. I think it's important for us to keep our voices strong and to make sure that we are Americans who protect the rights of everyone."

-President Núñez

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Building Institutional Support for Undocumented and DACA-eligible College Students in Michigan

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ABSTRACT

In 2017, the state of Michigan operated, and continues to operate, in an unstipulated policy environment related to undocumented students. There is no higher education commission or policy coordinating body in Michigan nor has the state legislature passed any legislation related to undocumented students or students who are DACA-eligible. Under this unstipulated policy environment, postsecondary institutions have the discretion to establish their own admissions policies and practices, including tuition and financial aid guidelines for undocumented students. Some institutions have stated their public support of these students through what they identify as inclusive and supportive institutional practices via their websites. However, these polices have created a nebulous environment which has created additional barriers for undocumented and DACA-eligible students trying to access postsecondary education. The lack of clear and consistent financial aid and admission policies across the state has resulted in a convoluted environment for undocumented and DACA-eligible students in applying to institutions. In this paper, we highlight how a group of undergraduate and graduate University of Michigan student researchers, both documented and undocumented, developed an instrument to analyze institutional policies related to in-state resident tuition, admission, financial aid, as well as the availability of dedicated student support services for undocumented and DACA-eligible students in the state of Michigan during the Fall of 2017. The data for this project has been turned into a website with updated (as of 2020) and available at https://uleadnet.org/mi-undocu-map.

Keywords: undocumented, DACA, college access, admissions policies

Since 1982, when the Supreme Court issued its landmark decision in Plyler v. Doe, stating that the States cannot constitutionally deny students a free public K-12 education on account of their immigration status, almost all states have faced a growing number of undocumented students graduating from their high schools (Biswas, 2005). However, the law did not extend any such guarantee for postsecondary education, and as a result, many of these students are left without the opportunity to access postsecondary education (Biswas, 2005). In addition, numerous studies have shown that the cost of education is a key reason why many undocumented students do not go to college or fail to finish once they have started (Contreras, 2009; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser, 2013; Perez, 2010).

While federal law does not bar colleges and universities from enrolling undocumented students, a clause in the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) leaves it up to the states to determine policies on admission, in-state tuition, and state-based financial aid. Currently the majority of states, including

Michigan, have unstipulated higher education policy environments related to undocumented students and therefore a majority lack any type of state-wide policies regarding admission and financial aid processes for these students (National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, 2017). Michigan does not have a higher education coordinating board; therefore, colleges and universities have to establish their own policies, practices and procedures for admitting undocumented students. As a result, Michigan law allows educational institutions to develop and establish tuition and financial aid guidelines, specific only to their institution.

Adding to the confusion for both students and families, some institutional practices do not always align with state policies, even when those policies are formally adopted. Furthermore, even when institutions do adopt undocumented-friendly policies or practices, many institutions do not publicize them for a host of reasons, including fearing retaliation from federal and state legislators (Green, 2019; Pratt, 2016).

While an institution might have publicly announced their support for these students (Michigan Association of State Universities, 2017; Yan, 2017), should an undocumented student be interested in applying to a Michigan college or university, they will encounter a perplexing variety of admission, tuition, and financial aid policies. Already concerned about college affordability, this set of circumstances poses a significant barrier for affected students, further complicated if they are reluctant to share their identities and legal status with those who might support them (Abrego, 2006; 2011).

Educators and institutions within the state of Michigan have recognized the need to have a clearer understanding of how they are serving not only the growing U.S.-born Latinx population, but also the number of immigrants, undocumented, and students from mixed-status families (e.g., students who are U.S. citizens but whose parents are undocumented) who are finding their way into higher education institutions in their state. It's important to note that these groups are not homogeneous, their backgrounds differ, and their needs can particularly differ, but the conflation between U.S.-born Latinx populations and Latinx populations who are immigrants, undocumented and from mix-status families is often made in public discourse, occasionally by mistake, and sometimes on purpose (Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011) and is often mirrored in the levels of educational participation and success in postsecondary attainment.

It is also the case that different racial, ethnic, and citizenship-status individuals are a part of the larger Latinx community, which often share similar circumstances and many similar barriers. Improving opportunities for any of these groups requires that we pay attention to individuals, regardless of status. To highlight the importance of individual populations and,

for the purposes of this study, we focus primarily on one group that is particularly vulnerable and may face even greater challenges from recently proposed policy initiatives.

Significance of the Problem

According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), increased numbers of undocumented students are graduating from high schools nationally, from 65,000 to 98,000 in 2019 (Zong & Batalova, 2019). As a result of insistent undocumented student activism throughout the country, more and more institutions have taken it upon themselves to implement policies inclusive of undocumented students. States have also joined in the effort to increase access to higher education for undocumented students by implementing in-state tuition policies or financial aid sources for undocumented students. With the passage of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) through Executive Order under President Obama in 2012, many undocumented young people received temporary relief from deportation and were granted legal permission to work in the U.S. DACA served as a vetting tool for many states and institutions who chose to extend higher education benefits to undocumented students who qualified for or had DACA. While DACA has afforded a chance for these young people to pursue their dreams, public and institutional support for these students has differed across the continuum resulting in additional barriers to entry and continuous support for these students.

During President Trump's presidency, the administration attempted to dismantle the DACA program, even after the Supreme Court ruling allowed DACA to continue (Rose, 2020). The unpredictability of the DACA program and anti-immigrant rhetoric of this administration have created a hostile environment for undocumented students, especially those enrolled in postsecondary education (Kleyn, Alulema, Khalifa, & Romero, 2018; Uwemedimo, Monterrey, & Linton, 2017). What little security undocumented students had regarding access to in-state tuition or financial aid was tossed about with every legal decision of federal courts and undocumented students no longer knew with certainty whether their access to higher education would remain (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014). Such policies at the federal level deliberately exclude undocumented students from receiving public assistance and send strong messages of normalizing discriminatory policies and practices (Nienhusser, 2018; Rodriguez, & Monreal, 2017). Such policies impact public behavior which translates into exclusionary institutional practices that intentionally make it even more challenging for undocumented students to thrive (Kleyn, Alulema, Khalifa, & Romero, 2018; Uwemedimo, Monterrey, & Linton, 2017).

