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## Testimonio: The Experiences of an Undocumented Student in California Post-DACA Rescindment

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	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Biography</b></p> <p><i>Isabel Rangel Hernandez is an aspiring educator with goals to provide diverse students an equitable education. She currently serves as an AmeriCorps Distance Tutoring Coordinator for Reading Partners where she runs a virtual reading center for students far below grade level at a Title I Elementary school. As a daughter of undocumented immigrants, Isabel aspires to continue organizing efforts toward an immigration reform that will ultimately benefit the undocumented community. Her lived experiences as a student from a mixed-status family inspired her to join grassroots community organizers such as Student Advocates for Higher Education (SAHE) and the California DreamNetwork to further efforts of supporting undocumented college students at their respective college campuses, including San José State University. During her time in SAHE, she learned about testimonios and how powerful it is to share (and listen) to a student's narrative. Through their narratives runs resilience and strength; this inspired Isabel to continue utilizing testimonios as a method and methodology for her research to bring light to their experiences.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Isabel Rangel</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Major: Child &amp; Adolescent Development</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mentor: <b>Dr. Rebeca Burciaga</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Testimonio: The Experiences of an Undocumented Student in California Post-DACA Rescindment</i></p>	

## ***Testimonios: The Experiences of an Undocumented Student in California Post-DACA Rescindment***

### **Abstract**

After Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA, 2012) was rescinded by the Trump Administration in 2017, many students were left in “limbo legality” (Gonzalez 2012) This study addresses the question, “What are the experiences of undocumented students regarding their academic motivation toward graduation now that DACA has been rescinded at San José State University (SJSU)?” Grounded in a Chicana Feminist Epistemology approach, the methodology of testimonio is used to capture the experiences of the author alongside an undocumented graduate student. Findings suggest that college campuses should incorporate faculty knowledgeable in policies that affect undocumented students, Undocumented Ally trainings in college campuses, and campus support groups specifically for undocumented students.

## Introduction

As California grassroots movements and social justice organizations advocate for more educational resources for undocumented students, the topic of delegating permanent equitable resources for undocumented students in post-secondary institutions has been largely dismissed by the local, state, and national government. California has been responsive to the demands of undocumented students by passing bills such as AB540 and the California Dream Act, but as a country, the United States rescinded the national immigration policy, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), in 2017. The lack of DACA and/or immigration policies leave many undocumented individuals unable to apply to various opportunities that would assist and enhance their academic experience. Each presidential term addresses policies that affect undocumented students, but these policies do not provide a permanent solution for undocumented students in higher education. These ever-changing policies inhibit, benefit, and enhance undocumented students' experiences in higher education in many different ways. These various policies provide a variety of specific resources for undocumented individuals, and not as a whole population. Due to these sporadic resources, undocumented individuals face difficulties understanding how much each policy legally applies to their "liminal positioning" (Gámez, Lopez, & Overton, 2017).

To explore the different experiences of undocumented, AB540, DACA students and their various approaches to utilizing resources that are provided at San José University (SJSU), I used *testimonio* (Delgado, 1998), a methodology that combines trust and testimony, to address specific topics of social justice (i.e., immigration status in higher education) and the participants' personal narrative. Through *testimonio*, I assessed Carlos and my knowledge of campus resources and their effectiveness in order to examine students' individual stories, academic retention, and their motivation toward graduation. In addition to incorporating my own *testimonio* as a student from a mixed status family, as well as Carlos's *testimonio* (an undocumented graduate student), a Chicana Feminist Epistemology framework was used to analyze our experience as Chicanas/os, first-generation college students, as well as the participant's undocumented status. By utilizing *testimonio*, the researcher and the collaborator created an authentic relationship through trust and testimony

that positioned the participant to apply his personal narrative into many aspects of social justice. Themes that will be discussed from my participant's *testimonio* will be his family's involvement as motivation to pursue higher education, his awareness of his undocumented status and the influence of the media, his experience as a grassroots activist, and his involvement in student organizing, as well as his collaboration in this pilot study as he is diligently incorporated in this research contrast to dominant Eurocentric epistemology in academia.

