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Challenging educational barriers : undocumented immigrant student advocates

Francisco J. Villegas
San Jose State University

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CHALLENGING EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS: UNDOCUMENTED
IMMIGRANT STUDENT ADVOCATES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Mexican American Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Francisco J. Villegas

August 2006

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Dr. Julia E. Curry-Rodriguez

Dr. Louis Holscher

Dr. Rhonda A Rios Kravitz, Sacramento State University

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

Dea Williamson 07/17/06

ABSTRACT

CHALLENGING EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT STUDENT ADVOCATES

by Francisco J. Villegas

Undocumented Latina/o students who make it to the university contend with stressors related to race/ethnicity, undocumented status, gender, and socioeconomic status. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Latina/o undocumented students in higher education. This study examines the barriers undocumented students experience in their pursuit of higher education. A secondary endeavor is determining whether the degrees they achieve will be useful. The study relies upon qualitative data, specifically field observations and seven semi-structured interviews conducted during the 2005-2006 academic year in a Bay Area university. Preliminary findings indicate that students are resilient in their academic endeavors, rely upon several sources of support including peer, familial, and institutional opportunities, and they advocate on behalf of other students. The analysis indicates that there is a need for further advocacy and research to address this vital population of students central to U.S. society and the nation's economic future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Review of the Literature

Children who immigrate to the United States without documentation encounter difficulties in attending higher education. Regardless of their length of residence in this country, undocumented Latina/o students who make it to the university contend with stressors related to race/ethnicity, undocumented status, gender, and socioeconomic status. One significant barrier for undocumented students is the cost associated with obtaining a college or university degree. Although some states have passed legislation allowing students to pay in-state tuition rates at public universities and colleges, the denial of financial aid, including access to federal loans and work study monies, significantly reduces the ability of undocumented students to pay for a college degree. Thus, few students benefit from the in-state tuition rates. It is important to note that while immigrant adults come to the United States for a variety of reasons, children often do not have a choice, generally immigrating with their parents or joining parents or family members once they attain financial stability in the host nation. Undocumented children come not as workers but rather as part of family units and engage in age-appropriate activities including attending school. Like other students, they hope that access to college will provide them with many benefits, including opportunities for economic and social mobility.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Latina/o undocumented students in higher education. Specifically the questions that guide this study are: How does undocumented status affect students' perception of the university? What stressors do undocumented students experience at the university beyond minority-status? What

sources of support do undocumented students use through higher education? Why do students pursue higher education given that it is costly in time and finances? This study attempts to identify a relationship between hopeful attitudes, the persistence of undocumented students in higher education and whether hopelessness negatively impacts the higher education aspirations of undocumented students on undocumented student aspirations to higher education. The word hope is specifically utilized because of the ideology of the American dream, limitless opportunities for social mobility, and general well-being imagined as an outcome of immigration. This study will not only examine whether undocumented students experience barriers in obtaining higher educational degrees, it will also examine whether they experience barriers in using their degrees.

An examination of existing literature concerning immigration, higher education, and their convergence sets the context for this study. The review of literature is divided into four major areas. The first section titled *Demographics* introduces the estimated magnitude and diversity of immigrants in this country. The second section, *Immigration Policy*, provides a historical backdrop of the Mexico-U.S. border, the policies aimed at controlling the flow of people across the border, the categorization of immigrants by immigration agencies, policies affecting undocumented immigrants in higher education—specifically the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Act (IIRIRA) and state policies relevant to immigrant student resident status for public universities. Lastly, this section addresses anti-immigrant sentiments relating to policy. The third section titled *Workers and Mobilization* details the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the labor market; their response to punitive and criminalizing policy, the role of the

immigrant in contemporary American society, and immigrant quality of life. Finally, a fourth section, *Latina/o Undocumented Students*, addresses the experiences of Latina/os in academia specifically, sources of support, theories concerning retention and specific immigrant stressors, the use of university services, isolation/alienation resulting from the fear of being found out in terms of immigrant status, and finally the constant fear of deportation.

Demographics

The population of the United States includes 11.9% foreign born, of which the vast majority are not undocumented. Passel (2006) reports that undocumented immigrants make up 30% of the foreign-born population. Moreover, The Pew Hispanic Center (2006) estimates the foreign-born population in 2005 to be 37 million, of which they estimate that 11.1 million were undocumented. Undocumented children represent approximately 1.8 million of the total undocumented population.

Social and economic factors have consistently increased immigration to the United States. Since the establishment of the 1924 immigration policies, the United States has set a quota of people from set nations to enter the country each year. Thus, many immigrants, who do not meet these criteria enter the U.S. without state-mandated documentation. Historically, a predominant assumption was that undocumented immigration primarily involved men. Currently, women and children constitute the majority of documented immigrants to the U.S. (Pedraza, 1991). Immigrants, who also were once also likely to return to their nation of origin when jobs dried out, now remain in the country for extended periods of time as a result of punitive strategies to limit

undocumented immigration including increased difficulty in returning to the United States and enhanced penalties if caught as undocumented workers (Reyes, Johnson, & Van Swearingen, 2002). The increase of family units in immigration and extended stays in the country has resulted in the acculturation of immigrant children in the United States.

The prolonged stay in the country of undocumented immigrants results in mixed-status families (Kretsedemas & Aparicio, 2004), including combinations of children and/or adults with differing nationality statuses ranging from undocumented foreigners to U.S. citizens. Undocumented children in the United States adopt the language and culture of the host country, enabling them to interact sufficiently in both cultures. These children attend schools with non-immigrant children and, like many of them, aspire to higher education. However, because of their undocumented status they face adversities accessing and persisting in the university.

Citing a study by Mehta & Ali (2003), Salsbury (2003) states “like their documented counterparts, undocumented students want to attend college, but are more restricted in terms of financing their education” (pg. 471). Recent initiatives in various states have allowed undocumented students to pay resident tuition at public universities, however, they are not entitled to financial aid in most states. Thus, access to higher education may still be unattainable as a result of the cost of tuition. This is particularly true in states where undocumented persons are also denied access to drivers licenses which limits employment and income opportunities.

Immigration Policy

Immigration includes the movement of people across contested national boundaries. In relation to the history of Mexico-United States, immigration is commonly thought to have begun in 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This treaty effectively ceded the state of Texas to the United States and along with the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, created the border that is known today (Johnson, 2000, Nevins, 2001).

In contemporary times, immigration continues to be a politicized phenomenon. According to Reyes, Johnson, & Van Swearingen (2002) “the current border enforcement policy is based on the premise that apprehension deters illegal [undocumented] immigration” (pg. v). The amount of money budgeted to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), increases yearly. In addition to the money spent on border security, initiatives like California’s proposition 187 further aim to deter “illegal immigration” and not only blame undocumented immigrants for economic downturns, but also attempt to punish them for living in the United States.

While romanticized ideology identifies this nation as one built by immigrants, current discourse attempts to limit immigration through man-made barriers (including Operation Gatekeeper, Operation Hold The Line, and Operation Safeguard) and anti-immigrant initiatives seeking to limit rights or criminalize undocumented immigrants (prop. 187 in California, 200 in Arizona, and H.R. 4437 also known as the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act). According to Marcelo

and Carola Suarez-Orozco (1995), “issues that once dominated the discourse about immigration and ethnicity, such as the wisdom of bilingual education and multilingual ballot materials, have been replaced with ranting about the invasion of illegals, alien crime, and alien welfare abuse” (pg. 24). The limited economic and political power of undocumented immigrants along with racialization makes them easy targets to blame for economic slowdowns and other social problems.

The immigration of people across borders is shaped by complex and detailed policies of both the home and the host nation-state. Individuals must often negotiate civil bureaucracy by applying for a passport identifying their nationality. A passport may require documents such as military draft cards and local identification. Immigration to the United States involves its own bureaucracy. There is a great diversity in the types of immigrants and their categorization is important. According to Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995),

“Latinos come from many different countries and from different socioeconomic, educational, and professional backgrounds. Their experiences vary considerably depending on whether they enter the United States as documented or undocumented immigrants, whether they immigrate voluntarily or because of political persecution, whether they are seasonal migrants planning to return home or ‘settlers’ who intend to reside in the United States more or less permanently, and whether they come to the United States as a family unit or as individuals” (pg. 47).

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) categorizes different types of circumstances for immigration and status adjustment including family reunification, employment, investment, international adoption, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and assignment to candidacy for residence for asylee or refugee using a

diversity lottery. There are also “quasi-legal” categories including Temporary Protective Status, (TPS) and Extended Voluntary Departure, (EVD) (Passel, 2006). Each category has a limited number of visas per year and utilizes a specific method to distribute them. If a category has more applicants than visas, applicants join a waiting list that is carried on over the following year(s) depending on their date of acceptance by the Department of Homeland Security.

While the categories provided by the DHS are clear-cut, the process is long and tedious. An applicant’s home country also curtails the immigration process. Applicants from countries with a larger influx of immigrants face a significantly longer wait for a green card than those from a nation sending fewer immigrants. Alternatively, undocumented immigrants are categorized into two categories by scholars and policy makers, those who crossed the border without documentation, classified as “entries without inspection,” EWIs and those who overstayed their visas (Passel, 2006).

Semantics play an important role in the perception of immigrants. Often the term “illegal alien” is used in regards to immigrants without state-required documentation. According to Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995), “people’s association of the terms ‘illegal,’ ‘criminal,’ and ‘immigrant’ feeds the common belief that not only are most new immigrants ‘illegals’ but they are here with the purpose of committing crimes” (pg. 35). Since many media outlets only address immigration when speaking of undocumented immigrants, in the minds of many the word immigrant has become synonymous with undocumented. Perceptions of abuse of social services and job displacement have also fueled the negative perception of undocumented immigrants.

According to Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco “five distinct but related areas of concern [exist] in the debate of over the new immigrants” (pg. 26). These areas consist of the belief of immigrants overrunning “natives,” cultural and ethnic differences too large from that of previous European immigrants, the perception of immigrants unwilling to assimilate into mainstream society, immigrants as economic, social, and demographic drags on the rest of society, and finally, the belief that immigrants contribute to the rise in crime. Researchers have seriously questioned these claims (Weintraub, 1980; Chavez, 1992; and Gutierrez, 1995), the media and anti-immigrant politicians still feed these sensationalized views of current immigrants to the general public. If the research is conclusive on such topics and there is no empirical evidence of immigrants engaging in the identified areas of threat, why does the public believe it? Pejorative terms, along with the increased visibility of different people identifiable by skin tone, accent, dress, and language cause anxiety among the general public. Many contemporary immigrants, unlike their European predecessors cannot blend in as easily, serving as a constant reminder to Americans of the “browning” of the nation.

Immigration policy is a fiercely contested issue in today’s political arena. At question are the benefits and detriments of undocumented immigrants, usually referring solely to their economic worth (the perception of immigrants doing labor citizens will not perform and providing tax dollars to the economy vs. the perception of undocumented immigrants as wards of the state). There is also a great disconnect between state rights and federal rights. According to Perry (2004), “immigration law gives states room to determine residency for educational and economic purposes but there is an apparent

perception that this freedom interferes with the federal government's ability to control the borders and monitor immigration" (pg. 39).

Furthermore, in any discussion of immigration, national boundaries and political sovereignty may be relevant issues. In contemporary times, perception over national boundaries has strayed to the idea of safety and control. Nativist fears of an immigrant takeover have influenced the political debate about the benefits and detriments of immigration. Current demographic changes have caused many to fear the "browning" of the nation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), Latina/os made up 14.02% of the total population and in 2000 Latina/os were 32.4% in the state of California. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995), referring to immigrant scapegoating, state that "frustrated by economic and sociodemographic upheaval, many are singling out the new immigrants as prime suspects in the creation of California's woes: the economic crisis, the budget crisis, the health care crisis, chaotic schools, and crime, to mention a few" (pg. 12). The reason is that "[b]laming them distracts everyone from looking seriously at the real causes of our growing problems, including widespread illiteracy, the breakdown of family and community, and the increased competition from foreign workers, be they in Japan or Los Angeles" (pg. 38). The irrational fears of immigrants taking over the country and labeling them as the cause for social problems distracts individuals from examining immigrant issues critically, whether they are related to the educational system or to government spending.

The children of immigrants often face punitive measures. Legislation like California's proposition 187 attempted to criminalize all immigrants seeking social

services including education. Although later declared unconstitutional, proposition 187 sought to punish the children of immigrants for their parents' "crimes." Education for undocumented students was not always guaranteed, in fact, proposition 187 was not the first legislative measure to attempt to exclude the children of undocumented immigrants from the educational system. In 1975, the state of Texas revised its state laws to withhold state funds to educate children of undocumented immigrants. The state legislation at that time posited that it was not the responsibility of the state to educate non-residents. The issue was taken to the Supreme Court in 1981 where it was decided that "illegal aliens and their children, though not citizens of the United States or Texas, are people 'in any ordinary sense of the term' and, therefore, are afforded Fourteenth Amendment protections" (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). According to Perry (2004) "the court believed that denying undocumented children access to education punished children for their parent's behavior...the court noted that the children of undocumented parents should be taken as future members of society and granted benefits benefiting of such as status" (pg. 16).

By 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Act (IIRIRA) changed the way in-state resident tuition was conferred. As cited by Perry (2004, pg. 37) Section 505 of the act stated that "an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a State (or a political subdivision) for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such a benefit (in no less an amount, duration and scope) without regard to whether the citizen or national is such a resident." In many ways, IIRIRA became a counterpoint to *Plyler v. Doe*. IIRIRA declared higher education, unlike K-12 (through

Plyler v. Doe), a privilege unnecessary to survive in the United States and effectively removed undocumented students from consideration of aid provided to citizens, residents, and documented immigrants. Undocumented students were excluded from receiving financial aid, resident tuition, and access to federally funded programs like the TRIO programs which have proven instrumental in raising the number of minority students in higher education.

State lawmakers attempting to better the access of undocumented students to higher education saw a glimmer of hope within IIRIRA's provisions in one word, "unless." IIRIRA states that undocumented immigrant students cannot receive any benefit unless it is also provided to citizens or nationals. Olivas (2004) provides an excellent explanation of this clause, "State A cannot give any more consideration to an undocumented student than it can give to a nonresident student from State B. For example, California could not enact a plan to extend resident status to undocumented students after they had resided in the state for twelve months, and then accord that same status to U.S. citizens or permanent residents from Nevada or Oregon after eighteen months" (pg. 453) The key to this verbiage is that if a state was to provide a benefit to an undocumented immigrant, the same benefit must also be extended to a citizen or national regardless of their state of residence. In California Assembly Bill (AB) 540 avoided IIRIRA provisions by making its benefits accessible to all university college students.