We believe postsecondary institutions are microcosms of the larger political arena and

institutional websites hold a lot of agency when it comes to undocumented and DACA-eligible students decision-making. Many undocumented and DACA-eligible students are also first-generation college students, and, in our experience as former admissions professionals, we know institutional websites are typically students' first trusted source of information, especially in the absence of culturally competent and dedicated counselors or networks who understand and can empathize with the complexity of undocumented students' lives. The way institutional policies are communicated and presented in a publicly available, trusted source matters to undocumented and DACA-eligible students who rely heavily on this information to evaluate whether an institution will be an inclusive and supportive environment and ultimately, influences their decision to attend or persist in higher education. In terms of cost, undocumented students are barred from receiving any federal student aid such as Pell grants, SEOG grants and loans. Unlike other states, Michigan does not have a state-wide grant available for undocumented or DACA-eligible students. Additionally, information about wraparound services for undocumented students such as access to dedicated counselors, mental health and legal resources, and student groups can signal an institution's commitment to the success of undocumented students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine which Michigan public colleges and universities have inclusive policies and procedures for admitting, funding, and supporting undocumented and DACA-eligible students. Also, of interest was how these policies and procedures developed and the role that institutional leaders, administrators or staff, and students played, if any, in their development.

- Which Michigan public colleges and universities have policies and procedures for admitting, funding, and supporting undocumented and DACA-eligible students?
- How accessible are Michigan public colleges and universities of undocumented and DACA-eligible students with regards to admission, tuition, and financial aid policies?
- Which Michigan colleges and universities have published communications in support of DACA-eligible and/or undocumented students?
- What are some of the practices of institutions who most strongly support undocumented and/or DACA-eligible students?
- How do supportive institutions implement their policies, practices and resources in support of undocumented and/or DACA-eligible students?

Methodology

This policy analysis focuses on the forty-six public institutions of higher education in the state of Michigan using data from 2017 and 2018. These institutions' policies were selected for this study based on their mission, including advocating for higher education as a public good and promoting its collective value in serving the public interest and the state of Michigan. Moreover, public institutions of higher education are affected by state policy whereas private institutions are not. Both two and four-year public institutions were selected for this study but a special importance is placed on two-year community colleges because they are a common entry point to higher education for undocumented students (Perez, 2010) and underrepresented students more broadly. All four-year institutions were included in the study due to public support of DACA-eligible students (Michigan Association of State Universities (2017).

Data Collection

We collected publicly available information on admission, tuition and residency, and financial aid policies for Michigan's forty-six public colleges and universities between September and December 2017. A total of 28 public two-year institutions and 18 four-year institutions were included in this study. Because the publicly available data was collected directly from institutional websites in 2017, the analysis in this study is based on the information available as of that date.

We assigned 11 institutions to each of four team members to review, and one team member reviewed 13 institutions. Each team member searched and benchmarked each institution's admission, tuition and residency, and financial aid policy. Team members specifically searched for information regarding undocumented students on flyers, documents, infographics, and required forms on websites, and specifically for keywords like "undocumented" and "international." We took notes on what we found, collected screenshots of the institutions' websites at the time, and saved documents and websites for each institution in a shared database on Mendeley.

Then, each team member reviewed their data and rated each institution assigned to them using the rubric we developed, detailed below. This information was collected in a spreadsheet separate from the shared database where data was collected and stored. Team members included notes in this spreadsheet that explained why they gave each institution's policies a certain score.

Instrumentation

We created a rubric to assess institutional policies at Michigan's public colleges and universities with regards to information and resources related to admitting and supporting undocumented and DACA-eligible students (see Appendix A). We agree with other

higher education scholars that simply admitting and having a seat in a university classroom is not equivalent to inclusion (Uditsky & Hughson, 2012; Gilson, et al., 2020). Therefore, we have chosen to define inclusion as "a comprehensive approach to inclusion with the goal of fully integrating [undocumented and DACA-eligible students] into academic and social life on campus" (Hafter, Moffatt, & Kisa, 2011, pg. 19) by trying to measure how clearly policies and practices were presented on the institutions' public-facing websites and interpreted by prospective students.

This rubric was informed by literature on undocumented students in higher education and other inclusion indices for other student populations. Specifically, we used the California UndocuCollege Guide & Equity Tool (Jodaitis, Arreola, Canedo, & Southern, n.d.) and The Campus Pride Index (n.d.) as guides for developing our own rubric. We used these rubrics as guides for our own because they provided a framework to operationalize institutional support of marginalized communities, both within the context of these communities and the state or national policy environments. This rubric was also informed by the authors' professional experiences working with undocumented students and DACA-eligible students. One author has over 20 years of experience working in higher education, including 5 years working with admissions and recruiting units, 10 years working specifically on policy issues at the institutional level regarding undocumented students; two of the authors were admissions counselors for several years working directly with undocumented students, and one author is a current undergraduate student who went through the admissions application process recently, with undocumented and DACA-eligible peers. Finally, additional undergraduate undocumented and DACA-eligible students participated in this study by providing insight into both the design of the project, but also by sharing their experiences looking for and applying to colleges with the research team. This rubric was then contextualized to reflect the state of affairs and existing institutional support for undocumented students in Michigan's public higher education institutions in 2017-2018.

Categories

The rubric as shown in Table 1 is categorized into three institutional policy areas: admissions policies, tuition and residency policies, and financial aid policies. Another category, general support, includes resources such as a designated support person, legal resources, or a student group.

The admission and tuition and residency policy categories, together, highlight how the institution defines an undocumented student's residency status and therefore how much tuition they would be charged. For example, an institution could classify undocumented students as international students, and charge them international student tuition. On the other hand, an

Table 1.
Description of Categories for Rubric.

Category	Description
Admissions Policy	Does the institution admit undocumented students? How accessible is this policy?
Tuition and Residency Policy	How does the institution classify undocumented students for tuition and residency purposes? Does the institution grant in-state tuition to undocumented students? How accessible is this policy?
Financial Aid Policy	In the absence of MI state grants available for undocumented students, does the institution award institutional aid to undocumented students? How do students access the aid?
General Support	What additional support services and resources are available to undocumented students at this institution?

institution can classify an undocumented student who meets certain residency requirements as a Michigan resident and charge them in-state tuition. The financial aid policy category addresses whether an institution makes institutional financial aid available to undocumented students. As stated previously, undocumented students are barred from receiving any federal student aid and unlike states like California, Michigan does not have a state-wide grant available for undocumented or DACA-eligible students. In Michigan, we found that thirty-nine institutions do not offer any institutional aid to undocumented students.