I will begin by explaining the different types of laws and policies currently in place for undocumented students—specifically DACA recipients, AB540, and undocumented students—in California. Then, I will delve deeper into the framework of Chicana Feminist Epistemology and how it ties into aspects of Carlos's *testimonio*. Using Cultural Intuition, which emphasizes our individual and communities' experience including academic, politics, and literature, will be highlighted to discuss the experience of Carlos and his retention and academic motivation to pursue higher education despite DACA's rescindment. Finally, I will offer suggestions for CSUs to incorporate and/or provide knowledge on how to better meet the needs of undocumented students on their campuses.

### **Laws and Policy**

Before delving into the *testimonios*, it is appropriate to discuss the local, state, and federal laws involving the delegation of academic resources for undocumented students in the United States. As many laws change according to presidential terms and their affiliated political parties, undocumented individuals face “limbo legality,” a term coined by Gonzales (2012) to describe the confusion undocumented youth face when they do not know which of many policies applies to them and their immigration status. For clarity, these policies can be broken down to 3 levels:

(1) K-12, community college, and state universities all differ in terms of benefits and qualifications;

(2) State policies are all different and dependent upon their respective representatives to implement policies that affect undocumented students with individual qualifications;

(3) Federal policies that affect undocumented students in all 50 states.

To reiterate, many different policies provide a multitude of specific resources for undocumented individuals, but not as a whole population. Key policies in California that impact undocumented students are *Plyer v. Doe* (1983), DACA, AB540, and the California Dream Act. Currently, there are no pathways to citizenship for undocumented people of various ages, nationalities, genders, levels of education, etc.

### **National Policies**

As of 2016, there are over 11 million undocumented individuals in the United States, 2 million undocumented students in a K-12 institution, and 1 million undocumented college graduates (Migrant Policy Institute, 2016). As explained by Gildersleeve and Vigil (2015), *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) gave undocumented children access to primary and secondary education. Originally, this court case settled the dispute of whether states would allow access and funds for undocumented student education in public schools. The court case explained that not including undocumented students in academic funding violated the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause and that undocumented students should be allowed access to public schools and funding. This case is crucial because it ties into the requirements to apply for state bills such as AB540 and federal bills such as DACA.

In 2001, a policy which would have made an impactful benefit to undocumented youth did not accumulate enough Senate votes to progress and move forward in the national legislature: Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM). The DREAM Act (2001) is a federal bill, if passed, that would have created a path for undocumented students to obtain citizenship by providing conditional immigration status. This would have allowed students to obtain higher education and occupation prior to being granted permanent residency. Although it was ultimately shot down, many aspects of this policy still exist in some capacities in various policies at different levels.

### **California State Bills**

In the state of California, there are 3 million undocumented individuals. 2,094,000 of undocumented immigrants' country of origin is Mexico, and 284,000 of undocumented students obtain a bachelor's or higher (Migrant Policy Institute, 2016). In California, AB540 (2001) is an

assembly bill that only allows undocumented students to attend a public college and universities with in-state tuition fee if they completed their high school education in California for three or more years. In-state resident tuition (ISRT) is offered to undocumented students to pay the same amount as local residents. Many states do not offer ISRT which creates a difficult barrier for undocumented students to pay non-residential fees on top of their tuition fee, and to apply for funding that they qualify for. The California Dream Act, consisting of two bills (HB130 and HB 131), allows AB540 students to apply to “various forms of financial assistance” by applying and receiving state and private financial aid. AB131 (2013) allows qualifying AB540 students to apply for fee waivers and state funding such as Cal Grants, and any remaining funds after California residents have been funded. AB540 does not mean that all undocumented students are eligible, which creates different barriers for each student population. The overall problem that these populations experience is a lack of faculty knowledge and support, institutional and societal exclusion, and lack of resources to fund their bachelor, master’s, or doctorate education (Person, Gutierrez Keeton, Medina, Gonzalez, & Minero, 2017).