Nine states allow undocumented students to receive resident tuition, Texas (2001), California (2001), Utah (2002), New York (2002), Washington (2003), Oklahoma (2003), Illinois (2003), Kansas (2004) and New Mexico (2005). According to

the Center for Public Policy and Administration (Robinson, 2006), there are two variations of resident tuition granting policies. These variations were used to implement the first two policies (H.B. 1403 in Texas & A.B. 540 in California), and subsequent policies utilized these models to form their own policy (Salsbury 2003). The Texas model classifies undocumented students who qualify under the bill as “residents” for tuition purposes. The California model exempts undocumented students who qualify under the bill from nonresident tuition. The main difference between the models is classification as residents. The Texas model grants resident classification while the California model exempts students from nonresident tuition. The length of residence in the state is also different in the policies. Texas requires “residence in the state for at least three years as of the date of high school graduation or receipt of the equivalent of a high school diploma,” while in California “prior to applying to college, an individual must only have attended high school in the state for three years to qualify” (Salsbury 2004 pg. 474).

California’s Assembly Bill 540 (AB540) provided undocumented immigrants the opportunity to pay resident tuition in the state’s public universities as long as they qualified under the specified criteria. Similar to all other states offering resident tuition to undocumented students, prospective students must “have graduated from a California State high school or have attained the equivalent thereof, such as a high school equivalency certificate, issued by the state of California GED office or a certificate of proficiency, resulting from the California High School Proficiency Examination... [and] have attended high school in California for three or more years.” Students must also have

signed an affidavit stating they have “filed an application to legalize immigration status or will file an application as soon as able to” (AB540 affidavit).

This legislation granting undocumented students resident tuition has increased their access to higher education. Enrollment of undocumented students at universities in resident tuition granting states has increased yearly. According to Lewis of The Boston Globe (2005), the number of undocumented students in Texas universities grew from 1,500 in 2001 to 8,000 in 2004, Kansas experienced an increase from 37 in 2004 to 221 in 2005. Some states however have experienced a negligible number of undocumented students utilizing the policy. The University of New Mexico system reported only 41 undocumented students in 2005, the University of Utah reported 22 and the University of Washington system reported 27 in the same period (Lewis, 2005). The low incidence of undocumented students in the University of New Mexico can be attributed to the recent enactment of the policy in 2005. Yet, both Washington and Utah had similar policies in effect for two and three years respectively without major increase in student enrollment. In the state of California where the law went into effect in 2001, the University of California reported only 357 undocumented students enrolled in 2004-05 (Lewis, 2005) while 3,500 students enrolled in the California State University system and California Community Colleges (Passel, 2003). According to Passel, “these students are principally but not entirely, undocumented immigrants” (pg. 2) This data is not conclusive of the usage of resident tuition granting policies, the state of California has a three-tier system where the University of California is the most exclusive and expensive of the three and cost could be a major deterrent to applying to a UC versus the cheaper California State

University system. Consequently, in any examination of access, cost to attend a college or university must be examined as a critical factor enabling or disabling access. It is also important to note that during this same period affirmative action and the use of race (and/or minority heritage) as categories for admission came under attack. Affirmative action was eventually outlawed in some states, including California, although federal affirmative action policies are still in place for institutions receiving federal dollars.

While a number of states have instituted policies allowing undocumented students to pay resident tuition in state funded universities only three, Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico make financial assistance available as well (Drachman, 2006). Although resident tuition makes higher education more affordable undocumented immigrants who are generally overrepresented in lowest socioeconomic levels in this country may still find college tuition a luxury.

One reason for the low enrollment of undocumented students at universities where they are eligible for resident tuition may be the limited dissemination of information both to individuals who guide students to college and the students themselves. According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (2005), "information sometimes fails to trickle down to students from guidance counselors and teachers" (pg. 3). This failure to disseminate information to school administrators and faculty may result in undocumented student immigrants assuming that higher education is not an option for them. College applications require social security numbers as a means of identifying students, further limiting the ability of undocumented students to attend colleges and universities.

While a number of states introduced and passed policies allowing undocumented immigrants to pay resident tuition at public universities as a public good, a segment of the population viewed this access as unfair to the rest of the student body. This sentiment has allowed immigrant opponents to reexamine and challenge resident tuition policies. For example, in the state of Missouri new legislation attempts to exclude all undocumented college students from public universities. In the states of Kansas, Colorado and California, pending legislation and/or lawsuits are attempting to overturn resident tuition policies granting resident tuition rates to undocumented immigrants.

Workers and Mobilization

Many undocumented students become undocumented workers to attend the university. Like many of their non-student counterparts, they often work in the informal economy where pay is low. Undocumented immigrant students work yet they have difficulty paying for higher education. Unable to receive financial aid, these students must find sources of funding for their education. Like other undocumented workers, they cannot obtain work authorization and usually resort to work in the informal economy receiving “under-the-table” wages in the immigrant labor segment. Their jobs provide a source of income but seldom enough to cover education costs.

The constant uncertainty and stress stemming from financial insecurity can affect a student’s morale. Traditional college students are conditioned to think about jobs during their college years as transitional between secondary jobs and permanent occupations. Such secondary market jobs, however, are the permanent occupations of most undocumented immigrants. Undocumented students without immediate access to

documentation may experience hopelessness in transitioning between the jobs they hold while attending college and those they attain after achieving their degrees.

The income from jobs held by undocumented students pays for their college education, thus all of their educational choices must be subjugated to their labor demands. Thus, students often face difficulty managing a full-time school schedule, which may include participating in internships or other extracurricular activities useful for post college opportunities. Undocumented students like many working class students must protect their job requirements. Moreover, because of the constant threat of being found out, undocumented immigrant students must negotiate a class load and a work schedule that provides shelter in both spheres.

Despite the diverse inequities and difficulties they face, undocumented immigrants are involved in the work force in higher numbers than their fellow resident immigrants or native-born people (Passel, 2006). There are various explanations for this higher participation including their age concentrations and a lack of options to higher education. Passel states that undocumented immigrants are younger than other potential workers and “few [undocumented immigrants] attend college, so they are more likely than other groups to participate in the labor force” (pg. 9). Passel implicitly posits the labor immigrant explanation for the low participation immigrants participate in higher education. Although labor force participation is an important component of the undocumented experience, this study intends to argue that a number of undocumented workers are primarily students. Studying immigrants exclusively in terms of labor force participation reifies the belief that undocumented immigrants are solely workers. Indeed

the examination of immigrant family settlement moved the focus of research on immigrants to family relations, gendered experiences, and child and youth issues. This study examines how children and youth integrate into United States society as students having been brought to the United States by their undocumented parents.

The majority of undocumented immigrant workers are found in “niche” markets (Andre Perry, 2004). Sarmiento Torres (2002) states that many immigrants are often relegated to the informal economy sector where working schedules are flexible and work is based on the employer’s need. Portes (1995) defines the informal economy as “the sum total of income-earning activities that are unregulated by legal codes in an environment where similar activities are regulated. Informal activities are distinguished from criminal ones in that they encompass goods and services that are legal, but whose production and marketing is unregulated” (pg 29). Job sectors with high concentrations of undocumented immigrants include agriculture, restaurants, construction, hotel and garment industries. Immigrants primarily earn minimum, or below minimum wages and thus, many immigrants are part of the working poor. Conversely, undocumented immigrants are underrepresented in white-collar professions with an estimated 10% of undocumented immigrants employed in management, business, or professional occupations, which are the professions undocumented students aim to have access to after graduation (Passel, 2006).

Despite the “shadowed lives” experience of undocumented immigrants, they participate actively in their communities. On March 18, 2006, 100,000 to 500,000 people protested the proposed legislation known as House Resolution (HR) 4437. The protestors

also demanded a comprehensive bill addressing the needs of immigrants. The demonstrations were organized mostly by grassroots organizations and Spanish language Disk Jockeys. In Chicago, marchers stopped traffic in the busy downtown, effectively shutting down the city. While one cannot assume all the demonstrators were undocumented, the protest did send the message of the importance of immigrants to the city. In the subsequent week, cities across the country experienced their own demonstrations. These included not only traditional immigrant hubs like Los Angeles, Riverside and Sacramento, but also areas with new, or increasing, immigrant populations such as Milwaukee, Seattle, Atlanta, and Charlotte. The number of people involved in these demonstrations displayed the organization, cohesiveness, and political awareness of immigrant-supporting groups fed up with immigration policy detrimental to immigrants. In the city of Los Angeles between half a million to two million people marched through the city streets to oppose harmful immigration policies, Atlanta saw 80,000 demonstrators through its streets, Denver had 50,000, Phoenix 20,000, and Charlotte 7,000. In Milwaukee, home to the district senator Sensenbrenner who sponsored of HR 4437, 10,000 people marched to oppose the legislation. It is important to note that the contemporary mobilizations are not new nor the only acts in which immigrants take action on their own accord. Historical record indicates that immigrants have been active in the trade labor movement as well as education and civil rights efforts at other times (Almaguer, 1994; Duron, 1984).

Latina/os in Higher Education

Education is the primary predictor to economic success yet undocumented immigrants have no guarantee that a college degree will better their economic status. To attain employment (outside of the casual sector) workers must verify their right to work with citizenship, residency, or valid work permits. Undocumented students cannot furnish such verifications. A college degree does not facilitate immigrant status adjustment. Undocumented students must assess the value of a college education as something other than employability or economic mobility.

The literature on undocumented students in higher education is scant. The scholarship on Latina/os and Latina/o experience in higher education may allow one to examine how undocumented Latina/o students navigate higher education—given that they share race/ethnic membership, class and, non-traditional student status, factors conventionally accepted as sources of stress for minority students. In addition, undocumented immigrant students experience stress regarding their immigrant status.

The majority of Latina/o students pursue higher education at community/junior colleges. While (11%) of college students in the U.S. are Latina/o, a vast majority enroll in junior colleges. According to Haro, Rodriguez and Gonzalez (1994), up to 70% of Latina/o college students attend two-year institutions, and the majority of these students never transfer to four-year institutions. Even if students advance from community colleges to universities, their chance for success is low since many transfer students never graduate. For example, in the University of California, 50% of transfer students dropped out after their first year (University of California Office of the President, 2003).

Latina/os have historically been underrepresented in colleges and universities. While the total number of Latinas/os in postsecondary education increased in the last thirty years, in comparison to the overall population growth, the percentage of college-attending Latina/os remained constant. Of that number, the graduation percentage remains dismally low. According to Nevarez (2001), “current and past education policy approaches to increase postsecondary access, while able to increase enrollments incrementally, have been largely ineffective in addressing issues of persistence and degree attainment” (pg. 3). Universities introduce Latina/os to the “revolving door syndrome” (Haro, 1994), where they are admitted to the university but little is done to ensure their graduation. The revolving door syndrome refers to a phenomenon where the number of admitted students equals the number of students dropping out, therefore producing a mirage of a constant Latina/o population and enrollment at universities.

Cortese (1992) drawing on 1978 data found that a higher proportion of Latina/os were underclassmen and their time of completion for each class level was longer than average. The overrepresentation of Latinos in the underclassmen level in higher education has not changed. In fact, Haro (1994) noted that the time required for Latina/os to graduate is longer than for most other groups in the student population. In addition, college dropout rates for Latina/os are much higher than for Whites and Asians. Higher attrition rates may be a result of marginalization and alienation in the college environment given the low ratios of Latina/o students and their feelings of under appreciation. It is also possible that disregard of their values among their peers may

affect their retention. However, a major factor in attrition is the result of financial distress.

Undocumented students also face a number of stressors strictly caused by their immigration status. Historically assimilation was considered necessary to succeed in education. According to Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995), the desire to maintain cultural traditions is often misconstrued as an unwillingness to learn English and adapt to American culture. However, in response to such criticism they state that regardless of the difficulties immigrants experience in the host country, “they nevertheless desperately try, seemingly against all odds to learn the language and to succeed in the educational system, not the welfare system, to ‘become somebody’” (pg. 5). Due to their ambiguous role in American society, undocumented students find it difficult to find a place where they belong and often conflicted about their social membership. As university students, they also experience dissonance about the outcome of their educational attainment. Their peers in the university have the possibility of social mobility, yet as undocumented immigrants, they are constantly aware of not belonging and not having access to critical financial resources that will help their social mobility. For example, they do not qualify for any financial aid, internships, or traditional minority student programs.

Undocumented students face several minority-status stressors stemming from their gender, ethnicity, and undocumented status. Dozier (1993) found that fear of deportation was a central issue for students that took part in her study. Fear of deportation deters students from seeking health care when they are sick, reporting crimes,

or asking for school benefits. They live in fear that their immigration status will be challenged. Grinberg and Grinberg (cited in Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995), use the term “persecutory anxiety” to discuss the impact of the fear of deportation. Persecutory anxiety consists of the emotional state “whereby the host environment, which was once idealized, is experienced as hostile and persecutory...persecutory anxieties may be manifested in the form of irrational fears about life in the host country” (pg. 62). Irrational fears constitute anxieties over events that would not normally happen or would have minimal effect but nonetheless provoke stress on an individual. The word irrational however connotes knowledge of what is possible and what is not, which is subjective. Irrational to whom? For example, in the case of recent immigrants with little knowledge of American society it is difficult to call such anxieties irrational. Even the fears or anxieties of long-term undocumented immigrants should not be misconstrued as irrational because regardless of the outcome, the fear of deportation may be a constant stressor in their daily lives depending on other factors such as living situation, employment and area of residence.

Undocumented Latina/o students also face limited funding options due to the unavailability of financial aid as well as fears of disclosure of their immigration status, which could limit their interactions with other students. Loneliness, while a common phenomenon among individuals, is an added stressor for undocumented students. Dozier (1993) states that “many students report their reluctance to develop close emotional relationships because of their concerns that others may discover their immigration status” (Pg. 4). Trust may be difficult to develop because disclosure of their documentation

status to immigration authorities would not only affect the undocumented student, it would also affect his/her family. Often the undocumented student is not the only person in his/her family to lack immigration documents. Thus, an undocumented student is constantly aware that their trust to anyone else impacts more than just him/herself.

