The Experiences of Undocumented Students in College: Dreams and Aspirations in Their Own Words

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The Experiences of Undocumented Students in College:
Dreams, Aspirations in Their Own Words
A Dissertation Presented
by
Marcelo Andres Juica Varela

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Educational Leadership Specialization
The Experiences of Undocumented Students in College:

Dreams, Aspirations in Their Own Words

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In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of seven undocumented immigrant college students living in Massachusetts as they negotiated the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and institutional challenges of their college experience. Three research questions guided this study: (1) What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience? (2) What were the various ways undocumented college students reported institutional and economic factors that affected their college experiences? (3) How did the students develop resilience to overcome social and systemic setbacks while pursuing higher education? A narrative methodology was used, and the participants were selected using a snowball sampling approach. Each participant was interviewed twice, with a protocol to protect their status and identity. Data was coded and analyzed in themes using MAXQDA. Findings in this study revealed that study participants experienced limited opportunities as new immigrants contributing to feelings of dislocation and isolation. Other findings indicated that participants experienced feelings of cultural and financial responsibilities towards family in the U.S. and their home countries, as well as stigmatization, marginalization, and feelings of fear, shame, and discrimination because of their immigrant status. They reported that they experienced unique institutional, social, financial barriers/obstacles in furthering their post-secondary education, which impacted their remarkable resilience. All participants reported having found someone they trusted as a “mentor”. Recommendations included college and high school staff training, institutional scholarships, career development, and advocacy initiatives to change current unfair and inhumane policies toward immigrant students and their families. Despite all of the challenges faced, these immigrant college students graduated from college.

Keywords: immigrant, college, undocumented, TPS, DACA, dreams, aspirations, Massachusetts
DEDICATION

I dedicate this research and this study to all the undocumented college immigrants out there that who are trying to change their lives through education and fighting the systemic oppression that keeps them from dream careers and opportunities in America. I want to especially dedicate this to Mardochee, Rose, Davidson, Celly, Jay, Pablo, and Amanda, who were brave enough to participate in this study and to share their most personal experiences about being both an immigrant and a college student.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my family who supported me for many years with wonderful family gatherings, warm meals, laughter, and joy when I was feeling down. I really could not do anything in my life without my family (including Chongo).

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the person who inspires me every day with stories, laughter, and love. I could not have done this without Nilda Isidora Varela Araya, my mother, who taught me to love to read, write, and tell stories and that storytelling is a wonderful approach to teach and learn. I used her inspiration in this dissertation. Gracias mami por tu amor, tu paciencia y tus tejidos de bufandas que me mantuvieron calientito durante los largos inviernos mientras escribía. I would like to dedicate this to my father, who took a chance in life by bringing us to the United States to have better opportunities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this research study could not have been done without the support of the incredible faculty and staff at Lesley University. I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Stephen Gould, Dr. Paul Naso and Dr. John Ciesluk—my professors in the Educational Leadership Specialization of the Ph.D. Educational Studies, and to Dr. Cynthia Bazinet—thank you all for your support and guidance in getting me to the finish line.

The dissertation process was one of discovery for me, as I truly grew to appreciate the depth of my passion for this work through the writing. I would like to thank Dr. Maria de Lourdes Serpa, Dr. Branca Telles Ribeiro, and Dr. Haner Hernandez for taking this (long) journey with me. I am eternally grateful to Dr. Serpa, who encouraged me to strive for excellence in my academic life and to use my immigrant voice as a Latino leader in my community; to Dr. Ribeiro, who taught me to honor the qualitative process; and to Dr. Hernandez, who taught me a most valuable lesson: to remember that I am an immigrant with valuable knowledge and experience.

I would also like to acknowledge the friends and family who supported me. Thank you Dr. Ryan Robichaud-Fuentes, Dr. Dolores Calaf, Dr. Christina Farese, and a very special thank you to Brian Pellinen, who helped develop my dream of starting a college campus for immigrant students. Many thanks, as well, to the students in this study for their precious contributions.

Lastly, I would like to thank my dearest friend, Sendy Vaughn-Suazo, for the support and encouragement that helped me get to the finish line. *Nuestro amor por nuestra gente es lo más importante. Gracias por estar en mi vida.*
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... iii  
DEDICATION .................................................................................................................. iv  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................. v  
TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................... vi  
LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................... viii  
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................ vi  
  Personal Background ................................................................................................. 1  
  Statement of the Problem .......................................................................................... 3  
  Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................. 6  
  Guiding Research Questions ...................................................................................... 7  
  Definition of Terms .................................................................................................... 7  
  Significance of the study ............................................................................................ 8  
  Limitations and Delimitations of the Study .............................................................. 8  
  Review of Literature .................................................................................................. 9  
  Method ....................................................................................................................... 10  
  Chapter Outline ........................................................................................................ 10  
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 11  
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ............................................................. 13  
  Historical Context ..................................................................................................... 14  
  Policies That Affect Current Undocumented College Students ............................. 30  
  Obstacles Affecting Undocumented College Students ........................................... 37  
  Support Systems for Undocumented Students ....................................................... 43  
  Understanding Undocumented Students’ Experiences and Needs ........................ 45  
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 46  
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD ..................................................................................... 47  
  Rationale for Method Selection ............................................................................... 47  
  Participants and Setting ............................................................................................. 48  
  Data Collection ......................................................................................................... 51  
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................ 55  
  Issues of Trustworthiness ......................................................................................... 57  
  Delimitations and Limitations ................................................................................. 57  
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 58  
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS ....................................................................................... 60  
  Narrative Analysis ..................................................................................................... 60  
  Participant Data ......................................................................................................... 62  
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................ 67  
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 107  
CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS ........................................................................................................ 109  
  Study Summary ....................................................................................................... 109
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 U.S. Historic Timeline Overview of Major Immigration Laws Since 1790........ 16
Table 2 Trump Administration Immigration Rulings Affecting College Students .......... 31
Table 3 Proposed DREAM Act States and In-State Tuition Programs ....................... 35
Table 4 DREAM Act State Legislation & Support for Undocumented Students .......... 36
Table 5 Community Cultural Wealth Framework (Yosso, 2006)................................. 45
Table 6 Demographic Characteristics of Participants.................................................. 51
Table 7 Demographic Characteristics and Immigration Status ................................. 63
Table 8 Participants’ Educational Characteristics ...................................................... 63
Table 9 Overview of Interview Codes for Guiding Research Question #1 .................... 78
Table 10 Immigration Application Costs 2007-2020.................................................. 88
Table 11 Overview of Interview Codes for Guiding Research Question #2 ................. 97
Table 12 Overview of Interview Codes for Guiding Research Question #3 ............... 106
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Personal Background

For the past 27 years, I have devoted my life to helping immigrant students find pathways to success in school and in college. I struggled to understand the inequities that immigrant families face, especially the undocumented individual who wanted to go to college in the United States. My profound interest in this topic came from my personal experience of once having been an undocumented college student myself. Surviving, persevering, and navigating the college system as an undocumented college student was extremely difficult. Especially challenging was finding the resources to help me succeed. I came to the United States in 1985 during a time when many immigrants were deciding to leave their home countries because of extreme political and economic unrest. During the political unrest of the late 1970s in Chile, we relocated to Venezuela where my father could work in the mining and cement industry. My childhood as an immigrant child in Venezuela has provided me many beautiful memories, but ultimately we had to leave because of the political changes that would impact our family as immigrants. Eventually, we embarked on a new journey north to find new opportunities and to explore our dreams of someday being able to live in the land of the free—the United States.

I remember how fervently I awaited learning a new language, making new friends, and participating in all the experiences I had only seen on television. Boston became my home, and I have been here for 34 years. During eight of those years, however, I was undocumented.

My years in the Boston Public Schools allowed me to learn the English language and to take advantage of opportunities that prepared me for college. As a freshman in high school, I realized that our legal situation would not be resolved and that our undocumented status would determine what sort of college I could access and what kind of experience I would have. So, I did
what many young and bright undocumented high school students do in this situation: I studied harder and excelled academically. Many of my peers had big dreams about both the colleges they hoped to attend and the programs they intended to pursue, all of which were attainable for them. I, however, worked on weekends washing pots and pans, earning less than $6 per hour in the only job available to me.

Somehow along the way, I found strategic ways to navigate the road toward college life. While in high school, for example, I entered a fellowship program in Journalism at Northeastern University as part of my senior year study. Although I had no interest in journalism or in becoming a reporter, I was selected to attend this dual-enrollment program, which could give me college credits. So I spent my senior year of high school in college. I thought that I could take this scholarship, enroll, stay under the radar, and use the college credits later on when I transferred to an affordable school that would not ask too many questions and allow me to use my savings and any private scholarships that I had secured. Socially, I made few friends there, as I was afraid that someone would discover my undocumented identity.