### **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA, 2012)**

In the United States, there are 652,880 DACA recipients as of 2019 (MPI, 2019). In California, only 242,339 (MPI, 2016) are DACA recipients. There are 72,300 undocumented students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, and 8,300 are enrolled in a California State university. It is assumed that only half are DACA recipients (Gordon, 2017). Currently only available for renewal and not initial applications, Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA, 2012)—which was implemented by the Obama administration and then rescinded by the Trump administration in 2017—allowed undocumented youth pursuing education in high school and higher education to obtain a two-year renewable work permit and a deferment from deportation. The work permit serves as an identification card and is accompanied by a social security number to use in means of employment, school, and various other mediums that require a social security. As described by Gámez, DACA recipients can now apply for college and work, but cannot apply for federal funding for their college

tuition nor qualify for federal programs such as welfare (Gómez, Lopez, & Overton, 2017).

### **Methodology**

The *testimonio* of undocumented students is crucial for this pilot study because their experiences are exclusive to them. *Testimonio* was chosen for this study because it presents a different approach to developing research on knowledge and the experiences of people of color. *Testimonios* are knowledge through oral stories. They combine aspects of social justice, someone's personal narrative, and trust between researcher and collaborator to pick certain topics (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). The interviewee is renamed as collaborator because during the *testimonio*, research entails constantly working alongside the collaborator and their *testimonio* by creating genuine conversation and a relationship built on trust. This allows the collaborator and researcher to have a genuine conversation in which the collaborator leads the direction of the conversation. In sum, *testimonios* are different from a conventional qualitative study; they focus primarily on people of color and their struggles with oppression and inequality, both in politics and education.

Recruitment of one participant was through purposive sampling, a method of recruiting specific people based on their expertise on a certain topic (Serra, Psarra, & O'brien, 2018). The research question pursued in this study is: What are the experiences of undocumented students regarding their academic motivation toward graduation now that DACA has been rescinded at SJSU?

For the purpose of this pilot study, one interview was conducted. The participant is an undocumented AB540 graduate student without DACA status who is attending SJSU. The interview consisted of 6-7 questions that were open for the participant to answer in any length of time they desired. With permission from the participant, the interview was recorded and transcribed to allow the participant to review his *testimonio* and revise or edit any information he provided. After Carlos chose not to remain anonymous, all information and *testimonio* provided were approved by the participant.

### **Chicana Feminist Approach**



Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Dolores, 1998) stems from Chicana feminists and scholars contradicting the Eurocentric form of academia and the exclusion of people of color in qualitative and quantitative studies. Chicana Feminist Epistemology incorporates a framework in which data stems from our own experience, shifting us as Chicanas as the subject of research. This includes our gender, race, class, immigration, and social justice in academia (Delgado Bernal, 1998). By using a Chicana Feminist approach, it legitimizes our cultural experience as not only a form of resistance, but a form of research. It also incorporates cultural intuition which helps us analyze our *testimonio* into various themes that highlight our experiences as well as comparing and contrasting our collective experiences.

### **Positionality**

Positionality (Flores, 2017), which stems from many Chicana Feminist scholars, explains how Chicana researchers are able to resonate with the participants' experiences in many unique aspects and perceptions because of the researcher's extensive knowledge and experience. While aligned with Chicana Feminist Epistemology, positionality allows Chicana researchers distinct insights to harness their cultural intuition to bring to light many aspects that may be buried had they not had similar experience to their participant and research (Flores, 2017).

However, I as a researcher and "outside" ally (Delgado Bernal, et al., 2012) will share my *testimonio* to support and demonstrate similarities between Carlos and my *testimonio* and bring to light many aspects that may not have been discussed had we not had similar experiences with immigration and our identities as Latinxs.

### **Cultural Intuitions**

In the Chicana Feminist Epistemology, Delgado Bernal (1998) explains that there are four sources of cultural intuitions within her framework: personal, academic, professional, and the analytical process itself (Huber, 2009). These four sources stem from Chicana, Indigenous, and Black feminist oral stories passing down knowledge and theoretical

sensitivity which allows us to view certain themes and parts of data that are overlooked by Eurocentric researchers (Delgado, Bernal, 1998).

When assessing our personal stories, we use key themes such as “collective experience” and “community memory.” Our relationships to other people, events, and actions are keys to analyzing data as it incorporates aspects of resistance, authority, and validity in our *testimonios*. In other words, what differentiates our personal story from a random story is that *testimonio* are intentional since they are needed to highlight a wrong (Reyes, & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). An example of this would be my own story and how, because of my experiences and *testimonio*, I am able to view details that may be overlooked by someone who had not gone through the same experiences.