Feelings loneliness, helplessness, and powerlessness may result in depression for undocumented students. According to Dozier (1993) undocumented students often yearn for the privileges denied them as a result of not having immigration documents, “a frequently heard phrase is ‘imagine how much I could do if I had the student visa, work authorization’ and so forth” (Pg. 5). Such stressors can lead many students to have a negative educational experience or may deter would-be students from enrolling in universities at all. Drachman (2006) states that fear of deportation or other serious consequences “has kept the number of undocumented students who actually enroll in public colleges and universities very low” (pg. 98). I agree with Drachman’s findings, yet it is also important to explain that other factors affect undocumented students’ access to the university including financial strain, lack of information regarding policies applicable to undocumented students, and the unstable future they face upon completing their degree since they face the possibility of never using their training. In other words, the low educational endeavors of undocumented youth are the result of complex social factors heavily shaped by their immigration status

Studies seeking to understand the attrition of Latina/o college students focus mainly on individual factors while ignoring social and institutional aspects. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in a study conducted in 1999-2000 examined

college student attitudes in regard to their exposure to seven risk factors believed to hinder persistence and degree attainment (Horn, 2002). The risk factors were: financial independence, delaying enrollment by a year or more, having children, being a single parent, working full time while enrolled, and being a high school dropout or a General Education Development (GED) credential recipient. Latina/os had exposure to a variety of risk factors, often several at the same time. While these risk factors certainly affect the ability of students to remain in school, the analysis remains at the individual level and fails to account for institutional factors that affect college persistence. Institutional factors include campus climate, perceived discrimination, culture shock, diminishing outreach programs, difficulty of transition, and poor K-12 preparation to ensure graduation from the university. These factors may affect the retention of Latina/o students at a university. Li and Killian (Li & Killian, 1999) found that “students were likely to have more than one reason for leaving” the university (pg. 13). It is important that institutional interventions not focus on a single factor for reducing college attrition but rather “rely upon multiple interventions that address a wide variety of student needs” (Li & Killian, 1999, pg. 13).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) offer a model of Latina/o persistence that revolves around the concept of sense of belonging and its effects on student retention. Within this model, the stronger the sense of belonging a student feels, the more likely he/she is to remain or reenter the institution. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), sense of belonging contains “both cognitive and affective elements in that the individual’s cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group results in an affective

response” (Pg. 328). Examining sense of belonging allows researchers to assess which forms of social interaction further enhance students affiliation and identity with the colleges they attend (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Common belief is that in order to succeed students must assimilate to mainstream culture; however research examining this belief has found the claim to be incorrect. Attinasi (1992) found that students integrate into the university system not because they share the values and orientations of the majority of students, but because specific collective affiliations help them acquire skills to negotiate the social, physical, and cognitive geographies of large campus environments. Newcomb (1962) observed that peer groups might form when common problems are experienced. These findings suggest that minority students can feel a part of the university community without acculturating, conforming, or adopting the values of the majority (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Membership in religious organizations, social-community organizations, student government, and sororities and fraternities fostered a broader sense of group cohesion for Latinas/os and enhanced their individual sense of affiliation and identification with their institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Their relationship to these organizations to communities with which Latina/o students were familiar eased their transition to the university. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), feeling at “home” is associated with maintaining interactions both within and outside the college community for Latina/o students.

The importance of mentorship and support has been widely documented for all students. For Latina/o students, mentors provide guidance, help them to access support

systems, give them knowledge about different academic and/or financial opportunities, and assist them with a strong belief in their personal potential within the academic environment (Gloria, 1999). Providing Latina/o students with mentorship opportunities increases their retention within the university. While many universities may offer mentoring and other coping related programs for Latinos, according to Gonzalez (1999), information and facilities may be difficult for the students to find. The race and ethnicity of the mentor can also be an asset. According to Santos & Reigadas (2004) if students and their mentors belonged to the same ethnic group, the students found the relationship more beneficial. However, due to underrepresentation of mentors of color in the academy, it is difficult for Latinas/os to find mentors from their own ethnic group. It is important that Latinos be aware of mentoring programs since tutoring and talking with faculty outside of class may contribute to a stronger sense of belonging in the university (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Extant scholarship points to several important factors essential to the understanding of minority student survival and general academic success. These factors include recruitment and retention issues, but lack discussions of immigrant status. In particular, our knowledge about perseverance, endurance and resiliency strategies practiced by undocumented immigrant students is poorly documented. This study expands on two areas of research. First, it addresses educational endeavors at the university level in terms of the impact of immigration policy, beliefs about who immigrants are, and what their goals are in the host nation. Secondly, this study

contributes to the scholarship about the impact of minority status in the pursuit of higher education when the minority student is also an undocumented immigrant.

Current debates about immigrants, immigration, and national sovereignty provide a context that is often present in social research. As the economic and social conditions in the United States have changed so too have perceptions about deserving individuals of the social goods of the U.S. At this point of our history, we experience national debate on immigrant rights as we experience a host of challenges at home and abroad. The recognition of policy makers, politicians, and some academics about the unintended consequences of post IRCA immigration, the tightening of the U.S./Mexico border and the free trade agreements have helped shift the lens to the possibility of thinking about how these policies impact not only adults, but how they impact children and youth.

Policies focusing specifically on educational access provide an aperture for this study. Without *Plyler v. Doe*, *Leticia A.*, and *AB540*, such a study would still only be possible within the framework of familial immigration. This study takes into account the impact of complex state and national immigration policies on students. The study focuses on a small group of undocumented students at a public university in California—whose student life is shaped by a series of factors not usually common to the educational experiences of United States born students.

Chapter 2: Methods

This study took place in the 2005-2006 school year, at a San Francisco Bay Area university, and consisted of observations and structured interviews. The focus was a student organization whose mission statement focused on advancing the higher educational opportunities of undocumented students and activism concerning undocumented immigrant rights. Immigrants for a College Education (ICEd), a chosen pseudonym for the group, reflects their mission statement and resembles the message in the group's chosen name. ICD is also a play on words of the federal agency in charge of detaining immigrants, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, (ICE). The "d," while meant to complement the "Ed" of education in the pseudonym, describes the state of the undocumented students who have been "iced," frozen in place by immigration legislation with little hope of forward movement in their lives. An important factor must be acknowledged at the offset of this study. The organization and students on whom this study focuses are a distinct vulnerable group for which human subject protection is paramount not as an academic practice but rather as a recognition of human rights. To protect the student group a pseudonym replaces their name. The group's permission was sought for observations and for individual interviews. Students agreed to participate in this project as both members of the group under observation and also as individual immigrant students.

Field Observations

To begin the formal study I attended meetings and requested permission from the leadership to address the student members. The two ICD co-chairs granted permission

to observe the group and served as gatekeepers. The leaders explained the purpose of the project to the members and made the observer comfortable and integrated. The observer became an active participant in the group, providing input often prompted by encouragement from the members. Observations were recorded as field notes by the investigator during meetings. Current agendas, proposed activities, efforts to complete tasks, skills utilized to achieve mission statement, and quotes from members became part of the field notes.

Observations took place during the organization's meetings for two semesters during the 2005-2006 school year. Meetings lasted approximately 1 _ to 2 hours. Due to conflicting schedules, the scheduling of meeting times changed every semester depending on the members' availability. Location also fluctuated, the first semester of observations meetings were held in a pre-arranged meeting room in the student union, while the second semester was different. Due to the inability of most members to meet at the previous semester's time, the meeting room was forfeit. Meetings were changed to a different day, and held in either a member's apartment or a library study room. Member participation also fluctuated between semesters. The first semester about 8-10 people attended every meeting whereas the second semester that number was reduced to 4-8. Meetings maintained a structured format, they all began with an icebreaker to enhance the members' comfort, continued with unresolved or unfinished items from the last meetings, introduced "new business," and finished with availability for members to voice announcements.

Interviews

Interviews consisted of five open-ended structured questions followed by questions derived from participants' responses. In order to participate in the interviews, potential narrators had to meet the following conditions: first, they needed to be currently enrolled in a higher educational institution; and second, they were undocumented at any time during their enrollment. Participants disclosed their undocumented status throughout the course of the meetings. Two persons were instrumental in gaining access and entry to the group. One was a graduate student who founded the student group and a current member. The second, the group's faculty advisor also mentored the observer throughout the research process. Their endorsement facilitated access to the group with the added benefit of having an initial sense of trust in place. Since the study took place in California, all undocumented students interviewed were beneficiaries of Assembly Bill 540 (AB540) and paid resident tuition. The initial recruitment of participants occurred during meeting times. Members were asked to refer other potential candidates who met the criteria to participate in the study. Because undocumented students are difficult to differentiate from other university students and because the university does not release immigrant status information, we utilized a *convenience sample*. Most participants were also members of the group. A snowball technique was also used to recruit participants' referrals. Interviews were conducted one-on-one, face-to-face, and included reading the consent form and completing a demographics sheet. Interviews ranged from 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

According to Cornelius, (1982) "most field researchers have found that the most difficult part of fieldwork among [the undocumented] population is locating and gaining access to the interviewees on terms that will permit valid and reliable information to be gathered from them" (pg. 385). While locating the participants was not difficult (due to the group's activism), the location of the interviews was very important. In order to maximize the participants comfort, interviews were conducted in a setting of their choice and according to the students' availability. One interview took place at the campus cross-cultural center, one in a professor's office, three in a private patio behind a local bookstore, and the other two in the department's conference room. The settings enabled personal contact, minimal interruptions, and created a sense of familiarity to the students.

Due to the importance of adhering to human subjects protection, anonymity was addressed by asking participants to choose a pseudonym to use in the interview. Participants were also asked to fill out a demographic data sheet detailing their age, gender, ethnicity, class standing, GPA, major, parent's education, importance of degree to them, age at time of migration, and length of stay in the country. The use of a demographics sheet allowed for the evaluation of ranges in different categories. Items of specific interest were the average age of migration, average age, academic plans post the B.A., and parents' educational attainment used to compare with their perception of the importance of education.

All interviews began with a reading of the consent form detailing the participant's right to stop the interview at any time and to choose not to answer any question for any reason. Assurances were made that participation in a study of undocumented immigrants

would not result in "detection and apprehension by immigration authorities." Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym and received assurances that all audiotapes would be destroyed to protect their anonymity.

Interviews were conducted the second semester after trust and positive rapport with group members had been established. Originally, interviews were to occur as soon as Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission was procured, but in retrospect, the longer than expected length of time served to strengthen my relationship with the group. Non-members of ICED who were referred as potential participants had confidence and trust with the interviewer because they were referred by a trusted friend. Appointments were made for a location of their choosing to provide a comfortable atmosphere in which to conduct the interview. At times narrators did not keep their appointments mostly because they had shifting work and life schedules. The university is a commuter campus, and the limited time availability of the participants made the interviews difficult to conduct.

The interviews were audio tape-recorded. Throughout the interview, the interviewer took notes on the responses participants provided. The notes included follow up questions based on the interviewees' response. Follow up questions were asked at a time when the interviewer felt the participant had not answered a question fully or when issues were raised by the narrators that seemed important to the study.

Informal sessions followed the completion of interviews usually discussing the interview or sharing stories over a meal, boba (pearl-iced tea), or while walking together to the interviewee's point of departure. While there was no noticeable difference in the

participant's comfort between the time when the tape recorder was on and the time it was off, the "rap sessions" provided both the interviewer and interviewee time to debrief on the experience. Many participants expressed their regret about forgetting to mention certain things or for not having an answer to a follow-up question. However, most of the post interview conversation provided additional information not expressed on tape by the participants. No notes were taken during these "rap sessions." Notes were written after the participant left while the researcher debriefed.

The interview questions were conceptualized as a way to collect as much information as possible about the effect immigrant status had on undocumented college students in both their daily lives and their experiences on a college campus. Of particular importance were the sources of support used by undocumented students in their persistence through higher education, their relationship with the campus at large, their plans after completing their degree, the role of AB540 in granting them resident tuition, and their own ideas about what help undocumented students need in the university.

The first question was how does your immigrant status affect you and your family in your community?" The purpose of this question was to understand the undocumented experience and to explore the perceived effects of undocumented status in general. Themes explored included deportation fears, driving, and their immigration story including the method and reason for immigrating. Overall, participants appeared comfortable answering the questions, all of them told their immigration story, some were very emotional while others were stoic. Most of the narrators displayed everyday fears about deportation to their country of origin. While fear of deportation was expected, we

asked additional questions to understand how such fears affected their everyday life and if they prevented students from engaging in any activities. One problem with the question was confusion over the meaning of the section on community—some would hear “in your community” while others heard “and your community.” While there was no big difference between either interpretation of the question, it caused an initial sense of confusion to the participants.

The second question was purposely broad: “describe your experiences as an undocumented student.” This question queried students regarding their perception of how they fit in the university. Although initially meant to explore the student’s experience in the university, most participants addressed their entire educational experience. This interpretation reified Hurtado & Carter’s, (1997) research which found that a sense of belonging was influenced by factors such as level of involvement in university activities and organizations, contact with professors, and opportunities for mentorship and peer relations. Follow up questions included the effects gender and race had on their undocumented status. Students were also asked follow-up questions about sources of support; how their family perceived their pursuit of higher education; whom they spoke to when they had problems in the university; and who motivated them to remain in school.

The third question centered on how students financed their education. The question was worded as follows: “all students worry about financing their education, what particular obstacles have you as an undocumented student faced?” While some students spoke of applying for scholarships, the vast majority spoke about previous

experiences denying them the opportunity to apply because of criteria requiring a social security number they could not provide. As expected, families provided a large part of the support necessary to finance school expenses. Students worked to pay for their needs and academic expenses. We were interested in this question because it provided evidence about the family's commitment to their children's education. Discussions also provided evidence about how students joined the labor force as undocumented students, including the inferior wages they were paid, the uncertain schedules they experienced, and their need to balance competing demands, while at the same time ensuring that their academic endeavors would be successful.

The most difficult question for the interviewer to ask and the respondent to answer was question four: "what do you plan to do once you obtain your degree?" While answering previous questions many students spoke of education as a means for social mobility, but also hinted at an uncertainty as to whether they could ever utilize their degrees. This question was the core of the study. While all students know a degree does not secure employment, undocumented students must contend with the possibility of applying for employment as undocumented and U.S. educated college graduates.