The program ended, and I graduated from high school. I was accepted into every private college I applied to and some awarded me full scholarships. I fell in love with the idea of being a college student in America. Unfortunately, however, because of my status, I could not accept any of the full-tuition scholarships I was offered, so I fell back on a plan I felt I could afford: I went to a large state college so I could get lost in the crowd, thus avoiding scrutiny of my status.

Eventually, however, after a few semesters of living on campus, I was forced to withdraw; the expenses were too great. By this time, I was 19 and had left home. My mother had received her deportation notice in the mail, and my father had gone elsewhere, as my parents
separated due to the stress my father experienced at having to work as a pizza man rather than the electrical engineer he had been in Chile and Venezuela.

Eventually, my status changed, and I was able to use financial aid to cover the expenses of a full-time course load. I graduated and received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Massachusetts focusing on Human Services. I found my passion within the immigrant community as a leader-advocate in several Latino youth programs and organizations, helping individuals to go to college, to find jobs, and to find pathways as immigrants in America. With a Master of Education degree from Boston University, I began teaching in public schools and eventually became both an administrator in the Boston Public Schools and an adjunct faculty member at the University of Massachusetts at Boston working with adult learners. For the last twelve years, I have worked as an Associate Dean at Urban College of Boston and am currently the founder and director of Endicott College in Boston, a campus community for adult-learners, immigrant students, and single parents. Starting with a small group of students, we have built a vibrant learning community where students are receiving their college degrees and obtaining their dream jobs after graduation.

**Statement of the Problem**

Undocumented high school graduates experience unique stresses and difficulties in navigating college admission, enrollment, and tuition (Gonzalez, 2009). These students do not qualify for federal aid, which determines eligibility for other types of financial aid. In addition, undocumented college students are unlikely to apply to colleges or scholarship programs that require them to disclose their status, fearing the risk of legal ramifications (Del Razo, 2012). Furthermore, American colleges and universities have not yet prioritized their institutional goals for the financial issues undocumented college students face. Recent federal
legislation for undocumented college students has opened a discussion on how to support these students in college through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. The DREAM Act of 1996 and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival, or DACA, of 2012 could create new opportunities for undocumented college students to be successful in college. Should Congress pass immigration reform legislation supporting DACA and the DREAM Act, pathways would be created for undocumented individuals to matriculate in college and pay in-state tuition rates (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016). To address this problem, however, a thorough understanding of the experiences and needs of undocumented college students is needed.

Every year, about 65,000 undocumented immigrant students graduate from public high schools across the United States (Gonzalez, 2009). In the United States, the term “undocumented” technically denotes immigrants who lack legal status of any kind. As well, persons living in the United States with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or who are subject to DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) are legally resident; however, both TPS and DACA represent fragile protections, given the current political climate. For the sake of simplicity, therefore, the term “undocumented” will be used in a more general sense to represent immigrants who lack permanent residency (or “green card”) status.

Undocumented students are likely to have been raised in an American schooling environment from an early age, and many of them are children of families who live in the country without legal status. Since 1981, U.S. law protects undocumented children from discrimination in accessing public PK-12 education based on their legal status in the United States (Olivas, 2012). Typically, undocumented immigrants who graduate from public high
schools are well prepared for the college experience, and many of these students excel in academics and extracurricular activities (Gonzalez, 2009).

It is not uncommon for many of these students to be unaware of their immigration or residency status, with some believing that they are Americans, just like their peers in school. In the documentary *The Dream is Now* (Guggenheim, 2013), undocumented college students are presented with harsh realities, such as the difficulties of covering the cost of tuition as someone who is not allowed to work legally in the country (Del Razo, 2009). Many of the high-achieving students in the documentary had been offered scholarship opportunities to continue their education; however, most could not take advantage of these opportunities because of their unsettled legal status. “Dreamers” is the term used for students who would benefit from the passage of DREAM Act legislation, which would allow undocumented college students to receive federal financial aid and pay in-state tuition in colleges across the United States. This legislation, first proposed in 2001, has not been passed in Congress.

Undocumented students experience significant obstacles in accessing a college education. Although no laws prevent undocumented college students from applying to college, private or public, enrollment hurdles exist nonetheless (Gonzalez, 2009). Students must demonstrate some level of local residency status to qualify for “in-state” or local tuition rates, and they must provide a Social Security number when registering for a course. In some cases, undocumented students can register with the Internal Revenue Service to receive an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). Per federal guidelines, colleges and universities collect Social Security numbers or ITINs to report the tuition that a student has paid, so the student can use an IRS 1099-T form to claim an educational expenses tax credit and report educational financial aid.
received (Nguyen, 2013). The ITIN, however, does not allow holders to receive or qualify for financial aid.

Given the risks associated with exposing their immigration status to the IRS as well as the improbability of filing a federal tax return, undocumented students are unlikely to apply for the ITIN. Undocumented students often prefer to pay for their tuition from savings or to seek private scholarships that do not require documentation of citizenship (Del Razo, 2012). A few private institutions have created scholarship programs for those who do not qualify for federal grants or loan programs (Fairfield University, 2013; Gonzalez, 2009). According to a report by the Ford Foundation (Fairfield University, 2013), many Jesuit schools have begun to develop institutional aid for undocumented students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to study the educational experiences of seven undocumented college students in Massachusetts and their navigation of college systems in the U.S. in finding the support they needed to finish their bachelor's degrees. Prior research has indicated that undocumented students need multiple sets of support to be successful (Del Razo, 2012; Gonzalez, 2009; Perez, 2012). To survive and persevere through a college education in the United States, undocumented college students need academic, social-emotional, financial, career, and employment support. This study explored how undocumented students navigated a college system to find support and success as well as what they recommended to improve the current reality (Perez, 2012, Del Razo, 2012). There is a gap in the literature regarding the type of support that is needed for students with DACA, TPS, and ND status.
Guiding Research Questions

The following three questions informed the research for this study:

GRQ #1: What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience?

GRQ #2: What are the various ways undocumented college students report institutional and economic factors that affect undocumented immigrant students’ college experiences?

GRQ #3: What factors did undocumented immigrant students report that contributed to their development of resilience in overcoming social and systemic setbacks in pursuing higher education?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study and defined as follows:

Dreamers

Undocumented students affected by DREAM Act and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation.

Undocumented College Students

Students who have illegal or fragile immigration status in the United States, including those who have a temporary status like Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA), and No Documentation (ND).

Family

Parents or other relatives who assume the roles of guardians; usually such family member(s) can assume financial responsibility for the young person(s).
**Significance of the study**

This research provided insight into the challenges and successes that undocumented students experienced when applying to and entering college in the United States. It considered socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural factors that contributed to their decision to attend college and identified support systems they needed in college to be successful, which may be relevant for those guiding undocumented adolescents in their goals for future education. This research provided detailed information that can serve as a foundation for recommendations to institutions that seek to improve the quality of services provided to undocumented college students.

As well, the findings of this study may provide support to other students in their college journey and help to empower those in similar circumstances in persevering while facing institutional obstacles and challenges. Moreover, this dissertation research may help faculty, college advisors, and other administrators to more fully understand the experiences of undocumented students so that they can be more supportive of them. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing conversation to policymakers that seeks to find answers in how to be more culturally and socially sensitive to the issues and needs of undocumented students.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Participation in this study initially was limited to nine students enrolled in colleges in the metropolitan Boston area. Outreach to local immigrant advocacy groups who support the DREAM Act, DACA, and legislation to allow in-state tuition for undocumented college students was conducted. Participants in this study were neither limited nor determined by ethnicity, race, gender, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation. Sole criteria were that participants be undocumented (including DACA and TPS status), enrolled or matriculated in an undergraduate
college program, and willing to participate in a research study about their experiences as college students navigating college support systems.

Because the nature of this study was to understand the perspectives of the students selected, it was essential to find participants who would confide their status and their experiences in an academic setting. Making a public appeal for undocumented participants was deemed too risky for students; therefore, snowball sampling was conducted using community outreach to meet potential participants randomly at local events and by asking college counselors or individuals working in the community to refer students who might have interest in the study without disclosing their immigration status. A qualitative methodology was adopted to facilitate trust between researcher and participant, allowing confidential material to emerge heuristically.