Academic aspects are used to assess our *testimonio* by analyzing existing literature in the field or topic of study. Literature is not limited to academic journals and peer-reviewed articles, but also newspaper articles, public documents, and anything that contains stimulating information to support analyzing data from a cultural perspective—contrary to Eurocentric epistemology. An example of this would be the reading of literature and articles previously researched on the topic of undocumented students, as well as reading the various immigration policies.

The professional experience portion from our *testimonio* will be derived from our experiences in a particular field—specifically, a specialization. It can be an occupation, career, academic involvement, or participating in a grassroots organization. These experiences provide knowledge and insight. An example of professional experience would be my experience as a grassroots organizer and how it relates to my perspective on social justice and immigrant rights.

Analytical experience shapes the way the researcher assesses data with the collaborator. As previously stated, the participant is renamed the collaborator as his experience as the main subject of research is assessed for certain themes and together, we are involved in the collection of data and findings. An example of this is my additional knowledge of reading articles regarding various immigration statuses to further understand and improve the analysis of my participants’ undocumented status and differentiating from other immigration statuses.

## Testimonios

From these *testimonios*, similar themes will be assessed. Additionally, I will be utilizing Chicana feminist epistemology to view different aspect of research often overlooked and delegitimized by Eurocentric research (Delgado, 1998). Certain aspects that are overlooked in Eurocentric research are utilized in the Chicana feminist approach, which also incorporates *testimonio* from a method to a methodology. While methods are a form of strategy and technique to collect data, methodology is the practice of using theory and analysis on the research process as the Chicana feminist epistemology utilizes political and ethnic issues to analyze the research (Dolores, 1998). One of the features overlooked by Eurocentric research is co-collaborating with the participants regarding the collection of data and how it is utilized (Huber, & Cueva, 2012). Following the co-collaborating, the participant is able to use their narrative and life experience to analyze different many aspects of their life and how it is contrary to the White man and/or men (Dolores, 1998). Aspects included – but not limited to – are, political, social, and cultural conditions. This includes the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Dolores, 1998).

For this study, I will be collecting a *testimonio* of an undocumented student to assess their experience in contacting resources to support their academic retention and motivation to continue their undergraduate degree in hopes to fill in the gaps created after the rescindment of DACA.

The collaborator, Carlos, and I have been friends for over four years. We met through a student organization that focuses on peer support and grassroots organizing for undocumented students, students of mixed status families, and allies. We have established a genuine and authentic friendship in which I asked for his participation due to my knowledge of his status, a form of purposive sampling. He agreed to collaborate in this pilot study without the use of a pseudonym.

### ***Testimonio of Undocumented Student***

Carlos Amaya is an undocumented graduate student at SJSU. He began his undergraduate career as an AB540 student at SJSU in 2013 and graduated in 2018 before pursuing a Master's in Economics in 2019. Although he was aware of his undocumented status from a young age, he

did not let that hinder his trajectory of pursuing higher education. This feat was not accomplished by himself; with the support of his family and his fifth-grade teacher, he was able to delineate a path in which he could continue his postsecondary education despite the boundaries set by existing policies.

### *Hurdles*

Carlos has had to overcome many hurdles tied to his personal experience. These hurdles included many challenges when attempting to obtain information regarding how to navigate college with his AB540 status. Since Carlos is not a DACA recipient, these challenges were maximized, as many educators were not knowledgeable of undocumented students prior to DACA enactment. From a young age, Carlos has known of his status and was aware of his limitations. He missed the opportunity to participate in the “American Rite of Passage,” which is the mainstream tradition of a teenager applying to receive their driver’s license and getting a job. Subsequently, he also had difficulties applying to college. Although he was admitted to San Jose State University, college came with a new set of challenges. Applying the AB540 affidavit, navigating college with his AB540 status was a challenge he had not anticipated. It was difficult to find knowledgeable educators that could assist him with his status. On top of these challenges, some educators were uncaring and dismissive of his plea for help. Because he felt disconnected from SJSU, he took on various leadership positions within student organizations to combat the issue of misinformation and lack of information.