The purpose of this study was to understand how undocumented students remained hopeful despite the virtual impossibility of receiving employment in their discipline. Answers ranged from frustration to hopelessness. The participants talked about needing to persist in applying for jobs and hoping they would find an employer who would not ask for their documentation. Throughout the interviews, the students displayed a willingness to persevere in their pursuit of a degree in higher education while at the same

time hoping that a legislative act would pass and give them the necessary documentation they needed to graduate and obtain a job. Thus, their hope lay in a change in policy.

One of the study's goals was to finish the interviews with the students telling us what they needed to better support them in their academic endeavors. The final question was "how has AB540 helped advance your educational goals and what else could be done to help undocumented students?" The question was meant to provide students a space to voice their desires and needs.

Participants

Seven undergraduates with current or previous undocumented immigration status participated in the study. All names used in this study are pseudonyms. All the participants came to the United States from Mexico before the age of 13. Four participants, Perla, Emily, Linda, and Sofia were female and three, Joseph, Marcos, and Jose were male, five were undocumented, one had recently obtained residency, and the last was in the process of appealing a denial of residency based on her brother's medical condition. All students interviewed were single and without children. All but one of the students had come to the university directly out of high school. One student attended a local community college. One student had enrolled at the university after high school, but because of financial difficulties transferred to a community college and had just transferred back. Six of the seven participants were ICED members and their recruitment occurred during regular meetings. An ICED member referred one participant.

Student Profiles

Joseph and his brother Marcos came from Mexico City in 1993. Their immigration was predicated by threats their mother received at the work place. Their parents were separated. Their father immigrated to the United States while they lived with their mother. Joseph immigrated at the age of 10 and is currently 23 years old, he is a junior living off-campus with his family and hopes to become an animator. At the time of the study, he was the co-chair of ICED. To pay for his tuition he works at a flea market on weekends and a local bookstore on weekdays. He reported his family income to be between \$20-29,000 a year based on his father's work in construction and his mother's as a school aide. His father's highest level of education completed was high school and his mother had attended a technical school where she learned clerical skills.

Marcos is nineteen, and immigrated at the age of seven. Currently he is a sophomore at a local community college and lives off-campus with his family. He exhibits a common indecisiveness in choosing a major as he finds he enjoys many things. Possible professional aspirations include being a teacher, lawyer, or an activist. He chose his pseudonym in honor of subcomandante Marcos, one of his heroes. He works part-time to pay for his educational expenses at the same bookstore as Joseph and believes he will require another job to transfer to a university once his community college requirements are completed.

Perla recently attained her residency; she is nineteen, and is currently working on a bachelor's degree in social work. Although she is in her second year at the university, she is still at freshman standing and at the time of the interview was on academic

probation. Her goal is to earn a graduate degree in social work and work with abused children. She is a native of Chihuahua, Mexico and immigrated at the age of five in 1992. Neither of her parents had more than a high school education. Perla reported a family income between \$30-39,000. Her family owns a business, which allows her family to pay for her education.

Emily did not fill out a demographics sheet, however based on her interviews she is nineteen years old and hopes to become a sociologist. She immigrated at a very early age and was always a top student. She lives off-campus in an apartment with other students, all of which are members of ICED in which she will serve as treasurer next year. She has two siblings one of which was born in the United States and the other, like herself, is also undocumented. Afraid to get a job through informal or formal channels, Emily relies on her family to pay for her college education.

Linda is a nineteen-year-old sophomore from Guadalajara, Jalisco. She immigrated at the age of nine in 1996 and is currently working on a bachelor's degree in sociology. Linda served as ICED's treasurer at the time of the study and was recently elected as next year's co-chair. She reported a family income of \$30-39,000 but relied on part-time work at the flea market, scholarships, personal savings, and family aid to pay for her education. Because her family lives in the Central Valley, Linda lives in an apartment off-campus with a roommate. She hopes to continue on to graduate education after the completion of her bachelor's degree.

Jose immigrated from Jalisco at the age of three in 1991. He is currently eighteen years old and a freshman at this university. Neither of his parents went beyond an

elementary school education and he reported a family income of \$20-29,000 a year. Jose is currently studying business and works as a waiter to pay for his educational expenses. One of Jose's brothers is a college graduate and provides him with advice regarding the university. Although a college-graduate with a degree in engineering, Jose's brother is also undocumented. He has had difficulty maintaining a job in his field because of his documentation status. Jose lives off-campus with his family and relies on public transportation to attend the university—a two hour each way trek. Because he was so young, Jose has no recollection of his journey across the border, all the information he provided regarding that topic was what he was told by his parents and older brothers.

Sofia is 21 and emigrated from Mexico when she was six in 1991. She has a younger sister also enrolled at the same university. She is currently a senior majoring in history, and hopes to continue on to graduate school in pursuit of a Ph.D. Both of her parents attained education beyond high school. Her mother received a secretarial credential in Mexico and her father attended some college but did not receive a degree. Sofia reported a family income of \$20-29,000. Her mother works cleaning houses and one of the people for whom she cleans pays for Sofia and her sister's college tuition. Sofia's family at the time of data collection was appealing a denial of residency based on her brother's learning disability.

The demographics sheet also included the statement, "I value the degree that I am currently working toward." Using a Likert scale to rate the statement, with choices of "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree," six marked "strongly agree" and one marked "agree."

Chapter 3: Group Dynamics

I did not know what to expect from the group. I first heard about ICED from a professor who worked closely with them. The first time I met the group members was during club rush week. The group had a booth near the student union with the other school organizations. A big banner atop their table read “AB540”. I walked to their booth and saw that a few of the members explained AB540 and the DREAM Act to anyone who stopped at their booth. Most people left ICED’s table with a pamphlet the group had designed describing their mission. The pamphlet included information on the importance of making higher education accessible to undocumented students. I introduced myself and explained my plans for this project. They appeared very excited to be a part of it and told me about other projects in which they were involved. They were very forthcoming with information regarding their experiences as undocumented students and talked about their efforts to effect change for students like themselves. These efforts included changing the climate undocumented students experienced at the university, bettering the living conditions for undocumented immigrants by raising awareness of their plight in society, and changing university culture to ensure student success.

As I write this, I am in my second semester attending ICED meetings. The first meeting I attended took place in one of the meetings rooms at the student union. The room contained one long table with about 16 chairs around it and a whiteboard. To create comfort and build cohesion members began each meeting with an icebreaker. Icebreakers consisted of questions posed to each group member in order to get to know each other better and to build a sense of belonging. Some examples include: How was

your day? What are your best features? What is your favorite ice cream flavor? And two true statements and one false thing about you. Members attempted to identify the false statement. Creating a sense of belonging also made the meetings run smoothly. Moreover, icebreakers helped the group create close relationships with each other. An important factor, since all participants interviewed identified ICED as influential their persistence and perseverance in school and as their primary form of peer support.

Leadership

ICED officers are elected on a yearlong basis. The officers consist of two co-chairs, one male and one female, one finance chair, one secretary, one historian, and one community liaison. Three of the participants interviewed for this project were officers at the time of the project. Joseph and Perla were co-chairs the first semester, and in the second semester, Perla, became the historian. Linda was the treasurer both semesters. ICED does not require undocumented status for membership or to become an officer. In fact, I found the majority of the members were U.S. born. Officers are responsible for coordinating meetings and creating committees to organize events. Officers do not hold more authority in decision-making than non-officers. All decisions are carried out in a democratic manner, calling each item to a vote and passing or defeating it with a simple majority.

The first time I walked into the meeting room, I was surprised to find a full agenda on the whiteboard. The agenda consisted of an icebreaker, old and new business, and announcements. Old business included topics discussed at previous meetings but not completed. At this specific meeting, the old business included five fundraising projects:

a film festival where ICED would sell drinks, candy, and cookies, an altar for *Dia De Los Muertos*, a *Noche Sonidera*—a dance sponsored by the group, and a concert. All fundraising activities had a specific purpose. The film festival, altar, and dance would provide funding for future events, while the concert's profits would create ICED's own scholarship for undocumented students.

Common Goals

ICED's mission statement is "to increase the number of immigrant students, regardless of legal status, attending and graduating from institutions of higher education through peer support, community involvement, development of leadership and integrity." Linda perhaps best put the goals into her own words when she responded to my question about ICED's purpose. She stated

Well I think our common goal as a group, ICED, is beyond being a support group...[to] dignify ourselves you know against society and kind of like strive for full potential and we know that we have you know good potential to get through our education and you know we're working hard for this and many people might not believe in what we're doing and that's kind of hard but our goal is kind of like to educate the community and...disrupt like stereotypes that ignorant people have about immigrants and what it means to be an undocumented student.

In order to achieve these goals, the group organizes high school and junior college presentations to explain to teachers and students the importance of legislation like the DREAM Act and the options undocumented students have to attend the university.

Clubs officers or teachers in schools request most presentations from ICED. Most requests are submitted via email to the groups' yahoo group or through contact with a particular member. ICED has a PowerPoint presentation available for classrooms which have equipment. They also use literature regarding the DREAM Act and the importance

of higher education to undocumented students that they distribute at every presentation. I was not able to attend any of these presentations but the meetings following presentations always focused on debriefing members about their experiences and feelings about these efforts.

ICEd is also active in events planned outside of the organization. ICEd members attend conferences and workshops to learn about new efforts and/or to network with influential organizations or political leaders. Some of the conferences they attended included a leadership conference, a Latina/o role model conference, an immigration forum with immigration attorneys, and a conference on immigration at a nearby university. Members of ICEd took every opportunity to address their concerns to anyone they perceived influential to their cause. Thus, they readily attended meetings with leaders including Latino business meetings and political fundraisers. These events provided members with up to date information on events affecting them and allowed them to voice their opinions to individuals in positions to help. These events afforded ICEd members the opportunity to network and to garner knowledge helpful during regular meeting times. Most importantly, these endeavors fortified leadership and public speaking opportunities for ICEd members.

As previously stated, membership in ICEd is not reserved to undocumented students. The group's constitution states: "Membership shall be reserved to any one who respects and believes in the purpose of *Immigrants for a College Education*." As a result, members from like-minded organizations also attend ICEd's meetings. For example, in preparation for *Noche Sonidera*, members from the church group, which provided their

space for the dance, attended several meetings to help ICED with preparations. Before viewing myself as a full member, I was allowed to collect data during meetings, and witnessed members of several college classes attend ICED meetings and organizing events to collaborate with ICED. As ICED became better known, at the college and in the region, so did interest in working with the group. Often interest came from groups or individuals who first contacted the group's faculty advisor. Such was the case of an inquiry for a UC journalism student who wanted the group to participate in a video documenting their activities in the community and interviewing some members about their experiences as undocumented college students.

Fundraising

ICED is a prime example of a self-help, grassroots group (Acuña 1972, 1998). A major function in which ICED is involved is engaging in fundraisers to support their activities and to build an economic base for a scholarship for its members- their major goal. As a student organization, ICED must follow guidelines set by the university. In order to become a formal student organization, officers attended several workshops, and filled out extensive paperwork. Holding events on campus required specific paperwork. Organizations are restricted to two fundraisers at which food is sold. For ICED, food sales were a major source of funds. As an official campus organization, ICED members learned the bureaucracy of campus activities in order to further their interests. Moreover, they also learned to manipulate the bureaucratic knowledge they experienced in order to achieve their agenda off campus.

All proposed activities depend on available funds. Thus, fundraising plans take an important role at each meeting. During the year I observed the group, they organized four fundraisers that included BBQs, *churro* sales, *Noche Sonidera*, and a film series.

All fundraisers had to make money. This requisite notwithstanding, all fundraisers were carefully thought out to foster a respect for the cultural heritage of ICED members, to create an awareness of immigrant barriers, and to create a space where community members could interact in a positive manner. The film series was an example of all these goals. The Films were mainly independent titles centered on the undocumented experience, the difficulty crossing the border, and the desire for a better life. Members of the university and general community were invited, the films provided an opportunity for the group to sell food and drinks.

ICED events proved profitable. Members approached community businesses to donate or provide the space to make the items they would sell. For example during one fundraiser, the members sold *churros* on campus. They contacted a restaurant to allow them to make the churros after it closed. To organize the *Noche Sonidera*, ICED contacted a number of halls to hold their event and eventually found a church that provided the space free of charge for their event.

ICED demonstrated excellent networking skills and resourcefulness in planning each event. Members selected tasks to complete, insuring a sound division of labor. For example for the *Noche Sonidera*, one member was responsible for finding bands and DJs to play free of charge. Two members organized publicity with flyers they distributed on campus and posters at the church announcing the event. Another member was

responsible for making up tickets that were distributed to members to sale. Pre-paid tickets were sold at a lower price to insure set revenue. At the event, ticket prices were increased. Perla's father provided the security for the event (himself).

Parents and family members were an important source of support for ICED. At *Noche Sonidera* Perla's father volunteered as security for the event. Her mother worked the door, selling tickets and stamping hands for people. Joseph's mother, who works at a local school, printed out flyers for the event. In fact, she consistently printed leaflets and flyers for other ICED events.

ICED also demonstrated business savvy. Members deliberated at length to determine the prices for tickets and food items in order to ensure maximum profit. The discussion regarding *Noche Sonidera* consisted of how much people were willing to pay for tickets for similar dances, the number of people expected to attend, whether to sell food or drinks at the event and at what price. Concerns were also raised regarding the clean up time if food was sold. Finally reaching a consensus, the group decided to sell water, sodas, and churros at the dance. These deliberations demonstrated the conscientious manner in which ICED leadership performed all of their activities with a single purpose of mind—to insure success and perseverance in their cause.

Group Dynamics

The language used for most meetings of ICED is English. Yet members speak to each other in Spanish. This does not mean that all members speak Spanish but it is, I think, a sign of the comfort members feel inter-changing languages in their interactions (Macias, 1979). The ease of transition between languages is an indicator of acculturation

to American culture that all of these students live daily (Foley, 1990 ; Trueba, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; Bejarano, 2005). Since most undocumented ICED members came to this country at a very young age and the rest are U.S. born their use of both English and Spanish languages is common. Code switching is a widely researched area by scholars who have focused on people such as these students (Bejarano, 2005; Macias, 1979; Foley, 1990).