**Review of Literature**

The literature for this study was selected to explore and understand the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical obstacles that many undocumented students face in attending college in the United States. The studies and reports selected focused on all of the undocumented college populations in the U.S., including DACA, TPS, as well as those with no documentation and explored the historical context of immigrants in America, the policies and obstacles that affect undocumented students, and the support that is needed for their success. The literature provided a perspective on changing legislation and immigration policies that impact undocumented students in the United States. The literature also provided a framework to understand the history, policies, and obstacles that students faced while in college. There are very few studies about the experiences of undocumented college students in all three status categories: DACA, TPS, and ND. The literature was organized by four areas: historical context, policies, obstacles, and successful models in higher education.
Method

To understand the experiences and personal perspectives of the undocumented student in college, several suitable research methods were available. A narrative interview research approach (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) was ultimately selected because it allowed for intensive focus on the voices of the students and their stories or accounts. In qualitative story-telling, two forms of interviews were appropriate for this study: testimonios and interviews. The testimonios methodology is often used in Latinx studies and is grounded in LatCrit (Latinx critical race theory) in which the participants are not all Latinx students and represent other countries and cultural backgrounds. Because the study was too sensitive for students to have multiple recorded meetings and observation notes were deemed too risky, an interview methodology was appropriate as it allowed for keeping the interviews to two sessions per student and the questions consistent. The study design required extreme caution to ensure that students were safe at all times and that their identities and status were protected. An application to the Institutional Research Board was completed and approved. Proper informed consent was secured for each participant and, to ensure anonymity, students selected their pseudonyms for the interviews. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through a coding system using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is organized into five chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Review of Literature, (3) Method, (4) Results, and (5) Summary, Discussion, Future Research, and Final Reflections. Chapter content is summarized as follows:

Chapter One provides an introduction to the study subject as well as a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the questions that guided the research, and a glossary of terms
used. Also included in Chapter One is an overview of the significance of the study, the description of the limitations and delimitations of the study, a brief review of the literature used to inform the study, a description of the method, and an outline of the chapters in this dissertation.

Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature on sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical obstacles that undocumented college students encountered in the college admission and enrollment processes. The literature review synthesizes significant findings and peer-reviewed reports that highlight the need to examine support systems for undocumented college students further.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the method selected for this study as well as the tools used to collect qualitative data from the undocumented college students who participated. It explains the research design, setting of the study, participant selection, protocols used to collect data, and coding procedures used to organize the data for analysis.

Chapter Four presents the results of the study. Included is an overview of the data collection as well as an analysis of the data. This chapter also presents the findings of the study organized by each research question.

Chapter Five offers a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, recommendations for action, and future research, and concludes with a final reflection.

**Summary**

This chapter introduced the researcher’s interest in the topic, the purpose of the study, and an overview of the problem the study is designed to explore. It also established the three questions used to guide the research and offered clarity on terms used that might be ambiguous. The limitations and delimitations affecting this study were acknowledged and an introduction to
the literature used to further the researcher’s understanding of the issues was provided. The chapter ended with a synopsis of the organization of the dissertation.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to undocumented college students in the United States to be used as a theoretical foundation for investigating the educational experiences of seven Massachusetts undocumented college students and how they navigated U.S. college systems to find the support that enabled them to finish their degrees. The literature review is organized into four major areas and includes a chapter summary: (a) historical context, (b) obstacles faced by undocumented students, (c) policies that affect undocumented students, and (d) support for undocumented students.

The selection of literature was guided by the study’s three research questions:

GRQ #1: What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience?

GRQ #2: What are the various ways undocumented college students report institutional and economic factors that affect undocumented immigrant students’ college experiences?

GRQ #3: What factors did undocumented immigrant students report that contributed to their development of resilience in overcoming social and systemic setbacks in pursuing higher education?

The following keywords were identified as relevant: Undocumented Student, Higher Education, Policy, and Support. Databases used included ProQuest (Dissertation and Thesis), Dissertation-Scholarship at Lesley University (S@L), ERIC EBSCO, and Google Scholar.

The following parameters were used:

- Timeframe: research articles, dissertations, and policy reports published or released within the last ten years (2009-2019).
• Population: research articles, dissertations, and policy reports about undocumented immigrant college students (including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protective Status (TPS), and students without legal documentation

• Relevance: books, dissertations, policy reports, journal articles about undocumented college students were reviewed.

An online search produced 15 relevant studies. From those, eight were selected for this review. Ten policy reports were reviewed, five of which were selected for this chapter. Several books have been published about work with undocumented students. Relevant U.S. immigration policies affecting undocumented individuals were also discussed.

**Historical Context**

**European Immigrations**

President Barack Obama, in a speech announcing the expansion of immigration reform, quoted President John F. Kennedy, who said in 1960, “Other than the native Americans (….) we are a country of immigrants.” Historically, the United States has always been a nation of immigrants. When the first White Europeans arrived and settled in North America at the turn of the 17th century, they found that this land was already inhabited by large numbers of native peoples (Horn, 2000). In the ensuing years, hundreds of thousands of people from such countries as England, France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands also immigrated to the American continent (Horn, 2000), colonizing Eastern North America as well as Alaska, California, and what is now the southern United States (Cooke & Klein, 1998). The earliest European immigrants settled in the Chesapeake region (Virginia and Maryland), the Middle Colonies (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware), and New England (Horn, 2000). In 1776, the
British immigrants organized themselves as a colony, and in July of that year, declared independence from England with the 13 colonies forming the beginning of the United States. As settlers moved south and westward during the 18th and 19th centuries, the number of states grew. Finally, 1959 saw two more states declared, both geographically separated from the contiguous 48 (Cooke & Klein, 1998). The historical development of these 13 colonies to 50 United States is beyond the purpose of this review.

By 1890, control of immigration was assigned to the federal government. As employment opportunities became available, massive numbers of new immigrants escaped extreme conditions in Europe to settle in the United States. In 1892, New York’s Ellis Island became a central entry port for millions of immigrants, about 450,000 in that year alone (The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island Foundation, 2019).

**Laws and Regulations That Affected Immigration**

Immigration laws were established by the federal government and the United States Congress (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013) to control who is allowed to enter the country legally and for how long (America Immigration Council, 2019). Since the first immigration law was enacted only in 1790, the United States had implemented several laws that regulate how people may enter and establish residency. These laws established a context that shaped opportunities available to undocumented college students (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019). Table 1 provides a brief overview of significant immigration laws from 1790 to 2012.
Table 1

**U.S. Historic Timeline of Major Immigration Laws Since 1790**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Immigration impacts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-2010: Homeland Security (Patriot Act, Border Control, REAL ID, Fence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriot Act (2001): Created tougher rules for entry into the U.S. and increased monitoring of foreign students in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real ID (2005): Implemented to ensure that all states check on legal status of those seeking driver's licenses.</td>
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</tbody>
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| 2011-2019: Dreamers, DACA & End of TPS |
| DREAM Act (2011, not enacted): Provided pathway to citizenship and higher education for undocumented persons brought to the U.S. as minors. |
| DACA (2012): Provided work permits to adolescents without status who were brought to the U.S. as minors. |
| Executive Orders (2017, overruled): Authorized travel bans for immigrants from Muslim countries. |
| Family Separation (2019): Held and separated refugee families from Central America who walk to the border seeking asylum support. |

Juica, M (2020).

The history of U.S. immigration over the last two hundred years tells a story of ethnic diversity. However, some White Christians of Northern-European descent have preferred to think of themselves as merely Americans (Minahan, 2013) and not as immigrants or descendents of immigrants, many of them undocumented by today’s standards. This fundamentally hegemonic perspective conveniently expunges their ancestors’ commission of America’s racial and ethnic “original sins”: displacement—and attempted genocide—of its indigenous tribes and the cruel exploitative of importing African peoples as slaves. Similarly, it erases the nation’s long record of both literal and social exclusion of emancipated African Americans, Southern
Europeans, Chinese and other Asians, Irish, Jews, Mexicans and other Spanish-speakers, and Muslims, not to mention the more recent resurgence of a white supremacist narrative as epitomized by the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi adherents. Experiential definitions of who is “American”—and even of who is “white”—have fluctuated in ways that the history of immigration law can only imperfectly document. Nevertheless, the current study demands that the legislative context of U.S. immigration be reprised here.

1790-1875: Population-building and the Definition of Citizenship

From 1700 to 1775, half a million people migrated to what is now the United States from several countries (Butler, 2000). The new nation was rapidly building its White population as well as its workforce of enslaved Africans. At the same time, the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 (1 Stat. 570) increased the residency period required to obtain naturalization and awarded the President extraordinary authority to imprison and deport persons considered dangerous to the nation. Later, the Naturalization Act of 1790 (1 Stat. 103) established the first regulations allowing White immigrants to acquire citizenship. As a result, thousands arrived from Northern Europe: English, Scots, Scot-Irish, Germans, Swiss, French, and others settled in three regions, the northern colonies/states (Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire); the middle colonies/states (Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, New Jersey); and the southern colonies/states (Georgia, Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia). From 1846 to 1855, about 100,000 people crossed the Atlantic to America (Hirota, 2017). During this period, the nation’s borders were open to immigration, even as the boundary of citizenship was defined by race.
1822: First Exclusion: Chinese

U.S. borders remained mostly open to immigrants until the early 20th century until territories in the U.S. where being claimed (Hirota, 2017). Nevertheless, the equation of belonging and race began to gain legislative recognition with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (22 Stat. 58), which prohibited the future immigration of Chinese laborers and their families. Those already residents were allowed to remain but were barred from obtaining citizenship and their families disallowed entry. It is noteworthy that the ostensible rationale for exclusion focused on the labor market. Chinese—like the freed male slaves who first obtained the vote in 1870—worked for wages in the labor market, thus encoding for the first time the notion of “others” undercutting White employment.