### **Personal Testimonio**

As an “outside” ally (Delgado Bernal, et al.,2012), I do not wish to impose upon an experience that is not mine, nor do I wish to write without placing undocumented students’ stories first. Undocumented students have a story, just like everyone else, and they do not need anyone else telling their story. Having someone else tell their stories carries a risk of negligence which often can be misguided and misrepresented. Undocumented youth have power through their narratives, and it is important for the researcher

and the reader to be mindful and respectful of the experiences of undocumented students.

My experience as a daughter of undocumented parents has been a confusing and rewarding journey that has entailed many hardships. One community that I have been focused on are students who are undocumented. Due to my lack of knowledge regarding the undocumented community, I initially believed that my family was the only undocumented family in the U.S. In 2009, my father was detained by Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) on the basis of accumulated traffic citations and for carrying a false identification card. During the Bush administration's transition to the Obama administration, undocumented individuals could not obtain a driver's license and there was no law prohibiting ICE from collaborating with local law enforcement. Once he finished his sentence in a local county jail, he was transferred to an Immigration Detention Center many miles away from our home city. The lack of resources, knowledge, and understanding of laws and politics led us to believe we had lost our father, but a glimmer of hope arose when an attorney arrived late to my father's court case. With the attorney's expertise, my father was released under certain conditions: work as long as his work permit remained valid. Those conditions soon ended once the Trump administration entered the Oval Office. His work permit was no longer valid, so my father's future in the United States was no longer valid to the United States. Denials of *Stay of Removals* and reoccurring letters addressed to my father to surrender led to our despair and to us asking the Office of Appraisal to reconsider my father's case during his annual routine check. While waiting for his routine check, two ICE agents detained my father and immediately transferred him to Yuba County Jail where he was ultimately deported to Tijuana, Mexico. The fear, despair, and ultimate betrayal of a country separating a father from his three daughters and wife can never be healed. However, being born in the U.S. allows me to use my privilege to advocate for the rights of immigrant communities and to further advocate for many more communities.

My friend, whom is undocumented, introduced me to a student organization that was a support group for undocumented students, students of mixed statuses in their families, and allies. I was appalled that there were more undocumented families in San Jose besides my own; students who

were undocumented. These were young undocumented students not only advocating for themselves and navigating a much different path than just their Latino identity, but also their status and what policies and laws pertained to them. Not only did they have to educate themselves on how to navigate their status in higher education, they also educated hesitant faculty members and took many risks in exposing their status to obtain certain opportunities to progress in their academics. I quickly learned that not all undocumented students' experiences are the same; many may have DACA status, AB540, TPS, are completely undocumented, had DACA status but could not renew it, are in the process of adjusting their status, or under a new policy like AB2000. It amazed and continues to amaze me that these students quickly adapted and navigated their status and academics while working and simply living a daily routine.

### *Support System*

The significance of having a support system was crucial for Carlos's trajectory to obtain his undergraduate degree.

One of the main motivators for Carlos to pursue his undergraduate degree was his family and their support. He warmly described that his parents may not have known what pursuing an undergraduate degree in the United States as an undocumented, first-generation Latino consisted of, but their unconditional support was crucial to the completion of his bachelor's degree. His family's aspirations of wanting their children to pursue opportunities despite informing them of their status at a young age was to encourage him to educate himself on the immigration policies in the United States. His parents reinforced him to succeed and progress despite what the media presents was influential in Carlos's academic path.

Another factor of support for Carlos was his teacher from fifth grade. She was instrumental in navigating Carlos down a path rich in academia versus the soccer trajectory he was immersed in at the time. Her persistence to convince his parents to register him in a prestigious private Catholic middle school in which he can expand his knowledge was a success as Carlos was already showing promise by having the top grades in his class. Using her familiar connections with the principal, they both met his parents while he was away at science camp to persuade them to register him into a private school. Although his parents were wary about the fact

that it was a Catholic school and they believed it would lead him to pursue the path of becoming a deacon or a priest, they agreed. Carlos was admitted to a prestigious private school, which then influenced his decision to enroll in a private prestigious high school. As he reflected back in his educational path, he firmly believed that it was her support and advocacy that nurtured the importance of education for him.