Group attendance varied from week to week. As a commuter campus, attendance planning was difficult. Many external factors also affected attendance. One particular member, Jose, was affected by a bus strike for a few weeks. Jose lives over thirty miles from campus and depends on public transportation to get to school and back. During the strike, Jose used his networks to get to and from campus. He got rides and attended school on a friend's schedule. This severely limited his availability for group activities. As noted earlier, California passed a law preventing undocumented immigrants from obtaining drivers' licenses—so Jose could not drive. While Jose's dilemma seemed more pressing—given his distance from campus, transportation to and from campus was a major challenge for all undocumented members of ICED. Class schedules also affected attendance to ICED meetings. In fall 2005, the group averaged 9-12 members at each meeting, while attendance at the beginning of the second semester consisted of 3-5 members, and later in the semester 4-10 members. Since class schedules change each semester, ICED changed its meeting times to accommodate the largest number of members. In the second semester, meetings were changed from Wednesdays to Tuesdays.

Similar to attendance, the location of the meetings also fluctuated. All meetings were held in a room reserved at the student union the first semester. The second semester saw many changes. I have already explained that the day of the meetings changed. Changing the meeting day resulted in the loss of permanent meeting space at the student union. As a result, meetings were held in Linda's apartment.

Linda's living room was furnished with a long couch that held four to five people and four chairs used by members. Seating was organized in a semicircle around the living room. Seats were not always available so at meetings with larger numbers of people some sat on the floor. In the middle of the semester, Linda moved and could no longer host the group's meetings so study rooms in the library were reserved to hold the meetings. These rooms had glass walls, giving passersby full view of all inside and making the meetings a fish bowl of sorts. The furniture of the study rooms consisted of a number of chairs, one mid-size table and sometimes one or two small couches. When meetings were held at the library I remember being apprehensive about what was being discussed because it was as easy to see what was going on inside as it was to hear what was being said. Although members often kept the door closed, the rooms were not soundproof so privacy was impossible. My apprehension about the candid discussions of the students was a result of my own concern for their well-being. Perhaps I was over-protective. At the end of the semester, ICED finally found a home at the Chicana/o Studies conference room. The conference room provided a private meeting area with covered windows providing no visibility from the outside to the inside, and while not soundproof, it is set in a building on campus that has less foot traffic than the library.

The room is also noticeably bigger than the library study rooms. Finally, because the group's advisor is a professor within the Chicana/o Studies Department, the conference room provided an additional level of comfort to all members.

Challenges

Lack of attendance did not affect the member's level of involvement. At a particularly slow time during a meeting Perla stated "ahorita que no estamos haciendo muchos proyectos, podemos hacer algo" (now that we are not involved in many projects we can do something). This statement translated into handing out and delivering flyers on AB540 and the DREAM Act to consulates, and counselors in schools. Also during this "slow time," ICED agreed to participate in a presentation to upward bound students visiting the campus.

One intriguing event ICED planned to hold was a *dream-in*. They envisioned a dream-in, much like a sit-in to involve individuals in taking over a public space to promote an ideal. The proposed event consisted of individuals spending the night outside of the university library to promote the passage of the DREAM Act. The location was symbolic since the library is named after a civil rights hero well known for promoting his dream of equality and justice. Because so much of the daily life of undocumented immigrants requires anonymity, the proposal consisted of contacting as many student groups and community organizations as possible to ensure a mass of people participated, thus making it difficult for authorities to differentiate between documented and undocumented participants. Strategies included getting media outlets and politicians to influence the passage of the DREAM Act in the federal government. The dream-in did

not actually happen because of a complex array of issues surrounding the library's bureaucracy. Since the library is a university and city library, it was difficult to determine under whose jurisdiction the event would fall. The event was planned to take place during the initial Senate discussions on immigration reform, but due to the inability of the organization to collect concrete information, ICED was unable to carry out the dream-in. However, the very discussion and the planning were important actions of empowerment and determination. These students demonstrate incredible ingenuity harnessing social forces, opportunities, and understanding bureaucracies in every aspect of their group efforts.

While many people support ICED's mission, group members also experienced several events reminding them of the prevalent anti-immigrant sentiment in society. One event consisted of an advertisement in the school newspaper questioning undocumented student's very presence in the university. The advertisement called for out of state students to join a class action suit against the state of California based on undocumented students' right to pay resident tuition that became law under AB540. ICED members expressed outrage and disbelief that a student-run newspaper would allow the advertisement to run and brainstormed on ways to react. Ideas ranged from a letter to the editor of the newspaper, to running an advertisement on the same newspaper addressing the complexities of resident tuition and its relation to immigration policy, and an opinion piece in the newspaper. The biggest concern of the students was that in responding they would make themselves or the organization the target of attack. Because of this concern, anonymity became primary and the group chose not to fight that battle. ICED did send

letters to the editor concerning the advertisement. The response explained the disclaimer used by the newspaper policy regarding advertisements: That is, that any advertisement posted did not reflect the views of the newspaper. They also refused to remove the ad from future issues. The advertisement ran for at least five issues during the semester.

The passage of The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, HR 4437 at the end of the fall semester proved difficult for members of ICED. The bill calls for the building of a fence in parts of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. A study of the feasibility of building a fence on the U.S.-Canada border, proposes an end to the diversity visa program. The bill would also make “unlawful presence” a new federal crime, “broadening the definition of immigration violations to include every violation—however minor, whether intentional or not—as a federal crime.” HR4437 also criminalizes (with potential federal prison time) any person or organization assisting undocumented immigrants in the U.S., including those providing legal services, churches, family members, charities, and health care providers (Sinha & Casillas). While the bill had only passed the United States House of Representatives, a similar version had made its way to the Senate. In order to respond and not feel helpless ICED members distributed pre-drafted letters addressed to political officials detailing their disapproval of the legislation and the need to defeat it. The group also took part in the demonstrations throughout the region joining others in demanding the defeat of the bill, the creation of comprehensive immigration reform, and a stop to the scapegoating of immigrants.

Insuring the Pipeline

ICEd members value their high school presentations more than other activities because of their own negative high school experiences. Most of the Iced members described their experiences in high school and suggested few counselors and teachers knew of available options for them. All participants in the interviews expressed frustration regarding the lack of information available for undocumented high school students about higher education. This frustration was enhanced when Iced members made presentations at local high schools and saw the looks of hopelessness and discouragement on student faces. Iced members attempted to supplement the information available to high school students. Attending college and wanting to create awareness among high school faculty and students of the existence of AB540 and the support of the DREAM Act was a major objective of the Iced presentations.

During one Iced meeting, a journalism student from a nearby university came to observe the student interactions among the group. The journalism student asked the group questions that turned the meeting into a focus group. One question involved how people would respond to Iced members when they found out they were undocumented. Students explained that people express shock at their undocumented status and hold little knowledge about the experiences of undocumented students attending universities.

During the same meeting, I wondered aloud if Iced undocumented members “owned” the undocumented label, much in the way many groups in the past had “owned” pejorative labels used to identify them. I asked the question because through the time I had spent with the group very few members had hesitated in disclosing information about

their status, however after asking the question I did receive a few “are you serious?” looks. Students explained that an “ownership” of the label was not possible because you never know the politics of the people around you and to them it is foolish to walk around saying I am undocumented versus saying I am Chicano. The students did however exhibit a sense of pride over their achievements despite their undocumented status. One member stated, “look at what I’m doing, I’m doing a lot, and some citizens do so little.” Another stated “we’re just a small number of undocumented students making it and still helping out family.” In one of the interviews, Perla did not exhibit pride over the undocumented label but rather over the term *mojado*. When I asked her why, she explained “because people say it all the time and it’s like yeah, yeah, whatever, I could get insulted, I could not, and it’s cool, I crossed the river, I actually crossed the Rio Grande...I don’t know, I just find that cool, interesting.” It must be stated that at the time of the interview Perla had already attained immigrant residency. Thus, public pride in the *mojado* label held few if any legal detriments to her or her family. Two members explained the importance of the setting in which they found themselves in terms of how they speak about themselves, one said “if [the area was] only Mexicano then it would be different, if I were to live in another area I’m, sure it would be different.” Another member reinforced the statement by saying “within our own community we can own the title but once you step outside we must be careful with the title.” The use of the word “owned” here is intended as a parallel with ideas about empowerment in self-naming. Most U.S. minority groups have experienced scapegoating and pejorative labeling. In the

sixties, these same groups embraced those labels to affirm their racial/ethnic heritage and to demonstrate cultural pride (Feagin, 1984; Acuña, 1972, 1998; Morris,).

Chapter 4: Sources of Support

Attending and persisting in higher education as individual students is not easy. Most individuals rely on external forces to supply motivation and assistance. In order to help students we must understand their sources of support. A sense of social support allows students like Jose to describe a warmer campus climate where help is available,

“in a way I feel like, like I have people to back me up, you know like support. I have support here and I have the club and people who support...you know... immigration...so... in a way I feel like a certain comfort that, knowing that I have support, and people will be here with me and also that I’m not the only one.”

There are various forms of support college students can receive to insure their persistence in the university. These include familial support, peer support, and institutional support. While the categories appear clear-cut, there are often combinations of support systems in one source. For example, ICED can be categorized as a peer support because it is formed by peers. They are all college students, all share similar interests, and all are in the same age range. The group however, because of its ties to the university could be considered a form of institutional support as well. ICED, as a recognized student organization receives funding from the university and access to university facilities for its meetings and events. While it appears that ICED’s support is a combination of peer support and institutional support, the institutional support exists because ICED made it happen. ICED provides peer support to its members because of its university affiliation and it advocates and supports the efforts of the organization to the university administration.

Familial Support

As expected, most participants credited their families with their persistence in higher education. During a discussion at an ICED meeting, one member stated that his family's interpretation of education was that it is "a way to defend ourselves from self ignorance and be able to question authority, teachers, police, institutions, [and] learn a way to express [ones]self and be able to have confidence in expressing [one]self." When asked further about this statement the individual stated that in the town he was born a teacher had gained most of the town's land by writing contracts benefiting himself. His parents saw education as an important tool to ward against being taken advantage.

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco's (1995) argue that Latina/o parents want and support their children in their desire to gain access to universities and colleges. Families displayed their support in various forms. Some funded their children's education completely; others could not afford to provide this type of support. Some students had family members who had gone through the university and they served as guides helping navigate the institution.

All the participant's families were a source of encouragement for completing their degrees. Families valued education as an important source of power and accomplishment. They felt pride in the students' accomplishments. During my interview with Emily, I asked how it felt when she learned that she could attend the university. She stated that she had great satisfaction in her achievement. However, this satisfaction was not limited to her, rather it included her family, and extended kin—her cousins took joy over her acceptance to college. She states:

“I applied and I got accepted and they [her family] were like ‘oh my god, you’re the first one to go to college’ and I was like yeah! And it was actually a really big satisfaction for my whole family...my cousins, they were like ‘oh my god you’re actually going to college.’”

All participants stated that they had support from their parents to attend the university. Some, like Marcos, related the advice he received from parents,

“they want me to go to school because they know it’s the only way to succeed. Succeed in a sense that you don’t have to use your body as a source of income like construction.”

Marcos utilized construction as a specific example because his father, a construction worker, had recently been injured at work. Joseph, Marcos’ older brother gave him similar advice:

I guess most Latino parents tell their kids here in the United States, you don’t want to break your back out there where you could be sitting down and just doing everything with your fingers. You know, sitting down in your own office getting paid more for doing less instead of getting paid less for doing more, that’s basically what they [his parents] tell me.

Jose described the advice as,

“I feel like that’s why I’m here, like I’m trying to get a better education to get myself not have to go through that paycheck to paycheck life that my parents have been pretty much living through their whole lives... so I live up to what they have been working so hard their whole lives.”

While Perla did not address her parents advice during the interview she made sure to point out that one of the major reasons why her family migrated was to ensure that she received a better education.

For some students the driving force in their persistence was their siblings.

Siblings encouraged them to attend the university and provided them with hope to attain a degree. Despite all of the difficulties Linda experienced in higher education she pointed

to her siblings as the reason why she remained in the university, “I’m doing it for my sisters, I’m doing it for my brother.” Emily’s university attendance provided her sister with hope that she too could get a college education,

“my sister...she had told me before, ‘I’m going to graduate from here [high school] and I’m not going anywhere’ and after I came to school she was excited and she wants to come to college.”

Emily also spoke about the impact of being a college student had on her brothers “I feel that if they [her brothers] see that I’m coming to school then they’ll be like ‘oh if she did, I have to do it too.’” Perla had a different experience. Her family’s support also felt like pressure.

“I’m the first one to go to college so that’s a lot of pressure coming from my family...I have to be number one at everything in their eyes, if I don’t, I just need to keep trying until I’m number one because I am the first one and because I have two brothers who will hopefully do the same as I do if not better.”

Many students stated that their greatest difficulty was funding their education.

The undocumented students’ experience, in terms of financial woes is difficult because they are unable to obtain financial aid, have limited employment, and scholarship opportunities. While some students worked two jobs to pay for their school expenses, their wages did not provide enough to fund their education. All of the students stated that they were dependent on family members to help them pay their university fees and living expenses. The amount of financial assistance provided by families varied for all students. Some students had family members who paid for all their expenses; while others received supplemental aid when they could not afford to pay their costs independently. The ability of families to provide financial assistance was dependent on their economic situation. All

students who supplemented their family's aid with their own labor did so out of necessity. Perla, whose family owns their own business, knew her family would provide the necessary finances to pay for her education,

“[Financing my education] was nothing major because as I said my family has their own business...so I knew...even though I was undocumented I wasn't going to have the problems most undocumented students have, where's the funding going to come from? And how am I going to get it?”

Emily had a similar experience from her family, specifically her father,

“he has to pay for the house and he has to pay for my school, and it's not that he has to because if he wanted to he would be like you know what, I can't afford your school but he says 'you know what, I'm going to support you and I'm going to go with you all through the process, you know of school, all the way until I can't help you, you know, you're going to go to school no matter what.'”

Not all students were so fortunate. Some students come from families that were not able to provide complete financial support. These students were forced to find ways to finance their education. Jose, Marcos, and Joseph witnessed the financial difficulties their families were going through and decided they would need to find employment to advance in the university. Their awareness of their family's limited financial assistance did not cause them to question their parents' commitment to their education. Some parents attempted to save money for their children's education; however, they could not fully fund their child's education due to the rising costs. Sophia states that her mom “started like a college fund for us [Sophia and her sister], but it wasn't a lot of money and it was only good for like a year or something.”