1942-1945: Japanese Internment Camps

During World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt enacted Executive Order 9066. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, the U.S. government, fearing espionage, detained 110,000 Japanese men, women, and children living in the United States and relocated them to internment camps throughout the U.S. (Nagata et al., 2019).

1902-1950s: Border and Immigration Control Tightens

At the beginning of the 20th century, border control in the U.S. tightened. The Immigration Act of 1917 (39 Stat. 874) expanded on the prohibition of Chinese entrants to Asia, in general, and to other non-European countries such as British India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East and required that anyone entering the United States obtain a visa in advance, inaugurating a broad-based policy of governmental determination of which immigrants were deemed acceptable. Even professionals, such as doctors or lawyers from non-approved regions, were denied visas (Hirota, 2017).
Beginning in 1917, approved immigrants over age 16 were required to demonstrate literacy in any language and were subject to increased arrival fees. These prerequisites reflected suspicions of immigrants that had been stirred during the Great War and paved the way for the broader restrictions to come. Soon after, an overall immigration quota was established based on the proportion of ethnicities represented in the 1910 census and was followed by the National Origins Quota Act of 1924 (known as the Johnson-Reed Act). Several features of this legislation codified an ideal of White European ethnic homogeneity and prohibited the entry of anyone ineligible for citizenship (further broadening the exclusion of Asians). The Act also pushed back the census anchor point to 1890 and, most significantly, applied a 2% immigration quota based not only on the ethnic origins of recent immigrants (as was previously the case) but also on the national lineage of the entire U.S. population. This latter measure had the effect of increasing the proportion of permissible entrants from the British Isles and Northern Europe who had dominated the earliest migration (Major U.S. Immigration Laws, 1790 - Present, 2013). The provisions of this legislation remained in effect until 1952 when the Act was revised.

**Mid-century to the Millennium: Postwar National Security and America’s Reputation**

In the United States, the Second World War was marked by labor shortages that not only brought increasing numbers of women into the labor force but also contributed to a gradual relaxation of some immigration restrictions that remained in effect until the end of the 20th century. The Mexican Farm Labor Agreement of 1942, also known as the Bracero Agreement, was part of the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951, enacted as an amendment to the Agricultural Act of 1949 (Public Law 78). This agreement allowed Mexican nationals to work in agriculture during World War II, even going so far as to allow employers to cover the travel and living expenses of migrant farm laborers. This program continued until 1964.
Beginning in the postwar period, however, Congress shifted its rationale for immigration toward other concerns, which included maintaining the United States’ reputation abroad and safeguarding the nation from infiltration by Communist agents. Revisions to the Immigration and Naturalization Act, signed into law in 1952 (182 Stat. 66), contained several measures that had been vigorously debated by legislators and interest groups. First, the Act reduced immigration quotas to 1/6 of 1% of each nationality’s population as documented in the 1920 census, a measure that resulted in 85% of available visas being awarded to persons of Northern and Western European lineage. Second, it rescinded the blanket ban on Asian immigration but severely limited visas to those from Asian nations and prohibited Asians from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens. Third, it established the employability preference visa system still in effect today, which prioritizes entry by those with unique or, typically, high-level professional skills. Finally, the Act broadened spousal reunification for couples in which one partner was an American citizen. While some provisions of the Act reflected the introduction of economic and social considerations into the regulation of immigration, the nationality-based quota system upheld the nation’s long-term antipathy toward non-European persons.

At the same time, the short-lived Refugee Act of 1953 (94 Stat.102), which was in effect only until 1956, reflected the recognition that some aspiring immigrants were fleeing persecution, had been expelled from home countries in Europe (including Southern Europe), or had been displaced by natural disasters. These provisions were underpinned by a Cold War consciousness as well as America’s assumption of an international leadership role. Those admitted under terms of the Act were required, however, to demonstrate specific housing and employment arrangements.
1960-1980 Civil Rights and Protections for Immigrants

Opposition to communism also prompted passage of the Migration & Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 (76 Stat.121), which opened the door to refugees suffering persecution because of race, religion, or political views (Olivas, 2012). Initially intended to assist Cubans fleeing that country’s communist revolution, the Act has been invoked in response to subsequent international emergencies, as well.

The most substantial change in U.S. immigration policy, however, came with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (79 Stat. 911). Whereas an overt purpose of the 1924 act had been to preserve the “homogeneity” of the U.S. population through the National Origins Formula (quota system), the 1965 Act inaugurated two measures that changed the literal and figurative complexion of immigration: it awarded priority to relatives of current U.S. citizens or permanent residents, allowing for family (re)unification and it eliminated nationality quotas, curbing immigration from the Western hemisphere, even as it opened entry from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (U.S. Immigration Legislation: 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (Hart-Cellar Act), 1965). America’s role as the most prosperous postwar player on the world stage, combined with the advances of the civil rights movement domestically, represented a shift away from Northern European-influenced “homogeneity” in the American population. The Refugee Act of 1980 (94 Stat. 102) encoded a similar perspective. It established a clear distinction between voluntary immigrants and refugees, who were defined as those who were unable or unwilling to remain in or return to their homeland for fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or social group membership, and codified new systems for processing immigrants in both categories.
1981-1996 Visas and Lottery Programs

As postwar economic prosperity ebbed toward the century’s end, legislative attention turned to the labor market effects of authorized and unauthorized immigration. Immigrant labor, particularly in the agricultural sector, had become a fact of American life, and Congress now sought to regulate it. During the Reagan administration, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 (100 Stat. 3359) was enacted, which required employers to certify that their immigrant workers had entered the country legally. The regulation was often quietly flouted, however, despite increased border controls and the introduction of sanctions for employers who hired undocumented [unauthorized] persons (Simpson-Mazzoli Act, 1986). In addition to these provisions, some longstanding unauthorized immigrants were granted amnesty conditioned on payment of a fine as well as meeting other requirements. This Act also continued the move away from Euro-centric immigration control. Several visa lottery programs became available beginning in 1986, commonly known as Diversity Immigrant Visas, or Green Card Visas, which entitled the holders to apply eventually for permanent residency. These were available on a first-come, first-served basis via random selection and favored admissions from countries with less immigration to the United States (Green Card Through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, 2018). These measures reflected America’s competing narratives about the role of immigrants in the life of the nation: immigrants as employment threat vs. America as a nation of immigrants.

1996-2002: Border Fencing, Education Restrictions, and TPS

By the mid-1990s, the U.S. economy had tightened; attention turned to issues of poverty, access to welfare benefits, and the number of undocumented immigrants entering the country. Under the Clinton administration, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA, 110 Stat. 3009) reaffirmed refugee relief but also imposed civil penalties
for unauthorized entry and expanded the range of criminal convictions that could prompt expedited deportation. Among other provisions, the Act also tightened employment eligibility regulations for immigrants and granted the Attorney General broad authority to construct fencing along the southern U.S. border to deter unauthorized crossings. It also prohibited undocumented persons from accessing Social Security benefits, in-state tuition at public colleges or universities, and federal higher education assistance (U.S. Immigration Legislation: 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, 1996). These latter measures, in particular, established the context in which this study’s participants sought to obtain a college education and found many obstacles that continue to be present under the current administration led by President Donald Trump (2017-2020).

The Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act of 1997 (NACARA, 111 Stat. 2160) provided relief from deportation to Nicaraguans, Cubans, Salvadorians, and Guatemalans, with Haitians added in 1998. These measures enabled some of this study’s participants to remain in the United States under Temporary Protected Status.

**2002-2010: Homeland Security Redefined**

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, anti-immigrant suspicions burgeoned, primarily against Muslims and others from the Middle East, but also against other border-crossers. The Patriot Act of 2001 (115 Stat. 272) authorized extensive surveillance and intelligence-gathering activities. It significantly strengthened border control actions, including the establishment of separate agencies for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The Enhanced Border Security & Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 (116 Stat. 543) developed new systems to track immigrants coming into the country to determine admissibility
and removability. For example, the US-VISIT program collects biometric information from entrants, creating a database of information in all entry ports throughout the country. With this level of technology, the U.S. government can immediately verify identity and status (Department of Homeland Security, 2007).