Carlos had good grades and supportive mentors that encouraged him to pursue higher education; creating friendship and meaningful relationships with mentors, professors, and colleagues contributed to the completion of his undergraduate degree despite his lack of resources. The hurdles he had to overcome while being an undergraduate student contributed to his feeling of disconnect regarding the campus social and academic environment. Instead of allowing the loneliness to consume him, he decided to become involved on campus. When he joined a fraternity and multiple student organizations that aligned with his values and identities, he stated that being a part of something on campus made him feel connected to the campus. His involvement contributed to many personal connections with various friendships on campus and also expanded his growth in many aspects of social justice that went beyond advocacy for undocumented students.

### *Multiple Identities Tied to Social Justice*

Prior to college, these were aspects that were obvious but not necessarily impactful to Carlos's academics. It was once he arrived at SJSU that these identities emerged and the resources for each identity assisted him in his undergraduate degree. These identities also rose awareness in his of the many challenges all these identities bring such as being first in his family to pursue and undergraduate degree in the United States, being a person of color, being undocumented, and being Latino. His father graduated college in Mexico, so Carlos could not technically identify with being a "first-generation" student at the university. However, after differentiating the challenges his father faced versus his, he was able to indicate that he did identify as first-generation because his father did not have the same experiences of being a college undergraduate in the United States versus their home country of Mexico. These challenges influenced his participation in social justice organizations, spearheading many of them. Carlos

participated in Fraternities as well as a student support organization that guided his participation in grassroots organizing. These transferable skills not only impacted his college navigation, but also impacted how he viewed his economics major. Although his career trajectory is rather independent and self-orientated, his experience in social justice and many identities left a lasting impact on his desire to give back to his community in the form of Economics.

### *Political Climate and the Influence of the Media Regarding Immigration Reform*

Carlos was aware of his status at a very young age, but for him there was a disconnect between the severity of being undocumented and the term “*No tiene papeles*” (not having papers); it was his understanding that he had many physical papers in his backpack. Over time, the realization of what being undocumented meant was unveiled by the Bush administration. Carlos revealed that the many immigration policies implemented by the Bush administration affected his mentality, causing it to deteriorate and form harmful triggers for him such as the creation of Immigration and Custom Enforcement. Transitioning to the Obama administration was an optimistic view because Obama enacted DACA which allowed many undocumented youths to apply for DACA to temporarily eliminate stress and worry. However, Carlos did not apply due to various complications. DACA was rather beneficial for various youths, the Trump administration rescinded the program and although Carlos’s status was unaffected, the rhetoric of the Trump administration regarding undocumented immigrants was very harmful to Carlos’s mindset. With encouragement from his parents, Carlos tuned into the news to become better educated on immigration policies, regardless of whether it took a personal toll on him, such as his disappointment in the Senate’s Decision in 2011 to reject the National Dream Act.

### *Growth and Personal Reflection*

As Carlos gave his *testimonio*, there were subtle instances when he would reflect and express surprise over how much time has passed and how many obstacles he has overcome to become an undocumented graduate student. He compares his experience in college to his father’s experience in



college in Mexico and describes that college in the United States is different because various aspects of his identity impacted his undergraduate experience. Carlos also compares himself to younger generations and says that others have it tough, and unintentionally dismisses his experiences in order to assist those who are younger – particularly, incoming undocumented freshmen. His empathy is prevalent, as he wishes to continue advocating for undocumented students; especially the younger generation now they are impacted by the loss of DACA.

### **Conclusion**

Carlos's experiences have contributed to his insight on his academic trajectory as an undocumented student prior to DACA's enactment in 2012, during DACA, and now at the rescindment of DACA. By using *testimonio* and examining cultural institutions, we were able to assess key factors that influenced Carlos's ability to complete his bachelor's degree as well as how it impacted his motivation and academic retention. By having Carlos be the source of this research, we are able to see that the various mentors throughout his life – not limited to family and educators – were crucial to his undergraduate completion. With his mentor and family support, along with the hurdles he faced, he joined student organizations to be involved and feel much more connected to the campus. These aspects of his trajectory contributed to his interest in social justice and how it supported his decision to take on student leadership positions to advocate for students that resonate with his identities and challenges. His overall experiences impacted him to be involved in immigration politics and study the policies for his own benefit and to effectively advocate for others. Overall, Carlos's experiences are crucial in the fact that he has and is still defying the odds and overcoming many hurdles to be where he is at now.