The general support category describes what resources an institution has for undocumented students. This could include a student group, online resources such as mental health services or scholarship databases, an undocumented student program, a dedicated staff member, or other supports. While the general support category does not necessarily represent institutional policies, it is an important topic to study and measure in the effort to increase institutional support for undocumented students. The general support category looks at the resources an institution provides, such as non -academic support services targeted to undocumented or DACA-eligible students. As such, general support is an embodiment of policy at an institution and reflects how inclusive or supportive an institution is.

Measurement

Our rubric has four levels that describe how inclusionary and clear an institution's various policies and practices are, ranging from "Most Accessible", "Accessible", "Somewhat Accessible", and "Least Accessible." These levels were constructed to reflect the current range of policies across the forty-six public higher education institutions studied. Each

institutional policy area for an institution can fall within this range and had to meet certain criteria to achieve their score.

A "Least Accessible" rating represents the least inclusive, clear or transparent policies and practices on an institutional website relative to all other Michigan public colleges and universities. A "Most Accessible" rating represents the most inclusive policies and practices relative to other public institutions in Michigan. These policies are also easy to understand, easy to find, and clearly presented on an institution's website.

Importantly, in 2017, this rubric allowed us to note that no institution in the state of Michigan had a truly clear and inclusive policies regarding undocumented students or provided sufficient resources and services to properly support undocumented students.

Admission

The admission category identifies whether undocumented students are allowed to apply at an institution and how easy or difficult this process is. A school received the highest score in of "Most Accessible" if it explicitly stated that undocumented students with or without DACA-eligibility are allowed to apply for and gain admission if they met the institution's admission and residency requirements. These institutions also had an admissions page specifically for undocumented students on their website that provided clear instructions on how to fill out an application as an undocumented student and included links to other resources, such as a student support group or additional information. The page also included the contact information for a point person to help undocumented students with their admissions questions. Finally, an institution that scored "Most Accessible" in the admission category did not require students to have a Social Security Number (SSN) to apply or have a box asking for SSN in their application. Often, alternatives to filling out an application with an SSN were available and easy to find.

Tuition and Residency

The Tuition and Residency category looks at how an institution classifies undocumented students' residency status and what tuition rate they are charged as a result. Tuition cost is a big factor into whether and where an undocumented student pursues higher education (Perez, 2010).

A school scored "Most Accessible" in Tuition and Residency if they grant in-state tuition for undocumented students who meet the institution's residency requirements. This residency policy is published online and explicitly states that undocumented students qualify. These institutions have a residency webpage just for undocumented students and have a point person's contact information on this page.

Financial Aid

The financial aid category looks at whether institutions offer some sort of institutional aid to undocumented students. It also covers how

easy or challenging it is for an undocumented student to access said aid. A school scored "Most Accessible" in the Financial Aid Policy category if they had a financial aid web page specifically for undocumented students and had clear, separate instructions for undocumented students to apply for institutional aid. These institutions also had institutional need- and merit-based scholarships available just for undocumented students. In addition, institutions that scored "Most Accessible" published the contact information for a point person for undocumented students and had links to other internal or external financial aid resources. Often, additional financial resources for undocumented students were also published on this website, including emergency loans, textbook rentals, and more.

General Support

This category measured an institution's general support of undocumented students. General support for undocumented students includes resources outside of the policy areas in this rubric. These resources could be a designated support person or program for undocumented students, supportive communications from leadership, a webpage specifically for undocumented students, and links to additional resources. A school scored "Most Accessible" in general support if they "Have a resource center or program for undocumented students on campus" and "Have a point person for undocumented student issues/support" among other criteria. A school that scored "Most Accessible" in general support was The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. They received "Most Accessible" because their webpage for undocumented students informed students of the point person to contact for undocumented student questions.

Results

The data for this project was turned into an interactive tool which students and parents could use for themselves to determine the inclusivity and level of support for undocumented students in admission, tuition/residency, and financial aid policies at Michigan's two and four-year public higher education institutions. The rubric used to develop this website is available in Appendix A and Table 2 with all the schools and ratings is on the next few pages.

The majority of institutions analyzed in this study in 2017, scored low across all policy categories. In general, no more than five institutions scored a four or "Most Accessible" in any category and the majority of institutions scored a two, "Somewhat Accessible," or a three, "Accessible," across all categories.

In the admissions category, three institutions scored "Most Accessible", all of which were public four-year institutions (Figure 1). Similarly, only four institutions scored "Accessible" in admissions: three four-year institutions and one two-year institution (Figure 2). This means that only seven

Table 2a.
Michigan listing of accessible public campuses for undocumented and DACA-eligible students.

Rating System		**Least Accessible = 1**	**Somewhat Accessible = 2**	**Accessible = 3**	**Most Accessible = 4**
Institution	City	Admissions	Tuition	Financial Aid	General Support
Alpena Community College	Alpena	2	2	1	1
Bay de Noc Community College (Bay College)	Escanaba	1	1	1	1
Bay Mills Community College	Brimley	1	1	1	1
Central Michigan University	Mount Pleasant	3	4	3	2
Delta College	University Center	2	2	2	1
Eastern Michigan University	Ypsilanti	1	1	1	1
Ferris State University	Big Rapids	1	1	1	1
Glen Oaks Community College	Centreville	2	2	1	1
Gogebic Community College	Ironwood	3	3	1	3
Grand Rapids Community College	Grand Rapids	2	2	4	2
Grand Valley State University	Allendale	4	4	4	4
Henry Ford College	Dearborn	2	2	3	1
Jackson College	Jackson	1	2	1	1
Kalamazoo Valley Community College	Kalamazoo	2	2	2	1
Kellogg Community College	Battle Creek	1	2	2	1
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College	Baraga	2	2	2	1
Kirtland Community College	Roscommon	2	2	2	1
Lake Michigan College	Benton Harbor	1	3	2	2
Lake Superior State University	Sault Ste Marie	2	2	2	2
Lansing Community College	Lansing	1	1	1	1
Macomb Community College	Warren	1	2	1	1
Michigan State University	East Lansing	1	2	1	1

Table 2b.
Michigan listing of accessible public campuses for Undocumented and DACA-eligible students.