While most of the participants were the first members in their family to attend college, two of the participants, Jose and Marcos, had siblings who had attended the

university before them. Their siblings served as guides to the university helping them to find resources on campus, to apply for AB540 waivers, and in providing moral support. When asked about the support he received from his family Jose stated that they would help him:

“my brothers...specifically...the older brother just graduated, like whatever it is I need, like I know I can just go to him and ask him ‘hey you know, how...I do this or where...I go to find this and if he knows I know he will help me right off the bat.”

This same brother also told Jose about AB540. Without his assistance, Jose would not have been able to attend the university. Siblings played an important role in their brother’s educational endeavors. While in high school, neither of the siblings had received information about AB540 or educational opportunities for undocumented students from their high school teachers or counselors. Jose, whose brother attended the same university before and after AB540 understood the difference the tuition break created. He states, “I probably wouldn’t have even found out [about AB540] if it wasn’t for my brother.” Similarly, Marcos stated,

“When I was in high school he [his brother, Joseph] was the one that told me about AB540. He was already in the university he was the one to tell me yeah you have to sign up in AB540 to pay normal resident tuition, that thing helped a lot.”

Peer Support

Participants indicated that major sources of support came from peers. These included friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, and members of organizations. All but one participant identified ICED as a source of peer support. This finding was expected. Only one participant did not identify ICED as a source of support—but this person was not a

member. However, while not identifying ICED as a source of support, Sophia related that other groups gave her support. Her sources of peer support came from the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA). MEChA was her ICED

For ICED members who were undocumented students ICED was a space where they could interact with people who shared similar circumstances or with individuals whose goals were to ensure their success in higher education. While support can come in various forms, ICED provided students with an additional level of support by connecting students who experienced similar experiences relating to their immigrant status.

According to Jose,

“in a way like the way I feel most support is just knowing that there are other people going through the same AB540 and that I’m not alone and this and that. And that there are other people who are fighting for the whole -you know DREAM Act- and that are there like just to help you.”

Emily related to Jose’s account by stating,

“well I was actually fortunate to find ICED right away when I came to school ... to just find that first group... You know it was a big step to actually know people here that are in the same situation... because I found that group I haven’t really looked for any other support groups I feel I’m kind of complete.”

It is impossible to know a person’s documentation status by looking or talking to an individual. Undocumented students reported that they hesitated disclosing their immigrant status to their peers, making it difficult for them to find supportive relationships. ICED provided a source of support the participants had not had in their previous educational experiences. The mission of ICED states that they exist to support undocumented students, to provide a sense of comfort where students could speak about the stressors they experience related to the lack of documentation with peers sharing

similar circumstances. Emily addresses this facet of the group's support in the following statement:

“[ICEd] just lets me know that I'm not alone you know, there's a lot of us out there and just I guess hiding or like they're just not aware of their situation or that we're actually out here with them too you know? It just makes me feel not alone like I did in high school because in high school I didn't know anyone that was undocumented too as well as me.”

ICEd also provided members the opportunity to educate the community about undocumented student experiences safely using the banner of an organization whose primary goal was to create educational opportunities for undocumented students. ICEd found a way to empower students. The different events planned by ICEd help its members feel valuable as they developed closer connections to their immediate community. Emily remarked on these benefits provided by ICEd by stating,

“Just knowing that I can actually make a difference because you know how we have been going to high schools and actually informing kids and their parents that they can actually come to school and about the different resources...for school, like scholarships and all that stuff you know?...it has made me feel useful.”

Undocumented students also receive peer support from their friends. While a number of participants expressed reluctance in disclosing information regarding their documentation to people, the friends who were aware of their status provided them significant support. Friends who understood the limitations placed on undocumented students attempted to help with that difficulty. While planning a spring break, Emily narrated a story in which her friends demonstrated sensitivity about her travel restrictions by altering their plans to include her. According to Emily,

“with my friends like they know my situation they often ask me like they often say ‘oh lets go to Cancun for spring break or whatever,’ you know, I'm like well

you guys can go you know, and they like oh Emily no lets just take a road trip to like I don't know somewhere lets go to L.A. or something.”

Another of Emily's friends attempted to facilitate a resolution to her undocumented status, “One of my friends told me you know what, he was like if you want to I don't care let's get married he was like ‘*te arreglo papeles*.’” Emily declined the offer but his gesture displayed an understanding of the constraints of her situation through his offer of matrimony. Other friends had offered to change vacation plans in order to help her. Their willingness to consider her situation affirmed for Emily how important she was to her friends. The shared support among these friends was critical in alleviating the isolation and sense of loneliness they had all experienced in the past.

ICEd also provided opportunities to cultivate friendships. All members of ICEd remain in constant contact and hang out together. Three friends Emily, Linda, and Joseph, along with other members not interviewed, take turns cooking dinner for each other, fostering a closer sense of community among themselves.

Institutional Support

In the context of this paper, institutional support refers to actions the university takes to ensure student academic success. Sources of institutional support include a cross-cultural center, ethnic studies departments, faculty mentorship, outreach and enrichment programs.

The cross-cultural center at this university “collaborates with student organizations, academic departments, staff, residence halls, and members of the

surrounding community whose purpose is concurrent with [the cross-cultural center's] mission, philosophies, and goals.” Perla described the center as a place where

“they have internships and people in the internships they help out the organizations on campus, African-American, Chicano, religious organizations, fraternities, sororities, and then they just advertise whatever programs...it’s just basically a place to kick back and if you need information, if they don’t have it, they know who has it and they send you to them.”

Two participants, Perla and Sophia, identified the cross-cultural center as a safe space and an added comfort in the university. Sophia at one time was an intern at the center and Perla “basically lived [there].” In fact, Perla’s interview took place in a cubicle at the center. Perla, having experienced few mentoring opportunities with faculty at the university and feeling frustrated with her academic department’s student services utilized the staff at the cross-cultural center to receive support and information,

“I’ve gone, not to a professor, but to a program on campus and they didn’t much help me. So there I got really disappointed... so I just every now and then... I ask a staff on campus if they can help or here in [the cross-cultural center]...usually I get all my info from the director of [the cross-cultural center], you could say [she] is my mentor.”

The program Perla speaks about as discouraging her was an academic unit where a counselor gave her wrong advice on her major. While it is encouraging to know that the cross-cultural center mentors and supports students alienated by their academic departments, it would be fallible to believe that all alienated students find the cross-cultural center as a place of support.

The cross-cultural center provides a space for individuals of different cultures to meet and exchange ideas. Sophia described the center as a

“great place to just learn about other cultures...as an intern there, I learned about my...fellow, like, interns...the individual cultures...[and] similarities that we have between the two [a fellow intern and herself] and, like, just like similar struggles that each culture has.”

While the cross-cultural center provided students with valuable information and support, limited funding hinders the scope of the center. Sophia recalled several times that the difficulty she had in working with campus organizations was particularly evident when requesting funding for their activities. Often these organizations did not have any monies or resources for their activities.

“you think that [the cross-cultural center] is such an essential program... and the university doesn’t fund that program enough like it should. I remember as interns we had a budget to work with, and that budget we were to allocate to different organizations that were putting together programs and these organizations were like cultural organizations and I remember we’d always be really really stressed out [due to lack of funds].”

Two participants, Jose and Sophia identified the Chicana/o Studies department as supportive. Through its curriculum and accessible faculty members, both students felt comfortable seeking support within the department. Jose and Sophia described the classroom environment as comfortable and friendly. Sophia, remembering a class she had taken stated,

“I remember the first day in class we had to just like go around and talk about ourselves and that way we could like remember each other’s names...that way you know, we don’t feel shy about coming in the class and not talking to somebody because we’ve already been like introduced and like they’re expecting us to like work together.”

Sophia and Jose recalled class environments where students sat in a circle and worked collaboratively.

While students found mentorship in different places, for the purpose of this project mentorship was assessed exclusively in terms of faculty mentorship. Marcos provided a working definition of mentorship, he defined it as,

“a mentor is someone that helps you, guides you, or gives you a tip in your profession, your whatever you want to become, or through life. You have, I don’t know, problems at home, they might help you, they might give you their life experience when they had a similar situation or that sort of thing.”

I hesitated to ask participants if they actually had a mentor without first providing them with a definition. I contextualized the characteristics of mentorship and asked students whether they took part in mentoring activities. Questions related to mentorship centered on their comfort in seeking out faculty, using office hours, amount of time spent with a professor outside of class hours, and their perceptions on developing relationships with faculty members. Sadly, only one student reported a mentorship with a faculty member. Another student spoke of a developing relationship with a potential for mentoring and Perla referred to the director of the cross-cultural center as her mentor. Because most students interviewed were in their earlier years of a college education it was encouraging to know that three participants had found individuals who could serve as university guides.

Students found professor’s assistance and interest in their work to be beneficial to their self-esteem. Linda described her feelings when a professor took an interest in her work,

“...it was kind of inspiring how she had a lot of faith in me and the things I could so I don’t know, I think she inspired me a lot to work hard and do well in my classes.”

The inspiration Linda expressed in that instance, if consistent could grow into a mentorship where the faculty member provides her with the necessary tools and guidance to survive in the university. Linda felt positively about the professor's attention, "I think it's kind of flattering and encouraging that they place that kind of effort in bringing out the best in a person so it's kind of a motivation to do your best." The initial stages of cultivating a mentorship are not necessarily time consuming for an already overburdened professor. Simple actions like spending time with students during class time to review work, or constructive feedback on class work benefited students such as Linda. While one may think these actions are inconsequential and meaningless, they provide students a platform to interact with a professor and enable the student to feel positively about the extra time invested in them. Again, Linda describes her professor's actions that made her feel supported,

"basically like positive feedback on work that I would do, on papers that I would write. She didn't wait until I went up to her and told her, you know, asked about oh what did you think about my paper, she would personally come up to me and say you know I think this is really good material and you know try to help me out, areas of improvement..."

One participant reported how a mentorship developed when describing a professor's interest in her well-being after noticing a drop in the level of her work in his class. Emily described the experience,

"last semester I was going through, let's just say a health condition...so he noticed that I was not doing as good as I could have done and that sometimes I wouldn't go to class so he told me, you know, like so what's going on? I told him you know what I been having problems and I just don't know or whatever and he told me you need to go talk to your professors."

The mentor provided support in approaching the student and provided guidance and advice to cope with the situation. The professor further displayed his commitment to her by offering to write a letter to the professor teaching the class where she had trouble and by referring her to counseling to help with her “condition” -which she later explained to be depression.

Lack of comfort with a professor may cause a student to feel isolated in the classroom (Gloria, 1999; Dozier, 1993). Limited contact with peers can make a student feel alienated among many classmates. The classes become a chore to attend, to work on, and to wait for classes to end in order to depart, rather than a place where the student perceives a supportive learning environment. An action as simple as knowing a student’s name provides an additional level of comfort to students used to a routine similar to Jose’s where “I’m just going to go in, get my work done and I’m out.” Sophia explains the consequences of the perceptions of a hostile classroom environment,

“You know there’s a lot of professors that I’ve felt very intimidated [by] and I’ve never even spoken to, like I was a business major and I couldn’t handle it, I didn’t really like it.”

While Sophia’s attrition from the business department is not merely the result of this particular event, one wonders the outcome if Sophia had felt encouraged to interact with her professors. A student’s sense of alienation can occur in any department. There is no clear pattern about which departments are supportive of students. Yet students specifically stated that an ethnic studies department was more supportive of students than not. While one student stated that the business department was not supportive, it is

important to note that independent of a department, professors create the interpersonal relationships with their students and provide the critical role.

Chapter 5: Undocumented Stressors

Throughout the interviews, I found that participants contended with similar stressors based on their undocumented status. In this chapter, I address the stressors

- found in the interviews and the ways they affected the students. I delineate each stressor in a separate section, however, it is important to note that while I discuss each stressor separately, students did not experience one or two of the stressors exclusively, but rather contended with how these intersected, because in reality they are impossible to separate. The first part, “awareness and coping with undocumented status” discusses how learning that they are undocumented is a detrimental factor in the participants’ everyday lives and the strategies they used to mask the negative impact. The section on “Stigma and self-esteem” focuses on stereotypes and stigma undocumented students experience and how they affect their self-esteem. The section on “Unstable future” explains the stress participants experience because of their awareness of their limited ability to control the outcome of their efforts in the university. “Financial difficulty” outlines the struggle undocumented students experience working at low paying jobs with the potential for being “found out” as undocumented immigrants; their inability to procure financial aid; and the limited ability of their parents to help financially. Finally, in “Deportation fears”, I discuss the effects of the possibility of deportation and the ambiguity individuals who have spent the majority of their life in this country would encounter if they were forced to return to their nation of origin.

In addition to the general stress all college students face at the university, undocumented students also contend with stressors based on their immigration status.

Participants commented that through K-12, they received similar treatment as their peers and they had similar educational opportunities. With peers and administrators constantly telling participants that they had every opportunity open to them, many students bought into “the American dream,” and the belief in meritocracy where an individual’s success depends solely on their hard work. The fact that students persist through the university displays their ability to be successful students, their academic success in K-12, and the availability of support networks and resources. However, undocumented students experience limited options in the universities they attend depending on, among other factors, location and cost. Undocumented students also contend with the limitations of their immigration status. This chapter analyzes the effects of additional stressors undocumented college students experience as evidenced by participants’ responses.

Samuel P. Huntington (2004), citing Sosa, defines the *Americano* dream as a version of the American dream for Latina/os, although according to Huntington there is no *Americano* dream, “there is only the American dream created by Anglo-protestant society, Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English.”. Regardless of the language in which they dream, for some of the participants, Huntington’s (2004) words rang true since they felt excluded from the “Americano dream” although, interestingly, they concurred with his belief about what an immigrant should be: fluent in English, educated and integrated into the culture.

Awareness and Coping with Undocumented Status

The psyche of undocumented students is affected negatively when they realize they do not have access to the same opportunities as their peers. Joseph, while still in

high school, experienced a loss of motivation and purpose when he realized he would not be able to attend college. “I remember my senior year I basically fell into depression, I didn’t care about school anymore because what’s the point if I can’t go to college?” Fortunately, Joseph found a person who covertly admitted him into the university. How many students face his situation every year? How many students may face depression and lose hope because their academic dreams are lost? Even while having met all of the requirements to attend the university, Joseph spoke of the lack of hope potential college students who are undocumented experience:

“Many students get discouraged of going to college because they know that if try go to college and finish their whole degree they can’t use it so why waste those many years at school?”