### **Recommendations**

There are three recommendations that I can provide based on Carlos's *testimonio* and our experience as a grassroots organizer and immigrant rights activist, as well as other researchers.

1. Implementing faculty knowledgeable in policies and resource for undocumented students.

2. Faculty training and mentorships for undocumented students.
3. Support Groups for undocumented students on campus

The first one is the implementation of more educators and faculty knowledge of undocumented student resources on campus (Kleyn, Alulema, Khalifa, & Morales Romero, 2018). By having more knowledgeable faculty, it would reduce the misinformation that undocumented students obtain, thus reducing the risk of making harmful mistakes that may threaten their immigration status (Murillo, 2017). At San Jose State University, there is the UndocuSpartan Resource Center (USRC) for undocumented students to seek resources pertaining to their academics, guidance regarding their legal status, and professional opportunities to pursue. The USRC has been significantly beneficial for undocumented students as it provides a safe space and central hub for information. A program that the UndocuSpartan Resource Center and the University of Berkeley's Undocumented Student Program (USP) organize are UndocuAlly trainings in which educators, university staff, and faculty attend an in-depth workshop full of information on how to assist undocumented students (Sanchez, & So, 2015). These UndocuAlly trainings are supplemental for educators and university faculty to gain knowledge and confidence to support undocumented students and their academic trajectory.

A second recommendation is for university faculty and educators to not only be willing to participate in informational trainings regarding undocumented students, but also to not close their doors and be open to the idea of being a mentor. Having a central hub for resources is beneficial for students at SJSU, as it would be in many campuses, but by having more educators on campus that know of resources for undocumented students will increase the motivation and retention of students to complete their undergraduate degree (Kleyn, et al., 2018). Creating relationships with students as a mentor and/or a confidant effectively supports students in various ways; this allows students to have someone to trust their status to and reduce the notion of navigating college alone. Carlos had to rely on his friends to recommend academic resources, advice on how to apply and navigate his AB540 status, and educating himself on immigration policies.

Having a faculty mentor would have reduced the negative experiences and incorrect guidance compared to the advice he obtained by word of mouth.

The final recommendation should be the creation of support groups and student organizations to foster a safe space and initiate peer mentorship to create a sense of belonging on campus. Andrade (2019) argues that students must feel positive social development and positive validation to succeed in college. This is especially true for undocumented students, since they are considered “nontraditional” and require more support due to the Trump administration’s rhetoric and the rescindment of DACA. By fostering safe spaces and self-confidence within social relationships, it would improve healthy coping methods rather than increase harmful coping methods such as dropping out of college or worse (Andrade, 2019). By joining a student organization, Carlos was able to grow as a student, a student leader, and a current graduate student with the goal to advocate for his community.

### **Discussion**

Because this is a pilot study, the next steps would be to continue using personal *testimonio* to listen to the experiences of undocumented students. By using cultural intuition, we would be able to have a larger sample to further improve California State Universities in assisting undocumented students and their pursuit of higher education. Further directions would include listening to the *testimonio* of a DACA student and their experiences on how DACA’s rescindment affected their trajectory of completing their bachelor’s degree, as well as listening to the *testimonio* of undocumented undergraduate students from younger generations who are unable apply to DACA because it was rescinded. There will be many presidential administrations that will change immigration policies, but by addressing the needs of undocumented students, universities will be able to increase the graduation rate of undocumented students.

This is my first experience conducting research on not only undocumented students, but also conducting a *testimonio* on a friend. My interest in this research stemmed from my own personal experience and my will to improve resources for undocumented students and to advocate for the immigrant community. The friendship between Carlos and myself has accumulated over the years as grassroots organizers, immigrant rights

activists, and as students had contributed to the ease of conducting a *testimonio*. Having a friend that I can conduct a *testimonio* for research was crucial to not only the researcher, but to the collaborator as certain themes may not have shed light if it were conducted from a stranger-to-stranger method. As the awkward tension reduced, we had bursts of laughter that helped ease the tension of conducting a *testimonio*. The purpose of the *testimonio* was to shed light on the college experience of college students and to honor Carlos's experiences with the hope that many other undocumented students resonate with his narrative; and that they too will persist and pursue a higher education.