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (116 Stat. 2135) created a new cabinet-level agency, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), under which existing immigration-related agencies were subsumed: Customs & Border Protection (CPB), U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). In 2005, DHS also began to identify immigrants who were deemed a potential threat to national security. At the same time, the REAL ID Act (119 Stat. 302) was implemented, which promulgated national identity verification standards for those seeking driver’s licenses in state offices. This law established guidelines for removal and revised grounds for inadmissibility and deportations. In 2006, the Secure Fence Act (Pub.L. 109-367) authorized the construction of a 700-mile double-reinforced fence at the U.S. border with Mexico, ostensibly to decrease the entry of drug-trafficking and illegal immigration (Secure Fence Act of 2006).

2011-2019: Status Definition, Status Fragility

During the Obama administration, several pieces of legislation were drafted to help undocumented college students. In 2011, the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) [S.952] was introduced in Congress, representing the fourth time such legislation had been proposed since first introduced in 2001 (S.1291). This legislation would have allowed undocumented students to begin a six-year process leading to permanent-legal status (Durbin, 2011; Gonzalez, 2009; Guggenheim, 2013). The DREAM Act would have allowed undocumented applicants to receive permanent residency status (a so-called green card)
if they completed a college degree within six years (Gonzalez, 2009). Unfortunately, the bill again failed, although many of its provisions were folded into a different measure, Deferred Action for Alien Minors (DACA) in 2012 (Gonzalez, 2009; Guggenheim, 2013; Laurin, 2013).

DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) was implemented in 2012 under President Barack Obama through a policy memorandum published by the Department of Homeland Security (Center for Immigrant Rights Clinic, 2018; Fairfield University, 2013; Poe, 2012). Unlike the DREAM Act, DACA did not offer a path to permanent residency for childhood arrivals in the United States (Gonzalez, 2009); however, contingent upon meeting certain requirements and payment of a nearly $500 fee, it provided a renewable two-year reprieve from deportation and eligibility for legal work status, a measure that facilitated participants’ ability to enroll in higher education (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016). As of September 5, 2017, there were more than 800,000 persons with DACA status in the United States (Penn State Law, Center for Immigrant Rights Clinic, 2018). At the same time, millions of adolescents remained without a status according to a report by the Pew Research Center (2018).

Despite its advantages, DACA entails several risks (Pullias Center for Higher Education, 2017). First, applicants are required to disclose their status as undocumented immigrants, risking not only their status (if unapproved) but also that of their families. Second, although DACA status includes a work permit, recipients who participate in higher education are not allowed to use federal financial aid (Gonzalez, 2009; Laurin, 2013; P. Perez, 2010). Third, the short-term duration of any term of DACA eligibility imposes significant uncertainty for those who qualify; which were present in the interview data collected in this study.
DACA created momentum for further immigration reforms, as well (Poe, 2012). DAPA (2014), Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, gave undocumented parents who had a child with U.S. citizenship or legal residency reprieve from deportation and a path to citizenship. Unfortunately, the program did not survive the election of President Donald Trump in 2016. His plan included ending both DACA and DAPA programs, so DAPA never had a real chance to survive.

President Trump campaigned on an anti-immigrant platform and, upon assuming the Presidency, initiated a series of anti-immigrant measures: (1) a 2017 ban on Muslim immigrants, a controversial measure that was overruled, revised, and overruled again; (2) termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras (2018); and (3) a host of draconian practices implemented at the southern U.S. border with Mexico over and above a promised-but-unaccomplished wall to prevent unauthorized crossings. Meanwhile, extreme conditions in Central America led thousands from those countries to seek asylum in the United States. The administration’s responses, including separating children from families and long-term unlawful detention of children in overcrowded and unsafe conditions, sent shockwaves through immigrant communities and many U.S. citizens alike (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020).

In more than 200 years of United States history, from the 13 colonies to the 50 states, the branches of government have enacted and implemented immigration laws and policies designed to shape the nation’s ethnic demographics in ways that only certain elites considered desirable (Zolberg, 2006). Some of these measures enabled immigrants to work and live in the United States and to find pathways to citizenship; however, many residents who lack authorization or documentation have been left with the uncertainty of immigration status relief (Gelatt, 2019).
National U.S. Demographics

Since 1980, the population of undocumented U.S. immigrants has increased significantly, and by 2010 it had reached approximately 12 million. Of these, approximately 15% were under age 18 (Passel & Cohn, 2010). Five years later, the number of immigrant youth arriving since the start of the millennium was measured at 2.1 million (Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Most undocumented immigrants are adults, however, and a majority is male: 5.5 million men, vs. 4.5 million women. In contrast, the number of undocumented children is quite small, approximately 675,000 (Pew Research Center, 2018), largely because 3.5 million of the 4.1 million children of undocumented parents are reported to have U.S citizenship (Pew Research Center, 2018).

According to the Pew Research Center (2018), in 2016, 8% of children whose parents were undocumented (i.e., nearly 1 million) were enrolled in grades K-12 (U.S. Unauthorized Immigration Total Lowest in a Decade | Pew Research Center, 2018). This estimate indicates that the undocumented population living in the United States is relatively young and comprises an integral part of the American primary and secondary educational system. It is estimated that 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools each year (Gonzalez, 2009; Passel & Cohn, 2010). These children and youth, according to the Supreme Court’s ruling in Plyler v. Doe (1982), protects an undocumented student in U.S. public schools through high school but not beyond (Olivas, 2012). As a sanctuary for immigrant families, Massachusetts cities attract thousands of new immigrants to their vibrant communities (Lavan & Uriarte, 2008; Sub-Committee, 2009).

According to a report issued in 2015 by The Institute for Immigration, Globalization, & Education at the University of California, Los Angeles (2015), 200,000 to 225,000
undocumented students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in that year, representing 2% of the total undergraduate population (Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015).

**Undocumented Immigrants in the Contemporary United States**

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2013), “we the people” as articulated in the U.S. Constitution included individuals who are currently labeled as *undocumented* (or informally, by some, *illegal*). These are persons who do not yet have a legal status to live or work in the United States or the Commonwealth of U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico. Undocumented immigrants may have an expired tourist visa, have entered the country without passing through a Customs and Immigration checkpoint, or have not been awarded a legal immigrant status enabling them to qualify for permanent residency or citizenship (Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

Undocumented children may freely attend U.S. public schools from kindergarten through Grade 12. About 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools annually (Gonzalez, 2009). Perez (2010) reports that undocumented immigrant students have various job responsibilities at home, such as taking care of siblings and working (typically “under the table”) an average of 13 hours per week during high school and 30 hours per week while attending college. Perez further reports that for many undocumented students intending to pursue higher education, saving during high school to cover their future tuition and fees becomes a goal, given that they will be largely unable to access scholarship or institutional aid (Perez, 2010). Del Razo (2012) reports that these students say they internalize such constraints as they seek a pathway to attending college. Del Razo (2012) and Orozco-Suarez (2008) captured these students’ goals and plans through hundreds of interviews with youth who described their dreams of attending college in the United States. In these stories, the students described the importance of getting the right
education, preparing for the college experience, and training for careers that will improve their life opportunities.

**Policies That Affect Current Undocumented College Students**

Since his first day in office in 2017, President Trump announced that many programs considered essential to immigrants would be eliminated, including those that previously assisted undocumented individuals in obtaining a citizenship pathway through a lottery or other visa-relief programs (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Since 2017, 16 policies that impacted immigrants in the United States have been changed by executive order, five of which directly target immigrant students in college (Federation for American Immigration Reform, 2018). Table 2 summarizes these rulings.
### Table 2