Rating System		Least Accessible = 1	Somewhat Accessible = 2	Accessible = 3	Most Accessible = 4
Institution	City	Admissions	Tuition	Financial Aid	General Support
Michigan Technological University	Houghton	1	2	1	1
Mid-Michigan Community College	Harrison	2	2	2	1
Monroe County Community College	Monroe	2	2	2	1
Montcalm Community College	Sidney	1	2	1	1
Mott Community College	Flint	2	2	2	1
Muskegon Community College	Muskegon	1	1	1	1
North Central Michigan College	Petoskey	1	1	1	2
Northern Michigan University	Marquette	1	2	2	2
Northwestern Michigan College	Traverse City	1	1	1	1
Oakland Community College	Bloomfield Hills	1	3	1	2
Oakland University	Rochester Hills	4	4	4	4
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College	Mount Pleasant	1	1	1	1
Saginaw Valley State University	University Center	1	2	1	1
Schoolcraft College	Livonia	1	1	1	1
Southwestern Michigan College	Dowagiac	1	1	1	1
St Clair County Community College	Port Huron	1	1	1	2
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	Ann Arbor	4	4	4	4
University of Michigan-Dearborn	Dearborn	2	3	2	2

Table 2c.
Michigan listing of accessible public campuses for Undocumented and DACA-eligible students.

Rating System		Least Accessible = 1	Somewhat Accessible = 2	Accessible = 3	Most Accessible = 4
Institution	City	Admissions	Tuition	Financial Aid	General Support
University of Michigan-Flint	Flint	3	3	1	2
Washtenaw Community College	Ann Arbor	2	4	1	3
Wayne County Community College District	Detroit	1	1	1	2
Wayne State University	Detroit	2	3	1	1
West Shore Community College	Scottville	1	2	1	1
Western Michigan University	Kalamazoo	2	2	4	3

institutions in our data set had admissions policies that were inclusive to undocumented students and made this clear on their websites. Sixteen institutions scored "Somewhat Accessible" in the admissions policy category, meaning that their admissions policies could be interpreted to be inclusive to undocumented students, but it was challenging to interpret that. Finally, twenty-three institutions scored "Least Accessible" in the admissions policy category. This means that the majority (82%) of institutions in the state of Michigan have publicly available admissions policies that are or appear exclusive of undocumented students.

In the tuition and residency policy category, only four institutions scored "Most Accessible", and all are four-year institutions. More institutions scored "Accessible" in the tuition and residency policy category than in the admissions policy category.

Figure 1.
Number of Four-Year Colleges in Each Category by Score.

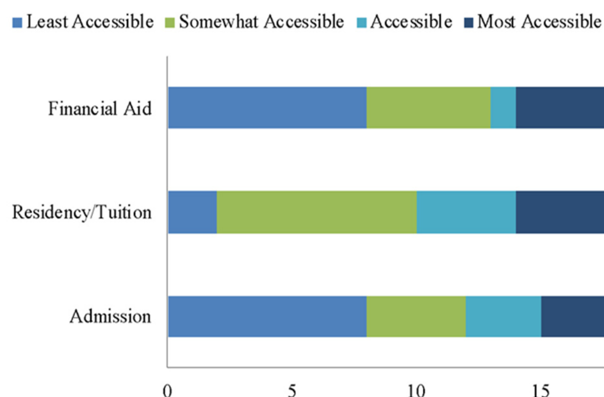
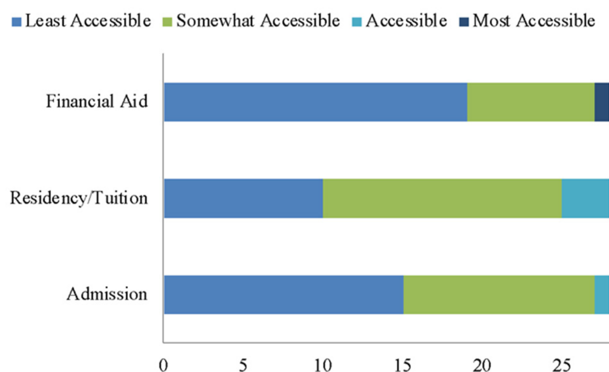


Figure 2.
Number of Two-Year Colleges in Each Category by Score.



Seven institutions scored "Accessible" in this category: four of these were four-year institutions and three were two-year institutions. Most institutions scored "Somewhat Accessible" in the tuition and residency policy category. A total of twenty-three institutions, mostly community colleges, scored "Somewhat Accessible" in this category. Twelve institutions scored "Least Accessible" in this category: two four-year institutions and ten community colleges. This means that the majority of public institutions in Michigan have tuition and residency policies that are not inclusive of undocumented students or do not publish it as so on their website.

In the financial aid policy category, more institutions scored "Most Accessible" than any other category. Five institutions, including one two-year institution, scored "Most Accessible" in this category. Only one institution scored "Accessible" in the financial aid policy category, and it was a four-year institution. While more institutions received a "Most Accessible" than in other categories, this means that even fewer institutions than any other category have a financial aid policy that is inclusive of undocumented students or make it hard to understand that institutional financial aid is available to them. Thirteen institutions scored "Somewhat Accessible" in the financial aid policy category. Five of these were four-year institutions and eight were two-year institutions. Finally, the majority of institutions scored "Least Accessible" in this category, eight four-year institutions and nineteen two-year institutions, for a total of twenty-seven institutions.

In the general support category, two four-year institutions scored "Most Accessible". No two-year institutions scored "Most Accessible" in this category. Four institutions scored "Accessible" in the general support category: two four-year institutions and two two-year institutions. Seven four-year institutions and five two-year institutions scored "Somewhat Accessible" in this category, for a total of twelve institutions. The remaining twenty-eight institutions scored "Least Accessible" in the general support category, seven of these were four-year institutions, and twenty-one were two-year institutions.