Most of the students interviewed were not fully aware of the impact of undocumented status on their opportunities until late in high school. Few events differentiate undocumented students from their documented peers until high school. As young adults, they begin to live social experiences shaped by immigration status. For example, obtaining a drivers license and applying to college. Jose reflects on the how coming of age is affected by undocumented status,

“in high school and middle school...it seemed like I belonged there...I was a part of everybody...that whole being undocumented issue...was never brought up because it just doesn’t...come up in public schools in my area...once I started getting in my senior year and trying to figure out college and the whole deal, that’s when it started to... like really show... like affect me.”

According to Joseph,

“I was in high school, my senior year when I realized that I was undocumented... I didn’t realize until my first semester of senior year when all these counselors started talking to me about college and most of them asked for a social

security number.”

The social security number becomes a rite of passage that the undocumented student cannot achieve. They have lived “shadowed lives” without knowing it. Or they have withheld information as a coping strategy. Either experience has placed them outside the margins. The lack of clarity on immigration processes also leads to a large number of the general population to remain ignorant about the effects of undocumented status on real human beings such as these students. Officials of some sort who are ignorant about how one could be undocumented may be vital gatekeepers who could influence the academic futures of talented young people. University officials, schoolteachers, academic and psychological counselors may not have understood the options and problems associated with undocumented status, making “shadowed lives” detrimental to the student isolating them from academic success.

In order to cope with limitations based on their undocumented status many participants developed explanations about their inability to obtain or take place in these “major events.” Developing these explanations served several purposes. First, they stopped further questions that could lead to discovery of their undocumented status, and second, they maintained the value that undocumented students have an acceptable social place of “equal” standing with individuals who ask questions about their future. Marcos discussed his explanations of these circumstances:

“people tell me why don’t you get scholarships or why don’t you get financial aid...the thing I tell them is I don’t want the government to help me, I want to do it myself, I don’t want the government to help me, but I don’t tell them that I don’t do that because I don’t have a social security [number], I can’t do it, so it’s my excuse.”

Marcos presented himself as an activist and stated that people perceive him as a “tree hugger.” With such a persona, stating his reluctance to obtain federal aid, his response would likely direct the individual asking the question to wonder why Marcos disagreed with federal aid rather than thinking about the possibility that he was ineligible to receive financial aid.

While undocumented students may rely upon narrative accounts to explain why resources are not available to them as a coping strategy, the constant threat of disclosing their immigration status may make this practice result in a negative outcome. A need to constantly develop explanations about one’s actions and perhaps one’s existence raises the possibility that undocumented students will feel constant dissonance and marginality. They may also internalize the idea that they will remain second-class citizens because of their status. According to Linda,

“You make your own mental situations of what could happen to you and it kind of like creates this like psychological mindset that you know, like you’re less than everybody else.”

These practices also cause stress since the student must “think on the fly” about how to respond to a potentially dangerous question about their immigration status and how their response will fit with previous explanations they have used. “Reasons” could be read as “lies” in the above paragraphs but there is an important difference between them, lies carry a negative stigma because the truth is valued greatly in our community, however, undocumented immigrants must utilize “reasons” to explain their daily life while masking the sensitive nature of their presence in the country. The difference between the two is the intent. While reasoning why an undocumented student cannot

partake in a societal standard is an act of self-defense, the intent is not to lie but to protect oneself from disclosing sensitive information with the potential for affecting the student and possibly their families as well. This coping strategy may also include avoiding other potentially detrimental topics. For example, Linda states, “you don’t want to tell anybody you don’t have a driver’s license because then they’ll question why you don’t have a driver’s license.”

Stigma and Self-Esteem

Many students who became aware of their undocumented status during high school displayed a reluctance to disclose their immigration status because they feared being stigmatized. Joseph explained that high school students need to fit in with their peers. Thus, the stigmatizing effect of undocumented status is an added burden:

“In high school it’s really difficult for someone to admit they are undocumented just for the whole fact that they want to be, high school is the time to be popular, you don’t want to feel embarrassed, you don’t want people to make fun of you, you don’t want people to call you wetback or whatever.”

The stigmatizing effects of being perceived as different in high school force many students to shelter themselves. For undocumented students the fear of possible deportation by a teacher or peer reporting them to immigration officials affects their daily lives. Perla emphasized this fear by stating:

“as I knew back then, the only way you could get deported was if somebody you knew who knew you were illegal all of a sudden just hated you and they could go and tell the authorities you were undocumented. And from then, of course, you would be deported. So... my mentality back then was be nice to everyone because from one moment to the other they could hate you and there goes your future... Just being happy with everybody, be nice. Don’t make anybody mad

specially the adults or your teachers or whatever so that they wouldn't hate you from one day to...another and deport you or tell the authorities."

A majority of participants described stigma as something undocumented immigrants experienced. According to Emily, "people, you know, like they see us as just the immigrants that come to this country to I don't know, *como estar de arrimados*." When asked about the prevalent stereotypes undocumented immigrants contend with she stated: "that we come to this country to just take jobs away, [that] we're not supposed to be here." *Arrimado* is translated as bringing or drawing nearer without proper sanction. In this context, the meaning as has a colloquial use - meaning to live together. The term holds a dependent connotation where individuals cannot fend for themselves and require the assistance or pity of another person to survive. The concept of immigrants as *arrimados* mirrors Mattingly's (1997) discussion of the ideology of immigrants as dependents. Mattingly states, "the ideologies of "working men" and "dependent" wives continue to inform policies and politics. In particular, immigrant Mexicans [remain] negatively stereotyped as 'dependent'." Participants, inhabiting dual roles as students and workers are similarly perceived as "dependents." The stereotype also creates a context where children of such "dependent" workers are described as "undeserving" and utilizing valuable and limited resources, as undocumented immigrants. "Dependent" and "undeserving" labels stigmatized participants both as students and as undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented students who perceived negative stigma around their undocumented status reported a negative effect on their self-esteem. Emily, specifically,

reported depression due to a disapproving perception about her immigration status and lack of options once she attained a degree.

“I just feel that people are going to look down upon me because I’m undocumented, I don’t have the same rights that they do...I see people and I talk to them and I tell them yeah I’m undocumented and then I like right away when I tell them that I feel like my level went down you know? As long as they don’t know they see me as anyone else but I feel that if they know that I’m undocumented like my self-esteem goes low and is like ok so now you look down upon me because I told you this?”

Emily emphasizes her “level going down” (referring to stratification or inequality) and when asked to elaborate on its meaning she explained it as a metaphor about the lowering of her self-esteem. Emily also demonstrates her need to fit in, to be perceived as an equal rather than as an “*arrimada*.” The negative responses undocumented students perceive, based on their immigration status, also carry the possibility of internalized hatred or stigma as seen in Emily’s fear of differential treatment based on her disclosure.

Unstable Future

Many students attend the university to ensure social mobility and entrance into middle class employment. However, as mentioned earlier, undocumented college students face an unstable future due to their inability to procure employment in their discipline after receiving their degree. This inability was a major concern to participants because of the amount of money, time, and energy they spent at the university. The stress caused by this instability led some participants to question the true value of their education. The more they learned about immigration laws and legislation, the more conscious they became of the limited and stark reality they were going to face in the future.

I asked all participants what they planned to do once they attained their degree. At first, they stated their dream jobs and talked about how their degrees would facilitate their attempts to secure such employment. After explaining their aspirations, all students then addressed their frustration about having little power over their future. Emily exhibited these behaviors and when asked about her plans after graduation she stated,

“[I] hadn’t really thought about it. Once I get my B.A. if I still feel like staying in school I think I’m going to go for my masters,”

then, as if reminding herself of the limitations based on her immigrant status she stated

“then wait for something to happen, hopefully a miracle but if not, at then end, just going to be lost in space.”

The miracle Emily speaks of is a new legislation that will adjust her status and will provide her an opportunity to fulfill her goals. Similarly, Joseph displayed an understanding of his dilemma, when asked about his future plans he stated:

“now that’s a big problem because I won’t be able to use it, well I wouldn’t be able to use it to get the job that I’m working for because I’m undocumented...once I get a degree, if I get a degree before becoming, obtaining legal status, I don’t know what I’m going to be able to do, continue working at the flea market or what not or save the diploma as a memory that I did work for something.”

Emily also demonstrated her frustration over the investment at the university and the possibility of a limited return,

“I don’t think all the work that I would have done here in school to get my degree would be, well, it wouldn’t be worth for me to get a job at a fucking McDonalds or Burger King you know? After working so hard to get a degree and be you know, just be someone.”

Emily's interpretation was similar to findings reported by Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995). Emily desired to become someone or somebody through higher education.

Financial Difficulty

Attending the university is expensive. Many students burden themselves with a number of loans in order to pay all their university related fees. Due to increasing costs in the university, Joseph at one time, transferred to a community college,

“it was right when Arnold [Schwarzenegger] became governor and he started increasing the tuition so I decided to go to [community college]...because I was working at a flea market and the flea market wasn't paying that much so it seemed like a right choice.”

Joseph still works at the flea market, but must also work another job to pay his tuition now that he has transferred back to the university. Joseph is not alone; other participants also faced financial difficulties, albeit in different ways. For example, four of the participants worked in order to attend the university, two had family members who pay for their education, and one received financial assistance from her mother's employer. Jose, who worked at a restaurant, was no stranger to an undocumented immigrant's need for multiple jobs,

“like most people, my mom has always worked two jobs, my dad the same thing...he works everyday and my mom she works cleaning houses during the day and then she works at a retirement home.”

Although the need for students to work while at the university is common, undocumented students face the additional stressor of not being able to supply social security numbers in order to work. Thus, undocumented immigrant students contend

with the stress of an employer asking for documentation knowing they cannot provide it. As a result, they are often relegated to low wage employment with limited possibilities for economic or social mobility. Work in the informal economy comes with the risk of employer abuse and unsafe working conditions. Perry (2004), Sarmiento (2002), and Portes (1995) address such issues. The students interviewed worked in traditional undocumented immigrants employment industries, one worked as a waiter at a restaurant and the other three were employees at small stores.

Employment often interferes with student focus on schoolwork. For example, Jose's weekly work hours varied depending on the season. During the winter, he worked fewer hours. However, during warmer weather he expected his hours to increase. He explained the difficult situation by stating,

“it is hard because like sometimes you know like you have to do certain things for school and stuff but you know that you just have that work and you know like you can't miss it because if you do it just put a big strain...if I miss one day I'm just like, how am I going to do to pay to get to school, to pay for the bus, or to eat, or to pay my tuition or whatever.”

For Jose, the expense of transportation to school, coupled with paying for tuition, books, and food caused him to constantly feel economic strain,

“there's always the whole thing of like I can't get what I want. You know, like, I get my paycheck and it feels good. Oh, I got my paycheck. But, oh, I owe it all so put it aside. So like, there's certain times when you're like 'oh man, need a new pair of shoes or something.' And like, no I can't buy the pair of shoes because all that money I have I owe it, so its like its always hard...That's why its so hard for me to miss a day of work, because I live off of it. And that's what, every week because I work at a restaurant so I live off of my tips. So whatever I get off tips is what I'll spend in the week.”

The labor demands participants experienced affected their ability to attend ICED events, to go out with friends, or just to have a day off. Many students also worked on days they did not attend school. Joseph and Marcos also worked during school days before or after classes.

Deportation Fears

For many undocumented immigrants, fear of deportation is the primary stressor in their daily lives. Knowing the conditions that led to the initial migration with their family members and the difficulty of crossing the border (with the inception of various government operations attempting to “control the border”, technological equipment, and vigilante groups across the border), many immigrants avoid places and actions they believe could potentially lead to deportation. They discipline themselves to avoid areas of potential danger. All participants in this study have lived in the U.S. longer than in their country of origin. Jose, for instance, has spent sixteen of his nineteen years of age in this country. When asked about the effects of deportation, all reported a sense of disconnect between themselves and their place of birth. Accustomed to life as a Mexican in the United States, no participant knew what to expect if he or she was forced to leave. The following excerpts from participants address their perceptions about deportation.

Jose:

“it would just be a complete life change. I mean I’ve never, I haven’t gone back to Mexico since I arrived here. For the same thing, that, that fear of having to get back, going through the whole, going to the border and everything and getting caught and stuff like that. So I just, since I’ve been here I’ve never gone back to Mexico so I don’t know what it’s like over there at all. So it would just be a complete life change, I just can’t really imagine what kind of life I would have over there.”

Emily:

“just the fact of being deported, I don’t like the idea. I don’t know it scares me. just, you know, that they would take me back to Mexico. And it would be really hard for me to actually come back. Obviously I don’t know. It’s scary because I don’t know how it would be to actually go back to Mexico and start all over again. And, you know, because everything that I have done so far you know, it has been building up. And if I get sent back, you know what am I going to do in Mexico?... It’s just, I’m so used to the life here that I grew up here... Well, I was twelve years old when I came to this country and so everything that I’ve lived and everything has been based on my experience here. So just to go back I think I would be lost.”

Linda:

“in recent times...with...now that I know more like about laws and that I’m involved with ICED and different organizations, and stuff, that I seek out more information too, I guess, kind of like, the possibility of being deported becomes more real”

Joseph:

“to me it would be starting over because my whole life well most of my life has been up here. I would have to start over because I mean I have family over there but most of them they already have their own families or have their own lives. And you know I don’t think they would want to bother by taking care of me or my brother or whoever.”

Regardless of an absence of familiarity or memories of a “homeland”, the uncertainty of what they would find in a land they left as young children proved a source of constant stress for all participants. The students expressed ambiguity when referring to themselves as being: “*ni de aqui, ni de alla*,” from neither here nor there. They expressed incongruence in their identities with respect to national origin. Emily states:

“I always tell people you know right now I’m at a stage and I’m sure I’m going to be in this stage for like a couple more years hopefully not too many but I’m in a stage where like I’m not from here and I’m not from Mexico anymore. Either you know because I can’t just go back over there because people are going to be like

what are you going to do here? You know like you have nothing to do here. You're not from over here, You're from over there you know? And when I'm here I feel that sometimes I feel that I'm not from here either because I'm not! you know? I don't know just a really not comfortable feeling you know? Like I don't know where I'm supposed to be I don't know who I am I just I don't know. I see a Mexican because I was born in Mexico but I don't really and I cannot say I'm Mexican American because I'm not a resident or citizen so I don't know I guess there's no term to describe me"

Emily exhibits what Hall (2002) describes as a diasporic subjectivity where individuals

"bear the marks of the particular cultures, languages, histories, and traditions which 'formed' them; but they do not occupy these as if they were pure, untouched by other influences, or provide a source of fixed identities to which they could ever return" (pg. 427).