**Trump Administration Immigration Rulings Affecting College Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigration rulings by Trump Administration</th>
<th>Relevance for undocumented college students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>(Jan.) Withhold funds from sanctuary jurisdiction.</td>
<td>Prevents disbursement of Congressionally appropriated funds to “sanctuary cities” that refuse to assist federal efforts to enforce immigration policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Mar.) Ensure proper vetting of foreign nationals before entering the United States.</td>
<td>Bans individuals from a list of countries from entering the United States, in effect, deny re-entry to many scholars, researchers, and students who travel to their home countries or elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Jun.) Withdraw DAPA amnesty (relief for undocumented parents of U.S.-born children).</td>
<td>Denies undocumented parents of U.S.-born children the opportunity for legal employment and eliminates their pathway to eventual citizenship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Sep.) Promised campaign to end DACA.</td>
<td>Administration requests expedited Supreme Court action to end DACA. Undecided. No new DACA applications accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Nov.) Termination of Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for Haiti.</td>
<td>Advises Haitians with TPS to “return home to Haiti.” Ending TPS denies Haitian students the ability to work legally to save money for college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>(Jan.) Termination of Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for El Salvador.</td>
<td>Salvadoran and Honduran TPS college students can continue working legally in the United States. Their pathway to U.S. citizenship is in jeopardy of absent action by Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Mar.) Justice Department sues California over sanctuary policies.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(May) Termination of Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for Honduras</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Jun.) Supreme Court Rules in favor of Trump administration on a travel ban.</td>
<td>Trump’s appointments to the Supreme court have created tension in the immigrant community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Undocumented students face many of the same hurdles faced by other first-generation college students (Perez, 2012). In addition, most undocumented college students come from families with limited financial resources in which parents who are themselves undocumented are unable to provide guidance and support in navigating the college system in America (Perez, Cortes, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). Among the financial and emotional challenges that undocumented college students face, fear of deportation is so central to their daily routine that it influences their decisions and interactions with their communities both at home and in the college environment (Perez, 2012). These students fear the college admission process and are even more afraid to obtain driver’s licenses, places to live, student identification cards, financial aid, loans, employment, or volunteer opportunities. In We ARE Americans, Perez (2009) creates a context for understanding undocumented students’ particular obstacles and challenges. Perez also describes the different stages of undocumented students’ experience as they transition from high school to college and life after college graduation. Perez’s text, one of the first to address these issues, relates the stories of 20 undocumented individuals who overcame the challenges of entering college without legal residency in the United States (Pérez, 2009).

Several other studies also recorded the experiences of undocumented college students (Del Razo, 2012; Perez, 2009; Laurin, 2013; Bailey, 2013). Del Razo’s study (2012) featured interviews with undocumented college students, which revealed that these students often fear their legal status will affect their interactions with college administrators and fellow students (Fairfield University, 2013; Laurin, 2013; W. Perez, 2010). In a study by the Jesuit colleges (Fairfield University, 2013), undocumented Latinx students also report feelings of isolation caused by anti-immigrant prejudices and insensitive or discriminatory comments expressed by their classmates, professors, and university staff.
Perez (2009) and Poe (2012), writing before the Trump administration’s anti-immigrant measures were implemented, saw conditions improving for undocumented students during the previous ten years. Others investigated ameliorative effects of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2011, or the DREAM Act (Laurin, 2013; Olivas, 2012).

In Massachusetts, one of the challenges for undocumented students is the rising cost of higher education and the dearth of available financial aid they can access. In many states, undocumented students are required to pay out-of-state or international tuition fees unless a state or community has enacted policies that allow these students to pay the in-state rate (L. Abrego, 2008). Even if undocumented students were awarded in-state status at the federal level, they would still find themselves ineligible for Pell grant support or any type of federal financial aid. For a brief period, DACA beneficiaries (also called DREAMers) were eligible for service in the U.S. military through which they could become eligible for citizenship, but this pathway was later discontinued due to national security concerns (Del Razo, 2012; Laurin, 2013).

Sixteen states and the District of Columbia (see Table 2) allow undocumented students to pay in-state college tuition as a result of legislation or referendum (Blume, 2011; Del Razo, 2012; W. Perez, 2012; W. Perez et al., 2010), and in some of these jurisdictions, students are allowed to access state scholarships or grants. Additionally, five state university systems grant in-state tuition status to undocumented students. The College Board and other research centers describe the implications of adopting a DREAM Act policy to ensure undocumented college students can finish college successfully (Gonzalez, 2009; Poe, 2012). Among recommendations emanating from such research, colleges and universities should create institutional scholarships for undocumented students in addition to offering other forms of support (Gonzalez, 2009). Private colleges currently have the flexibility to set up scholarship programs for undocumented
students; unfortunately, it is unlikely that private schools would advertise these scholarship opportunities for undocumented students (Fairfield University, 2013).

Many of the 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school each year will not go to college; instead, they will find any opportunity for employment (Blume, 2011). Opportunities are limited, however, because they are unable to work legally in the United States (Gonzalez, 2009; W. Perez, 2012). As a result, many will find immigrant labor that pays poorly and has no benefits. (Blume, 2011). For the other students, funding their education means finding the scholarships and grants for which they are eligible. (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011; Oliverez, Chavez, Soriano, & Tierney, 2006). In California, Texas, Arizona, and other states, many undocumented students are graduating from U.S. high schools and applying to colleges in those states. Many scholarship programs are developed at the community level and have fewer restrictions (Oliverez et al., 2006). DREAM Act states and the types of financial assistance available for undocumented college students are presented in Table 3.
Table 3

*Proposed DREAM Act States and In-State Tuition Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States offering in-state tuition through state legislation</th>
<th>State university systems offering in-state tuition</th>
<th>States offering state financial assistance to unauthorized (^1) students</th>
<th>States barring in-state tuition benefits to unauthorized students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Washington, D.C.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oregon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
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<td>Nebraska</td>
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<td>New Jersey</td>
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<td>New Mexico</td>
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<td>New York</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
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<td>Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from National Conference of State Legislature, Tuition Benefits for Immigrants (2019).

Table 4 compares the number of states that provide financial support and states that prohibit financial aid for undocumented students.
Table 4

*DREAM Act State Legislation and Support for Undocumented College Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DREAM Act-type support</th>
<th>Number of States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition (enacted by legislation or referendum)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer state financial aid to undocumented college students</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally bar benefits to undocumented individuals</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Conference of State Legislature, Tuition Benefits for Immigrants (2019)

**Election 2016: Post-Presidential Concerns for Undocumented Students**

The 2016 election of President Donald Trump placed several immigration reform programs at risk. As a candidate, Trump had announced that he would eliminate the DACA program as soon as he took office (ILRC Report, November 2016) and vowed that during his first 100 days in office, he would order the termination of other programs of benefit to immigrants (White House Framework on Immigration Reform & Border Security, 2017), including TPS (Pullias Center for Higher Education, 2017). Trump also issued an executive order that was repeatedly challenged in the courts that banned selected Muslim-country visa holders from entering the United States and terminated pending applications for non-citizens on a pathway to citizenship (Pullias Center for Higher Education, 2017). An executive order terminating TPS for Haitians was issued in spring 2019 and then extended to 2021 (*USCIS, Temporary Protected Status Designated Country: Haiti*, 2020). The proposed termination of DACA was challenged in court but was partially walked back by the administration (Pennsylvania State University, 2018). Overall, the Trump administration threatened more severe actions than it was able to implement, but the effect of this approach was to instill both fear and
uncertainty among immigrants who lacked permanent residency. This was especially the case for students in higher education who planned or had embarked on a multi-year educational journey.

In 2016, the California advocacy group Educators for Fair Consideration developed handouts and training materials for persons working with undocumented college students (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2016). These resources included institutional, community, and individual advocacy measures and policy proposals, among them: (1) institutional clarity about support and policies affecting immigrant students, (2) public advocacy by educational leaders, and (3) dissemination of information and program expansion regarding DACA- and TPS-compliant non-federal aid (Educators for Fair Consideration, Post-Election Report, 2016, DREAMUS report, 2017).

**Obstacles Affecting Undocumented College Students**

Undocumented college students face many challenges and obstacles, but these generally can be sorted into four categories. A more thorough exploration of each follows:

- **Sociopolitical:** Laws, regulations, and systemic or institutional marginalization of immigrants by government
- **Sociocultural:** Normative challenges, e.g., learning and adapting to language, nationality, values, identity, and customs
- **Socioemotional:** Social or psychological effects of marginalization, discrimination, and status insecurity
- **Socioeconomic:** Costs and exclusions related to financial well-being of families and students
Sociopolitical Obstacles

Oliverez et al. (2006) discuss institutional conditions that support or deter undocumented students in higher education. These include laws and policies regarding admission and financing that are determined by residency status. As the United States considers its position on the rights of immigrants and the impact of new policies concerning undocumented persons, college students are stuck in the middle of a national argument about what type of support should be offered to undocumented college students (Gonzalez 2009; Poe, 2012).

A multi-year, mixed-methods national study sponsored by the Ford Foundation (Fairfield University, 2013) examined the experiences of undocumented students as they faced the political challenges ahead. The research, conducted by legal and social research teams at three private Jesuit universities—Fairfield University (CT), Loyola University (IL), and Santa Clara University (CA)—involved collecting and analyzing the perceptions of 47 college administrators and staff, 26 undocumented college students, a number of community advocates at these institutions, and three additional anonymized Jesuit campuses regarding what supports these institutions provided for undocumented students. The resulting report concluded that greater access to financial aid and institutional efforts to create culturally sensitive campus environments are critical for immigrant students to thrive (Rodriguez, 2013).