Discussion

Although this project originally launched in 2017, the implications of this work are even more relevant in the wake of both political volatility and the COVID-19 global health

crisis. As part of the broader immigrant population, undocumented students are a growing and important part of the student population in the state of Michigan and nationwide. In 2018 alone, immigrants paid $3.3 billion in federal taxes and $1.4 billion in state and local taxes; as a whole, immigrants in Michigan comprise more than 11.7% of all healthcare workers 16.9% pharmacy workers, 13.5% of all grocery workers, and 13.2% of all restaurant and food service workers (New American Economy, 2020). By revising policies, public institutions in Michigan can ensure that they make higher education accessible to undocumented students and that the institution meets their mission of serving the public in the state. While Michigan public colleges and universities have come a long way in supporting undocumented students, long strides to achieve equitable access and postsecondary attainment for this group await.

"Our findings show that admission, tuition and residency, and financial aid policies at Michigan's public colleges and universities are made inaccessible to undocumented students."

Our findings show that admission, tuition and residency, and financial aid policies at Michigan's public colleges and universities are made inaccessible to undocumented students. We found that few institutions had policies that were inclusive of undocumented students and even fewer made that clear. Most Michigan institutions' published policies were vague in their inclusion and support of undocumented students, and while some of these policies may actually be inclusive of undocumented students, their wording was unclear. Additionally, public institutions in Michigan have room to grow when it comes to providing general support to undocumented students.

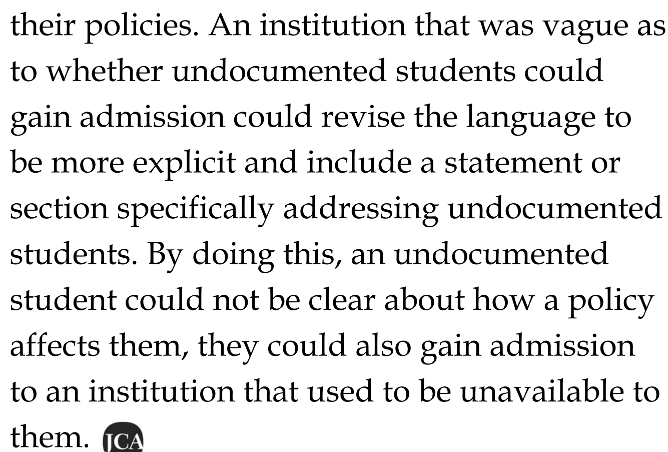
Navigating the college admissions process is complicated for any student. For undocumented students, this process is even more challenging and stressful because of their immigration status. Undocumented students cannot assume that they can gain admission, pay in-state tuition, or receive institutional aid at Michigan public colleges and universities because of the unstipulated environment regarding undocumented student access to higher education. As a result, they have to search for these policies at each institution they apply to in the state. When institutions do not make this clear, regardless of how inclusive they are of undocumented students, they add another barrier and point of stress for the student.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, undocumented and DACA-eligible students were already struggling to pay for the cost of attending college, DACA application and renewal fees, and affording basic living

expenses. Unfortunately, the pandemic has further exacerbated these inequities and heightened students' anxieties and fears about their safety and future in this country (Anguiano and Bombardieri, 2020). Although Congress passed the $6.3 billion Corona Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide direct relief aid to help students, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos enacted an emergency rule to deliberately bar undocumented, DACA-eligible and international students from receiving this aid (Whistle, 2020). Although the administration's deliberate attempt to dismantle the DACA program was ruled unconstitutional, additional barriers and restrictions for DACA-eligible recipients remain. The Trump Administration, until December 2020, rejected new, first-time applications—which left approximately 300,000 immigrant students in a state of limbo without any clear direction for their future in this country (Rose, 2020).

Undocumented immigrants are performing jobs that are considered essential. An estimated 389,000 have worked as farmworkers and food processors securing the nation's food supply, even as food processing plants have become epicenters of the coronavirus outbreak (Jawetz, 2020). We cannot turn away from this stark reality that this population is deemed essential yet forgotten. Recent figures point to the reality that undocumented individuals continue to be on the margins of conversations about educational opportunity and upward social mobility. Economic recovery post COVID-19 will require broadened opportunity to postsecondary education and upskilling. Nearly 40% of this population lives at or above the 200% poverty line with only 15 % obtaining a Bachelor's, Graduate or Professional Degree (MPI, 2020). Today's economy requires higher levels of education to ensure stable job growth and continued economic stability; previous research has shown that providing residency or a permanent solution in particular to the DACA -eligible population would move about a million workers out of low-skill, low-paying job markets into higher skill job-markets where they are estimated to earn about $380 billion from 2020 to 2029, and pay approximately $102 billion in federal taxes during that same period (Brannon, & McGee, 2019). Providing DACA and undocumented students, the ability to attain higher education by removing barriers is in our country's economic benefit.

Higher education institutions in Michigan can do two things to make their policies more inclusive of undocumented students. First, institutions can work with their students, leadership, faculty, and staff to change policies to include undocumented students. For example, an institution whose tuition and residency policy categorizes undocumented students as international students can revise their policy to classify undocumented students as state residents. Second, institutions can also revise the language in their policies to ensure they are clear about where undocumented students fall within



their policies. An institution that was vague as to whether undocumented students could gain admission could revise the language to be more explicit and include a statement or section specifically addressing undocumented students. By doing this, an undocumented student could not be clear about how a policy affects them, they could also gain admission to an institution that used to be unavailable to them. JCA

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Appendix.
Project Rubric (2017 version)
(Updated Results available at https://uleadnet.org/mi-undocu-map)

	Least Accessible	Somewhat Accessible	Accessible	Most Accessible
Admission	Explicitly does not allow undocumented students to apply and enroll in institution. Admission requirements include SSN (unless international) Application requires SSN, with no way around it (unless international) Does not have any resources or point people on website to contact with undoc-specific questions (?) Unclear that undocumented students are different from international students, or admission policy itself mixes/confuses the two.	Does not explicitly state that undocumented students are allowed to apply and enroll in institution, but can be interpreted that they ARE allowed to with a lot of effort. SSN not required for admission, but still unclear or confusing that you can apply. Application has alternatives to SSN or option to not include it. Clearer that undocumented students do not apply as international students, but still confusing.	Explicit statement that undocumented students are allowed to apply and enroll. Does not require SSN for admission or on application and/or has alternatives. Has an admissions page specifically for undocumented students but does not lead to other resources (financial aid, student support, etc.) Admissions page has published contact information for admissions point person.	Explicit statement that undocumented students are allowed to apply and enroll. Clarifies and is explicit about admission of BOTH undocumented and DACAmented students who meet admission (/ residency) requirements. Does not require SSN for admission or on application and/or has alternatives. Has an admissions page specifically for undocumented students that leads to other resources (financial aid, student support, etc.) Admissions page has published contact information for admissions point person. Published explicit instructions on how to complete application as an undocumented/ DACAmented student.