Emily has links to Mexican culture and the acculturation of a Mexicana in the United States but faces the stress of "transitional" status where she is in between cultures rather than feeling a part of both or either.

The fear of deportation proved a deterrent to students engaging in many activities that most people take for granted. If an undocumented worker is cheated at work, the likelihood of seeking legal recourse is low due to a fear of disclosure of their status. Dozier (1993) finds that the same fear could cause undocumented students not to seek assistance within the university setting due to a belief they are not entitled. This includes academic counseling, health services, and psychological counseling service, all of which the students pay for with their university fees. This fear can also make undocumented students extraordinarily cautious about whom they can trust with their most of their grievances and disclosure about their documentation status. This reality has the potential of making the university experience lonely and unfulfilling for these students. They must contend with an absence of people who understand their situation. They often feel like

they are the only person going through such a reality on the campus—a sense of marginalization as well as isolation.

Conclusion

As this project was completed, numerous stories of potential and current undocumented college students were covered by mass media. One such story is that of Dan-el Padilla Peralta, an undocumented immigrant from the Dominican Republic and a graduate of Princeton. Princeton, a privately funded university was able to provide Padilla a full scholarship for his undergraduate training. He graduated at the top of his class and was offered a scholarship to pursue graduate school at Oxford to study Philosophy. Padilla finds himself in a difficult place. On the one hand he is being handed the opportunity any student would covet-a full scholarship to a world prestigious university. Yet, to accept this path requires that he must leave the United States where he is undocumented and will not have the possibility of returning to share in the important life events of his siblings and his mother. Declining the scholarship and remaining in the United States would mean not using the degree for which he worked so diligently. Moreover, departure from the United States carries an immediate ten-year ban from the country and estrangement from his family. The narrators of this project are in a similar bind.

This study analyzed the ways undocumented students persisted through higher education. This chapter makes recommendations about how to improve the educational experiences of undocumented college students. The conclusions are derived from accounts told by the participants during their interviews. I provide implications for further research, and ways in which to expand the scope of this work. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this project.

My aim throughout this project was to understand how undocumented college students persist in the university. Research on the experience of Latina/o college students details the effects of a hostile university climate and limited sources of institutional support. The combination of these factors with stressors related to undocumented status creates the possibility of a hopeless experience. At first, I thought my goal, like that of many researchers in higher education, was to ensure the matriculation of students through academia. However, upon further review it became imperative to find a way to ensure that these bright minds would be able to use their skills in their discipline, not just for their benefit, but also for society in general. To deny undocumented students entry into positions where they use their training is to waste a significant amount of talent. It is not enough to provide students access to the university. Universities must also provide sufficient institutional support to ensure their persistence. Likewise, it is not enough to ensure the matriculation of undocumented students without providing the possibility of using their degrees.

All students interviewed experienced hopeless moments and periods where the limitations placed on them in higher education and after their graduation caused a great deal of stress, and at times depression. Yet, students also displayed an array of persistent behaviors by utilizing the resources available to them.

All participants demonstrated a level of interdependence with their families, where families supplied support in every possible manner and students reciprocated through their work at the university and providing their parents a sense of pride about their accomplishments. Participants with younger siblings perceived themselves as role

models and became guides to their siblings by attending college. In the absence of parents' physical presence, mainly because of geographical distance, extended family members looked after students. For example, Linda had constant contact with *tios* and *tias*, *primos* and *primas*, creating familial ties to help each other.

ICEd, the student organization also proved helpful. The group provided a space for students to gather and share common concerns, interests, and goals. Members created close relationships out of their constant contact and a deeper understanding of each other. They were close-knit and comfortable with each other, often speaking of sensitive topics including romantic relationships, current immigration news, and even more mundane topics such as what to eat that night. Moreover, ICD provided these students with a tool with which to both learn and master bureaucratic challenges as they engaged in activities that helped them gain a sense of control over their feelings of powerlessness.

I have attempted to bring together relevant literature with my observations and the experiences described by the participants. The following section provides what participants expressed as necessary factors to help undocumented college students. In an effort to be faithful to the participants' voices, I limit my own voice and attempt to weave together their discussion. I understand that my own biases can affect the discussion since I choose what portions of the interviews to include and where to place them.

After speaking about his plans for the future, Marcos believed supporting the DREAM Act as the primary action to take in order to help undocumented college students. Marcos stated

“first of all pass the DREAM Act because I think that’s the only, the only thing that will help out undocumented students...so they could get financial aid or get a job so I think the DREAM Act is I think is the only way the only thing that’s going to help the undocumented students.”

The DREAM Act in its current form provides the opportunity to legalize the status of undocumented immigrants in higher education and the military for students *who attended American high schools*. While attending ICED meetings, the DREAM Act was often referenced and members planned many activities including the aforementioned “dream-in” to encourage politician, citizen, and community support. The DREAM Act provided hope to members who believed each year it may finally pass and stability of their future resolved. Although Jose did not directly reference the DREAM Act, he specified similar facets of the act for individuals without full documentation and stated,

“just give [us] the opportunity to like [a] license and the ability to work, because if we can’t get financial aid, you might as well give us a chance to work and be able to pay for it.”

Most participants believed that financial assistance is important to undocumented college students. AB540 provided the opportunity to pay the tuition fees of residents but even resident fees are expensive. It is important to recognize that without a social security number students cannot receive any type of financial assistance including financial aid, bank loans, and the vast majority of scholarships. Well aware of economic obstacles, Perla, Sophia, and Emily advocated for the availability of financial aid.

Joseph had different ideas; he did not mention financial aid, but instead advised interdependence between undocumented students where they are able to develop their own resources, which they share, and all members benefit. He stated:

“start[ing] a peer group, get[ting] a hold of other undocumented students, [to] help themselves make an organization, make fundraisers, they could probably fund their own scholarships. There isn’t that many things they could do except help each other find resources, find professors that could help them, maybe other students who have gone through the same thing. Just basically they have to help themselves because that’s the thing when somebody is undocumented, it’s really hard to find help so they kind of have to help themselves.”

Joseph understood that such endeavors are not easy and networks take time to develop, severely hindering students near the end of their degree. According to Joseph,

“it’s hard, because in the organization I belong to, it has been hard to find other people outside ourselves, like the closest organization that helps AB540s is...also a student-run organization so it’s pretty hard outside the community.”

Given this reality, it is truly a wonder how undocumented students persist through the university and actively attempt to educate the community inside and outside the university.

Disseminating information to the community and undocumented high school students was also a concern for ICED students. Three of the participants experienced difficulty and depression while they were in high school, believing they were ineligible for higher education. High school teachers, counselors, and staff members knew little about opportunities for undocumented students in higher education and it took participants a long time to find individuals with the necessary information. According to Jose, information regarding AB540 would benefit undocumented students. He advised,

“just making them...aware...there is a way to do it ...getting the word out that AB540 exist[s]... there is a way for undocumented students to get ahead.”

Joseph voiced his frustration at the limited and incorrect information available to

undocumented students regarding their ability to attend a university and stated, “most of them, they don’t know because their high schools, they don’t let their students know.”

To this end Sophia advises creating educational programs concerning the dissemination of information regarding educational opportunities for undocumented students. She stated

“fund a lot of programs that can even like you know teach students that are let’s say in high school. Like I guess teach them about their opportunities, give them a little bit of hope and motivate them.”

According to Emily it is important to educate the community about the undocumented student experience in order to garner its support and stated,

“well if the community doesn’t know about it, they can’t do anything about our situation and everything. Their role should be, I don’t know, not only educating other people. Because that would be the main thing because you cannot make a change. Well someone cannot give you their support if they don’t know about it...I’m sure there’s a lot of people out there that are willing to help but they just don’t know what we are going through you know?”

This study is limited in various forms. It is a pilot study in a single university with a small number of participants. Limitations notwithstanding, this is a timely project with the potential to reflect the experiences of a significant group of every high school cohort of the future. With the dismal rates of minority high school graduation, and their ineligibility for higher education, students such as these may in fact hold a significant role in the economic future of the United States. Another factor to consider is a return to a population in higher education that is highly segregated in terms of race and ethnicity. After the inception of proposition 209 in the state of California, the number of minority university students decreased significantly. If contemporary people in the United States suffer from a lack of motivation, apathy, and an inability to be innovative, then it is especially critical that public policy examine and create opportunities that recognize the

ingenuity of the undocumented students who for all intent and purposes are marginal within higher education. Now is a prime time to address the dreams and possibilities for undocumented students. The success of students such as these benefits them not only as individuals, but also greatly benefits the United States as a whole.

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Demographics

Thank you for filling out this survey that examines your thoughts about your educational experiences. Do not spend a lot of time on each question –respond with your first reaction. Please circle the most appropriate answer to each question and answer all the questions. ****Do not write your name on this page!****

Gender:

- ☐ Male
☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed
☐ Female
☐ Separated

Age: _____

GPA: _____

Marital Status:

- ☐ Single ☐
☐ Married ☐

Class Standing:

- ☐ Freshman
☐ Sophomore
☐ Junior
☐ Senior
☐ Graduate student
☐ Professional student

Where do you live?

- ☐ on-campus housing
☐ off-campus housing with friends
☐ off-campus housing with family
☐ other _____

Are you a transfer student?

If yes, from where? _____

If yes, how long ago did you transfer? _____

What degree are you currently working toward?

- ☐ Bachelor of Arts or Science
☐ Master of Arts, Master of Science
☐ MBA
☐ J.D. (Law)
☐ M.D. (Medicine)
☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D.
☐ Other: _____

What is the highest academic degree you expect to earn?

- ☐ Bachelor of Arts or Science
☐ Master of Arts, Master of Science
☐ MBA
☐ J.D. (Law)
☐ M.D. (Medicine)
☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D.
☐ Other: _____

Which department are you affiliated?

- ☐ Applied Sciences and Arts
☐ Art and Design

☐ Business
☐ Education
☐ Engineering
☐ Humanities and the Arts
☐ International and Extended Studies
☐ Journalism and Mass Communications
☐ Library and Information Science
☐ Music and Dance
☐ Science
☐ Social Sciences
☐ Social Work

☐ Undeclared

What is your race / ethnicity? (check one)

☐ Central-American	☐ African American
☐ Cuban-American	☐ Asian American or Pacific Islander
☐ Mexican-American/Chicano	☐ Caucasian
☐ Puerto Rican-American	☐ Native American
☐ South-American	☐ Multiracial _____
☐ Other _____	

How do you finance you education? (check all that apply)

☐ Work part-time	☐ Family
☐ Work full-time	☐ Student loans
☐ Personal savings	☐ Scholarship

Have you been continuously enrolled since you began the degree you are currently working toward? _____

If no, how many semesters did you stop out of school? _____ semesters

What is your mother's highest completed level of education?

☐ No formal education	☐ BA/BS
☐ Elementary (1-5)	☐ MA/MS/MBA
☐ Middle school	☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D.
☐ Some high school	☐ Professional (M.D. or J.D.)
☐ High School (9-12)	☐ Other: _____
☐ Some college (no degree)	

DO you have any siblings? Yes No

If yes, have they completed a college degree? _____

If no, are they currently enrolled in college? _____

What is your family income?

- ☐ Less than \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000-\$19,000
- ☐ \$20,000-\$29,000
- ☐ \$30,000-\$39,000
- ☐ \$40,000-\$49,000
- ☐ \$50,000-\$59,000
- ☐ \$60,000-\$69,000
- ☐ 70,000 & Above

I value the degree that I am currently working toward

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree

How long have you been in the US? _____ Where were you born? _____

What was your age at the time of migration? _____

Have you applied for a scholarship?

Yes _____ No _____

if yes how many? _____

What is your father's highest completed level of education?

☐ No formal education	☐ BA/BS
☐ Elementary (1-5)	☐ MA/MS/MBA
☐ Middle School	☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D.
☐ Some High School	☐ Professional (M.D. or J.D.)
☐ High School (9-12)	☐ Other: _____
☐ Some College (no degree)	

Have any of your siblings attended college? ____

If yes, have they given you advice about education? _____

Question Guide

1. How does your immigrant status affect you and your family in your community?
2. Describe your experiences as an undocumented student.
3. All students worry about financing their education, what particular obstacles have you as an undocumented student faced?
4. What do you plan to do once you obtain your degree?
5. How has AB540 helped advance your educational goals and what else could be done to help undocumented students?

Interview Consent Form

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible Investigator(s): Francisco Villegas

Title of Protocol: Undocumented Students at the University

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating undocumented students in the university.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. I would like to schedule a time with you to answer a set of questions pertaining to your school experiences and about yourself. I would like to interview you using a tape recorder so that I can accurately record your answers to my questions and any additional information you wish to share with me. I will begin the session by informing you that recording will begin. The session will take approximately an hour to an hour and a half to complete. Interviews will take place at your availability at a location that is comfortable to you. Your answers will be confidential; **only** the researcher team and researcher's assistant will have access to your information.

Please be aware that you can choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time for any reason. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose to "not participate" in the study. Your consent is voluntary, you may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of it. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or with any other participating institutions or agencies.

I will use your name in my paper, unless you do not wish me to use your name. In the event you do not wish for me to use your name, please indicate a pseudonym by which I can refer to you. One of the objectives of this project is to record your opinions about this topic because there is very little documentation about contributions and accomplishments related to immigrant students. If you give me permission, I will deposit your taped interview and typed transcription at a local archive (such as Mexican American Studies Library Collection) for future use by other scholars. Please indicate if you grant me this permission. ☐ Yes ☐ No

You should address any questions about this research to Francisco Villegas at 707-315 4446 and present any complaints to Prof. Julia Curry Rodriguez, thesis adviser, Mexican-American Studies, 408-924-5310. Questions about research subjects' rights or research-related injury maybe presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations, at (408) 924-2480.

At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the interviewer.

The signature of a participant on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study. The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

Participant's Signature Date

Investigator's Signature Date