College Admissions Obstacles

Many undocumented students carry an internalized stigma that leads them to assume they cannot legally enroll in colleges or universities in the United States, so most do not apply (Gonzalez, 2009). As of this writing, no federal or state law prohibits the admission of undocumented immigrants to public or private colleges (Fairfield University, 2013); however, advisers and admissions staff tend to stigmatize immigrant applicants, questioning the integrity
and legal status of students who do not submit expected types of paperwork with their applications (Laurin, 2013; P. Perez, 2010).

In a mixed-methods study of factors that can create obstacles for undocumented students, Perez (2010) found that in college applications, undocumented students struggle to answer the question about their residency status in the United States. Most applications offer just three response choices: U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or special visa status. Results showed that undocumented students who are either filing for residency or awaiting a response from U.S. Homeland Security lose motivation for higher education if they are not offered a response choice that accurately reflects their process or status (Perez, Cortes, et al., 2010). The Ford Foundation study (Fairfield University, 2013) found that many undocumented applicants and their families also struggle to interpret legal terminology regarding eligibility in higher education application forms and informational materials, which typically are published only in English (P. Perez, 2010; Perez, 2012).

According to Laurin (2013) and Poe (2012), however, immigrants and their advocates are confident that some proposed federal programs could help to create access. They point to the DREAM Act (2012) and other advocacy efforts to create pathways to college for thousands of immigrant students.

**Sociocultural Obstacles**

Like high school students who are U.S. citizens, immigrant and undocumented immigrant students seek to learn marketable 21st-century skills that will qualify them either for the job market upon receiving their diplomas or for admission to postsecondary education or training that will allow them to support themselves financially. Indeed, secondary school curricula have long been designed with these two goals in mind, although the pressure to segue to higher
education has steadily increased (Perez, 2010). Thus Gonzalez (2009) argues that high school teachers and administrators should ensure that all students receive support and guidance in the college admission process. Gonzales further contends that strengthening educational opportunities for undocumented immigrants will result in a net gain for the U.S. economy, as education that leads to legal employment increases public revenue. Enacting and fully implementing the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, originally introduced in 2001) would allow 300,000 undocumented high school graduates to obtain education or training that could lead them to become skilled employees—and taxpayers (Gonzalez, 2009).

Many high school students are exposed to information about college admissions, whether by attending a college fair and meeting an admissions representative or by visiting a local college or university (Gonzalez, 2009; Laurin, 2013). School guidance offices also typically provide information about colleges and admissions. Given the complexities associated with comparing educational opportunities, curricula, requirements, and financial arrangements, including scholarships, grants, or loans, guidance counselors must support all students and their families in decision-making and planning for post-secondary education (Gonzalez, 2009). This is especially true with respect to immigrant and undocumented students, as navigating not only the legal and administrative hurdles but also the cultural norms governing college admission is challenging (Perez, 2010; Del Razo, 2012). Interviews with undocumented students already attending colleges revealed that undocumented students are likely to be resilient and aware of their undocumented realities, but there are gaps in necessary supports (Del Razo, 2012; Perez, 2012).
Socioemotional Obstacles

Laurin (2013) investigated the effects on 14 undocumented students of Proposition 300, a voter-approved Arizona law requiring undocumented students to pay the out-of-state tuition rate at public colleges and universities in the state unless they can document legal residency. Laurin (2013) reported that for many of these students, the choice to pursue a college education meant preparing to take enormous risks associated with navigating difficult admission processes and assembling funding sources sufficient to cover the cost of tuition (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

A further complication for all college students, but especially for undocumented students, whose path to a degree is punctuated by so many obstacles, is the reality that an undergraduate degree affords no guarantee of employment upon completion (Gonzalez, 2009; Perez, Cortes, et al., 2010). Perez (2009) and Perez et al. (2010) explored the social-emotional developmental framework for undocumented students. They found that undocumented students, regardless of how long they have lived in the United States, contend with significant language barriers as well as discrimination, shame, and fear. Del Razo (2012) explains that undocumented students’ awareness of their legal status, together with the labels that follow them from a very early age, cause them to internalize considerable stigma about their inability to present “papers” that would confirm their social acceptability. Typically, undocumented students spend a great deal of energy in high school on hiding their undocumented realities from their peers, teachers, and community. These social-emotional obstacles exert considerable influence on whether these students will experience success in college (Del Razo, 2012; Perez, 2012).
**Socioeconomic Obstacles**

The high cost of tuition is a challenge for many students. Achievement data on undocumented students and immigrants demonstrate that these students can qualify for admission and are likely to be successful in handling college-level academic work at most institutions (Laurin, 2013). Their college application processes, however, are fraught at every stage. First, the high cost of tuition causes some students and their families to reconsider higher education altogether, and fiscal reality justifies these doubts. In many states, students who lack legal residency must pay the much higher out-of-state rate at public institutions, or in some cases, the even costlier international student rate. Second, it is not uncommon for immigrant students, particularly those whose families have fled their home country because of political threat or natural disaster, to lack any documentation of their status. Third, at the lowest-cost bona fide college option, community colleges, a typical criterion is legal U.S. residency, again to qualify for in-state tuition. Because undocumented students are barred from receiving federal grants or loans, many state loans and some proportion of private scholarships are also unavailable (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012; Bailey, 2013). These realities take a toll, both financially and emotionally (Del Razo, 2012).

Among the serious obstacles to college success that Del Razo (2012) found by studying the experiences of 290 undocumented students in Arizona and California were several factors related to academic motivation. Latino respondents in this study reported feeling stigmatized, even dehumanized, by their lack of legal status, noting they had been overtly ridiculed or derogated. To an extent, these affronts were mitigated by community social networks, *familia*, who nurtured their sense of empowerment and hope.
Support Systems for Undocumented Students

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2008) studied academic achievement data for 400 high school students across the nation and followed up with qualitative observations and interviews with the students’ families to discover how they experienced the American school culture and to identify available institutional systems to support these students’ success in higher education (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). The researchers learned that immigrant families need support from both schools and advocacy organizations in their community. Especially important was language communication support: parents need information they can understand and correctly interpret in their native language. This means they need to receive native-language translations of informational materials, ideally provided by schools and colleges.

Del Razo’s research (2012) illustrates why family participation in the college application process is so important. Having surveyed 290 students and conducted in-depth interviews to investigate the aspirations, motivations, and challenges of undocumented students as they discerned a way to enter college programs, Del Razo also found that these students relied on their families’ strength, nurturing, and culturally-driven environment to support their motivation.

Furthermore, Del Razo’s (2012) assumptions about undocumented youth using critical race theory and Yosso’s (2006) Community Cultural Wealth Framework are appropriate to understand the motivation for undocumented Latinx students in Massachusetts to attend college. Undocumented college students have found many ways to make their educational experience successful through a series of navigational methods that require their cultural capital to be useful (Del Razo, 2012). For example, Del Razo (2012) describes how the students use their experiences to navigate through this complex college environment by using their language, their people, their networks, and their aspirations to succeed.
College advising, too, is an area in which much work is needed. Over 40 undocumented students were interviewed from an Arizona university about their enrollment in college and how the higher education institution had helped them (Bailey, 2013). Findings indicated that most college advisors were not trained or prepared to work with undocumented students, and many lacked simple terminology and knowledge about immigrant status.

Studies by Bailey (2013), Burman (2013), Del Razo (2012), and The Ford Foundation report (Fairfield University, 2013) investigated what colleges should be doing to support undocumented students while in college and found it is important to have college staff who are well prepared and trained to work with undocumented students. For example, the Ford Foundation (2013) project concluded that the six Jesuit universities studied were beginning to create informal advisory systems to support undocumented students and that students felt they could trust staff who demonstrated knowledge and understanding of their concerns. Nevertheless, the report recommended that these institutions establish centralized systems with specially trained staff who would work not only to support applicants but also to educate faculty, staff, and administrators about the distinctive needs of this population.

Perez (2010) contended that there are several possible models for offering intentional help for undocumented students to become college-ready and to access alternative pathways to success in college. The best of these models includes support-systems, financial aid planning, academic skill-building courses or bridge courses, and bilingual faculty and staff who can motivate these learners to be engaged and committed to completing a college degree (Burman, 2013; W. Perez, 2010). Several private universities have created programs targeting the needs of undocumented or immigrant students, which contribute to the students’ social-emotional development as college students (Oliverez et al., 2006; Perez, Cortes, et al., 2010). The literature
includes many examples of students who felt that having guidance and support from college
advisers, faculty, and administrative professionals who understood immigrant students and the
realities of their circumstances made a significant difference in their college experience (Perez,
Cortes, et al., 2010; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Understanding Undocumented Students’ Experiences and Needs

Community Cultural Wealth Framework (Yosso, 2006) is essential for a qualitative study
of undocumented college students’ experiences and needs. Yosso (2006) posits six forms of
cultural capital significant to immigrant and undocumented college students: aspirational,
familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic. These serve as assets that strengthen
immigrant students as they confront the barriers of marginalization and uncertain residency
status in their academic journeys (Talavera-Bustillos, 2007). Cultural studies literature supports
the use of these frameworks in exploring the needs of this population (Del Razo, 2012;
Gonzalez, 2009; Pérez, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008).