Appendix.
Project Rubric (2017 version)
(Updated Results available at https://uleadnet.org/mi-undocu-map)

	Least Accessible	Somewhat Accessible	Accessible	Most Accessible
Tuition/ Residency	Explicitly or implicitly does not grant in state tuition for undocumented students. No or very hard to find residency requirements for undocumented students (unclear under which status they fit). Confuses undocumented students' residency with international students on website.	Does grant in state tuition for undocumented students who meet residency requirements, but it is unclear, implicit, and/or stated in a very roundabout way. May be stated/implied on international student page. Residency requirements do not state that it is required that students be LPR or US Citizen. Term "resident" is not explained or defined further (important because resident is unrelated to legal residency, but undocumented students often think it is) If a separate form or procedure is required for undocumented students, it is unclear and implicit online.	Does grant in state tuition for undocumented students who meet residency requirements. Residency policy as pertains to undocumented students is published online, but could be more explicit in stating that it applies to undocumented students. Point person published on website to which questions can be directed to.	Does grant in state tuition for undocumented students who meet residency requirements. Residency policy as pertains to undocumented students is published online and is explicit in stating that it applies to undocumented students. Policy is accessible. Point person published on website to which questions can be directed to. Webpage specifically for undocumented student residency policy is published.

Appendix.
Project Rubric (2017 version)
(Updated Results available at https://uleadnet.org/mi-undocu-map)

	Least Accessible	Somewhat Accessible	Accessible	Most Accessible
Financial Aid	No statements or resources on website for financial aid for undocumented students. Institutional scholarship resources are explicitly inaccessible for undocumented students (i.e. SSN required) No financial aid point person published on website.	Published statements on financial aid for undocumented students, but are unclear or vague. Unclear or vague whether institutional scholarship resources are open to undocumented students. No financial aid point person published on website. Provides links to financial resources but doesn't provide resources or support themselves. Limited published links to external financial aid resources.	Published financial aid website tabs/sections specifically for undocumented students. Institutional need and/or merit-based scholarships open to undocumented students available Financial aid point person published on website. Published links to external financial aid resources but little to no links to own financial resources (emergency loans, textbook rental, etc.)	Published financial aid website pages specifically for undocumented students. Clear instructions and/or separate application for undocumented students to apply for institutional aid. Institutional need and merit-based scholarships exclusively (?) for undocumented students available. Financial aid point person published on website. Published links to external financial aid resources and provides own financial resources (emergency loans, textbook rental, etc.)

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Appendix.
Project Rubric (2017 version)
(Updated Results available at https://uleadnet.org/mi-undocu-map)

	Least Accessible	Somewhat Accessible	Accessible	Most Accessible
General Support	No information about undocumented student resources or policies at institution at all			Has a resource center or program for undocumented students on campus. Has a point person for undocumented student issues/support. Staff that works with undocumented students is knowledgeable (financial aid, admission, health, etc.) Ally trainings have been institutionalized on campus. Communications from university leadership in support of undocumented students/ DACA published on website. Undocumented student group on campus. Specific webpage with all information for undocumented students (ex. Undocumented. school.edu) Links/resources for undocumented students on website.

Best Practices: Catalyzing Change for Undocumented Students at Post-Secondary Institutions in California

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights learning lessons and best practices from the California Campus Catalyst Fund (CCCF), a unique three-year, $14M grant and technical assistance initiative, which supports programs for undocumented students at 32 campuses within each of the public higher education segments in California (University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges). The article focuses on three essential components of substantive changes for undocumented students attending CCCF campuses: 1) access to financial aid, 2) knowledge about income generation through entrepreneurship, and 3) student leadership development. Recommendations stemming from best practices and implementation of the CCCF are provided for multiple audiences, including postsecondary educators, policymakers, and the philanthropic sector, focused on increasing access and success of undocumented students.

Keywords: Undocumented students, undocumented, immigrants

Introduction

There are an estimated 450,000 undocumented students enrolled in higher education throughout the U.S., with approximately 20 percent in California (Feldblum et. al., 2020). As the number of undocumented students entering California colleges and universities grows (Zong & Batalova, 2019; Feldblum et. al., 2020), it is vital that statewide initiatives catalyze institutional change to meet the state's need for an educated workforce. In-state tuition and state-based financial aid have been in place for many years in California, however, due to a sizable rift between legislative policy and institutional practices, large numbers of undocumented students are still unable to achieve their educational goals or access valuable opportunities. The resulting loss of intellectual capital ultimately limits California's potential economic growth.

During the past decade, many institutions of higher education in California have begun to move from an "underground" piecemeal approach to supporting undocumented students, to one focused on building institutional competency (Valenzuela et. al., 2015). However, lack of training and targeted funding has prevented the kind of change necessary to implement institutionalized programming, specialized training for student services professionals, and designated safe spaces for undocumented students. Furthermore, constant changes in national policy have impacted undocumented students' postsecondary aspirations,

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[i] CA AB540, passed in 2001.

[ii] CA AB130-131, passed in 2011.

particularly with respect to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). These changes highlight the importance of identifying pathways for educational access and success for undocumented students (with or without DACA), as well as career and income generating opportunities which build on these students' dedication, resiliency, and commitment to their communities.

Immigrants Rising

The authors are practitioner researchers at Immigrants Rising (IR), an organization that for over 15 years has worked to support undocumented youth by empowering them to achieve educational and career goals through personal, institutional and policy transformation. Central to IR's approach, is the design and dissemination of programs and resources in a wide variety of topics that include access to higher education, income generation through entrepreneurship, legal services, mental health and leadership development. A few of our resources are highlighted in the sections below.

The California Campus Catalyst Fund Initiative

In 2018, Immigrants Rising, in partnership with postsecondary leaders and staff, and with the support of immigration-focused private philanthropic funding to stimulate the sustainable expansion of services, the California Campus Catalyst Fund (CCCF), was introduced. The CCCF is a unique 3-year, $14M grant and technical assistance initiative which supports programs for undocumented students at 32 campuses within each of the public higher education segments in California (University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges). The overarching goal of the three-year initiative was to expand the role of California's public higher education segments to support undocumented students and families by making services for this population part of a powerful paradigm shift through an examination of institutional policies, practices, and procedures. In addition to the grant support provided to CCCF partner campuses, staff and faculty also receive tailored technical assistance in a range of capacity areas that encompass the support and resources needed for undocumented students to enroll and succeed in higher education.

Areas of Focus

This article highlights three essential components of substantive changes for undocumented students attending CCCF campuses: 1) access to financial aid, 2) knowledge about income generation through entrepreneurship, and 3) student leadership development. Our years of direct services provision to undocumented students and our strategic partnerships with postsecondary educators inform our assessment that undocumented students' unique challenges call for a holistic approach to addressing the barriers they face and also present unique

opportunities to streamline facilitators to their success at postsecondary institutions.

Facilitating Access to Post-Secondary Financial Aid for Undocumented Students

A lack of access to financial assistance is repeatedly identified as the primary barrier for undocumented students to enter and succeed in higher education (Serna et al., 2017; Ballerini & Feldblum, 2021). For this reason, the CCCF sought to build or expand institutional practices at each campus with the goal of increasing access to in-state tuition, state-based financial aid, and scholarships for undocumented students. This goal has been implemented through targeted programming for community college and university personnel in the form of regional trainings, monthly coffee talks, and documenting promising practices that increase institutional support for undocumented students. Specific focus was placed on improving and streamlining practices within key campus departments such as admissions, financial aid, and undocumented student services to resolve common barriers to accessing financial aid among undocumented students (Perez, 2010). Feedback from the thirty-two campuses pointed to a collective impact that has allowed colleges and universities to build better practices to decrease the number of students paying out of state tuition and increase award rates for the CA Dream Act[iii]. One particularly effective intervention was the, "Bridging Financial Aid and Admissions to Support Undocumented Students" training. This day-long regional training allowed 147 participants from key departments to work collectively in identifying, and subsequently reducing roadblocks that significantly decrease access to financial resources in higher education. The training included self-assessments, action plans, sharing of key resources and the elevation, as well as documentation of promising practices. Topics covered in the training included: expanding recognition of non-Latino communities (Chan, 2010); updating informational materials and websites to include the latest legislation on in-state tuition and financial aid policies; developing targeted outreach strategies while protecting student data; and the inclusion of procedures to increase interdepartmental communication (Perez, 2010).

Another important intervention was a dedicated effort to increase the availability and accuracy of information for undocumented students on campus websites. Although websites are often the first place that many prospective or current students learn about the existence of and procedures required to access financial resources, research has shown that despite having access to technology and internet, low-income students have a difficult time accessing this information online (Venegas, 2006). Immigrants Rising used a rubric to undertake a detailed analysis of each CCCF campus

[iii] California Dream Act is a law passed in 2011 that allows undocumented individuals who meet certain eligibility requirements to receive state based financial aid.

website and evaluated the accuracy and inclusion of important elements that pertain to admissions, financial aid, and undocumented student pages. Each campus received a detailed report with specific recommendations, coupled with specialized training and one-on-one coaching to improve virtual access. Building on knowledge gained through this analysis, Immigrants Rising created the comprehensive guide, "Strengthening Your Campus Website for Undocumented Students: Guide for California Colleges and Universities" that included suggested language and resources to support the improvement of campus websites. The results of these efforts will ensure that more undocumented students receive the full financial benefits and security as set forth by federal and state laws. The guide was released prior to COVID-19, but its importance grew exponentially as websites became primary sources for undocumented students to learn about available resources and key deadlines.

Income Generation Within Undocumented Communities

While undocumented immigrants face significant barriers to pursuing employment in the U.S. due to lack of work authorization, any immigrant, regardless of legal status, can legally earn a living through entrepreneurship (IRCA, 1986). This is because self-employment and business start-ups do not require having work authorization or a Social Security Number (SSN). Instead of a SSN, individuals can use an Individual Tax Identification Numbers (ITINs), issued by the IRS, to pay taxes. Thus, entrepreneurship is an alternative to employment, and an avenue for undocumented people to generate income legally (Lee, 2018).

Immigrants Rising promotes knowledge of entrepreneurship models for individuals enrolled at CCCF campuses with the intention of ensuring that all students with and without DACA understand income generation options that do not require work authorization. Through in-person presentations, webinars and 1-on-1 meetings, staff, faculty and students across CCCF campuses work to identify opportunities to collaborate and create new entrepreneurship programming at their campuses. These models and strategies are discussed in more detail below.

Within the CCCF, a technical/trade college in Los Angeles launched an Entrepreneurship Certificate Program for their undocumented students, as well as for community members. The program was created in partnership between Student Affairs and the Business Department. The program curriculum consists of a series of classes focused on the fundamentals of entrepreneurship (from the Business Department) with content specific to the undocumented community (from Immigrants Rising). The classes also include hands-on activities on developing a business idea based on skills, ability, experience, and going through the permit and licensing process at City Hall from start to finish. The program works toward building efficiencies, so students have opportunities to combine technical training with entrepreneurial

concepts and be prepared to enter the workforce, regardless of immigration status.

Other CCCF colleges have partnered with local business training centers to offer workshops and one-on-one support for their undocumented students. One college incentivized their students to participate in entrepreneurship programming with pitch competitions in which students received feedback from a panel of judges and had the possibility to secure funds to launch their business idea. Other colleges included entrepreneurship training in the undocumented students' first-year experience and as part of their workshop series, with training offered by business faculty, community members, or community-based organizations. Incorporating entrepreneurship training and exploration early on allows for undocumented students to be able to take advantage of the business training and support on campus, as a complement to their desired field of study. Entrepreneurship training and support in school can help students realize that work opportunities do exist and see the value in completing their higher education goals.

Undocumented Student Leadership Development

Research has shown higher civic engagement participation among undocumented students (Perez et al., 2010). As such, the CCCF facilitated leadership opportunities for undocumented student leaders so they can be instrumental and active members of their campus' efforts to support them and their peers. The underlying aim of the CCCF Fellowship was to ensure that undocumented students had access to paid professional development, while gaining greater visibility, knowledge and a voice to help them advocate for themselves and others on and off campus. Since the inception of the CCCF, students from the 32 partner campuses have been identified and selected to become Catalyst Fellows. The Catalyst Fellowship is anchored in the notion that undocumented students' unique lived experiences and perspectives are not only invaluable assets for college educators to understand but are equally important strengths for Fellows themselves to leverage for their own leadership development (Andolina, et. al., 2003). Catalyst Fellows in Years One and Two received a $1,500 stipend and $3,000 in Year Three, throughout the course of the academic year in recognition of their active participation. They also received trainings on a myriad of topics to support their professional development, engagement on campus, and personal growth. Catalyst Fellows in the Year One and Year Two cohorts attended day-long, in-person convenings with other fellows, administrators and staff from their campuses where they grappled over critical issues of access to resources and services for undocumented students at their institutions, and designed action plans to make improvements. In Year Three of the initiative, the Fellowship was adapted to incorporate a hands-on project to forward Fellows' own academic or

professional pursuits. In all, over 150 undocumented Fellows have participated in three annual cohorts of the Catalyst Fellowship.

Personal reflections from the Catalyst Fellows showed evidence of greater confidence to share their story, acquisition of new knowledge about services and programming available for undocumented students, and increased desire to engage in advocacy efforts on campus and in their communities. Where undocumented students may experience a sense of isolation from their mainstream peers (even before COVID-19's impact), the Catalyst Fellowship provided an infrastructure for fellows to become part of a learning community that transcends the classroom. Fellows developed skills to connect their *already* demonstrated resilience and learned to apply it toward navigating novel tasks at their institutions and beyond.

Recommendations

Recommendations stemming from best practices and implementation of the CCCF are provided for multiple audiences, including postsecondary educators, policymakers, and the philanthropic sector, focused on increasing access and success of undocumented students. The authors draw from organizational knowledge of institutional best practices (Jodaitis et al., 2016; Ortiz Cerda, 2019) by working in a sustained and systematic partnership with colleges and universities from across California over the course of 20+ years. Lessons learned through the CCCF initiative add to the growing body of knowledge about building sustainable institutional practices that support undocumented students, driven by a commitment to equity.

Recommendations for Educators at Institutions of Higher Education

- Prioritize regular departmental and cross departmental trainings to ensure that key staff are knowledgeable about admissions, state financial aid, scholarships and fellowships, and ways to generate income through entrepreneurship.

- For over 15 years, content experts at Immigrants Rising (that include undocumented youth, educators, and other allies) have developed an extensive library of resources on a myriad of topics related to the undocumented experience. Resources such as "Strengthening Your Campus Website Checklist[iv]," can serve as blueprints to help staff and faculty learn about and implement strategies to empower undocumented young people to achieve their academic and career goals.

- Incorporate entrepreneurship training in programming for undocumented students. Establish partnerships with the business department on campus and local non-

[iv] https://immigrantsrising.org/resource/checklist-for-strengthening-your-campus-website-for-undocumented-students/

profit business/entrepreneurship centers to get support with training and curriculum development. Use Immigrants Rising's Entrepreneurship Hub[v] as a starting point.

- Create paid fellowships (available to all students, regardless of immigration status) within institutions of higher education, as a way to prevent isolation and foster leadership development from an asset building perspective.

Recommendations for Policymakers

- Use National Immigration Law Center's model language[vii] to create tuition equity laws, expand in-state tuition and state financial aid opportunities for undocumented students across all states.

- Create accountability metrics to ensure equitable implementation of undocu-friendly legislation, including access to sufficient funding and training for campus personnel.

- Pass legislation across all states to allow anyone, regardless of immigration status, to be eligible for professional licensing, business permits, apprenticeships, and workforce development training.

- Reinstate and expand DACA and ultimately provide permanent relief to the undocumented population in the U.S.

Recommendations for the Philanthropic Sector

- In states where legislation has made in-state tuition and financial aid possible for undocumented students, foundations can partner with education policymakers and campus leaders to ascertain the extent to which such statewide policies are operationalized and undocumented students are able to avail themselves of those resources.

- Leveraging their role as conveners and funders, foundations can stimulate collaborations between immigrant advocates and postsecondary leaders to identify and build institutional best practices and efficiencies at colleges and universities.

- Philanthropy's support for undocumented students and the organizations that serve them is strongest when it is informed by individuals from this population. Foundations can create or incentivize channels to elicit input from undocumented individuals who have benefited from their support and to learn about intersecting needs they face in school and local communities.

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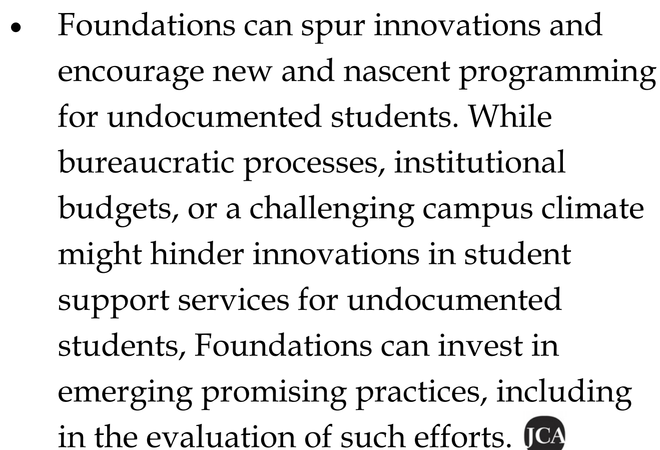
[v] spark.immigrantsrising.org

[vi] National Immigration Law Center. Tuition, Model Language: Tuition Equity. nilc.org/issues/education/eduaccesstoolkit2b/#model



- Foundations can spur innovations and encourage new and nascent programming for undocumented students. While bureaucratic processes, institutional budgets, or a challenging campus climate might hinder innovations in student support services for undocumented students, Foundations can invest in emerging promising practices, including in the evaluation of such efforts. JCA

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