Community Cultural Wealth Framework represents a metaphorical coin when applied to
the study of undocumented college students, in that their perspectives highlight critical aspects of
these students’ experiences: oppression and resilience. This theoretical framework is essential in
understanding how undocumented students navigate academic pathways despite marginalization
and systemic obstacles. Table 5 illustrates how these forms of cultural capital may be applied to
the experiences of undocumented college students.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Cultural Wealth Framework (Yosso, 2006)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forms of Cultural Capital</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational Capital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linguistic Capital  Intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language.

Navigational Capital  Skills of maneuvering through social institutions.

Social Capital  Networks of people and community resources.

Familial Capital  Cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* [kin networks] that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.

Resistant Capital  Knowledge and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequalities.

Source: Community Cultural Wealth Framework (Yosso, 2006)

The literature reveals that undocumented students’ support systems while in college have varied. As a marginalized group in America, they are challenged consistently by rules and regulations that are set by an American society that does not account for them in college.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature to four areas critical to understanding the experiences of undocumented college students: (a) historical context of immigration in the United States; (b) policies that affect the academic journeys of undocumented college students; (c) sociocultural, sociopolitical, socioemotional, and socioeconomic challenges faced by undocumented students in college; and (d) support systems to advise and support undocumented college students. This body of literature focuses on understanding current college policies, explores how federal policy can affect undocumented college students, and describes best practices in college advising.
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

The purpose of this research was to study the educational experiences of seven Massachusetts college undocumented college students and how they navigated U.S. college systems to find the support that enabled them to finish their degree. The main goal of this chapter is to describe the research design for collecting and analyzing the data that addresses the following research questions:

GRQ #1: What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience?

GRQ #2: What are the various ways undocumented college students report institutional and economic factors that affect undocumented immigrant students’ college experiences?

GRQ #3: What factors did undocumented immigrant students report that contributed to their development of resilience in overcoming social and systemic setbacks in pursuing higher education?

Rationale for Method Selection

The design and analysis for this research are informed by two theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Cultural Wealth Capital. The first of these perspectives focuses on identifying structural hindrances that undocumented students experience as they strive for admission to and success in college. The second identifies external and internal resources they rely upon to foster the resilience they need to surmount those hindrances.

Qualitative research can be described as an effective model for documenting lived experience in a natural setting. This research methodology allows the researcher high involvement in respondents’ actual experiences (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research claims
roots in anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation (Creswell, 2014). As well, qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative researcher serves as the instrument of data collection, which is typically conducted through interview or participant observation in a natural setting. Data analysis and interpretation build from particulars to general themes, with attention given to emerging questions or phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Creswell (2007) described five different approaches to qualitative research design: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. In this qualitative study, a narrative method was selected to capture an in-depth perspective using a general interview process to collect the data (Creswell, 2007). This approach affords the researcher flexibility in the order of the interview questions, and participants can more easily refine and develop their answers (Creswell, 2007; Turner, 2010). The strength of this format provided more focus than the conversational approach, allowing the researcher greater freedom and adaptability (Turner, 2010). The interview guide format deliberately created space for surprising responses and unexpected trajectories, making it appropriate for research in which the goal is to explore emerging questions or themes. Creswell (2007) provided the best methodology for a narrative study using interviews to collect the student’s perspectives about their experience in college.

**Participants and Setting**

To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of undocumented college students, it was essential to begin the study at the community level by communicating with non-profit organizations and programs that were already helping undocumented immigrants. The researcher
identified several non-profit organizations a year before the study commenced and began conversations about the study with non-profit leaders, teachers, and advisors working with college students. To protect the confidentiality of these organizations and programs that help undocumented individuals, the researcher did not reveal the names of the organizations and programs. These programs offer services in Boston, Chelsea, Somerville, and other areas of Massachusetts. Interviews with the selected students began in 2016 and concluded in 2017.

Using a snowball sampling selection process to identify potential participants, the researcher worked with community organizations and local college programs to solicit volunteer participation in the study. A flyer describing the study and seeking volunteers was shared throughout a network of colleagues and contacts who posted or shared it confidentially with undocumented students (see Appendix B). Twelve students volunteered for the project and participated in a short screening process.

To qualify for this study, participants had to have met the following criteria:

- born outside the United States
- hold either temporary or undocumented status
- aged 29 or younger
- have graduated from a U.S. high school.
- have been accepted and enrolled in a college in Massachusetts for at least one year
- have not completed an undergraduate degree
- reside in Massachusetts
- have agreed freely to participate in this study as a volunteer and to sign a consent form
Twelve students completed the screening interview process and responded to an email invitation to participate in the study. Among these 12, seven were willing to participate in the interviews and set appointments with the researcher. Ideally, two participants from each of the undocumented college student categories would be represented in the study, but the researcher allowed one additional participant who could add value to the study with his experience in college. Thus seven students were interviewed for the study: two with DACA status, three with TPS status, and two with no documentation. All spoke and understood English proficiently, as demonstrated in screening conversations, and all took their college courses in English. No one in the study required the researcher to translate questions; however, participants were allowed to use their native language to express feelings or attitudes about any of the interview questions. The participants’ native countries included Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela, and Cabo Verde. A detailed biographical description of each of the students in this study is presented in Chapter Four.

All participants read and signed a consent form (see Appendix C). To protect respondents’ confidentiality and safety, neither names nor identifying information was used in the study. Personal information was secured in password-protected files. All participants agreed to sign the consent form and answered the interview questions voluntarily in compliance with IRB policy and approval (see Appendix A: IRB Application). Table 6 provides an overview of the study participants.
Table 6

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Immigration status</th>
<th>High School Graduation Year</th>
<th>College Graduation Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>DACA</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celly</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cabo Verde</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>TPS</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Cabo Verde</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardochee</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>TPS</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>DACA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>TPS</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Data were collected from participants through an interview process. This section covers the timeline, data-gathering tools (see Appendices B, C, D, E, and F), and procedures used in the study. To build trust with study participants, the researcher invited all participants to a short one hour group information session before beginning formal individual interview meetings. This session allowed them to talk and share basic information with the researcher and, if they so desired, with one another. All of the participants in this study attended this meeting. This informational meeting was not recorded. During this screening process, the students had an opportunity to ask the researcher any lingering questions about the purpose of the study, and more importantly, about their anonymity and personal safety. At that time, all students were asked to review and discuss the consent form with the researcher.

The seven volunteers for the study completed a consent form, which was filed electronically and saved with encryption. For participants’ confidentiality and security, only their names and signatures appeared on the consent form; no residential addresses or phone numbers were included.
Because undocumented students require a safe place where they can talk about their experiences without fear of judgment or prejudice (Del Razo, 2012; Yosso, 2006), steps were taken to address this need. To further promote study participants’ comfort and trust, the researcher pledged to conduct post-study informational and community sessions after the dissertation defense to debrief any aspect of the study participants would like to discuss.

Participants selected for the study completed a short intake form that contained questions about their residency/immigration status, plans for college, and participation in a narrative study (see Appendix D). This form was used to gather baseline information for use in data analysis. The document also asked about the student’s understandings and attitudes toward being in college; about the support they were receiving, i.e., the types of services they were using; the obstacles they were encountering; and the difficulties they were facing in navigating a college system to find financial, academic, social, and emotional resources.

To confirm participation in the study, each student received an email message (see Appendix E) from the researcher with instructions and information about scheduling the study’s two individual interview sessions. These messages were encrypted for privacy and security.

Lastly, the interview protocol required that the students participate in a dialogue with the researcher about their experiences in college. The researcher developed a list of 12 guiding questions that were posed to each participant (see Appendix F). These questions were developed based on the topics articulated in the guiding research questions and were related to obstacles to accessing and succeeding in higher education, participants’ process for selecting their colleges, students’ aspirations and dreams, supporters, and what is needed to support the undocumented individual in college. Students received a printout of the questions as a second mode of communicating their content and purpose (see Appendix F).
Each participant was invited at a time of their convenience to an individual screening interview during which a preliminary conversation about the study was conducted where field notes were also taken. During this interview, participants completed the screening intake form (see Appendix D) after reviewing the purpose and goals of the study with the researcher. This contact also allowed participants to ask questions about the study and the interview process. Formal permission for audio recording was obtained at this time (see Appendix C). No interviews were conducted without a signed consent form from the participant.

Before the interview phase of the study began, steps were taken to create a functional and secure environment. These included efforts to secure comfortable, quiet, and private rooms for interviewing participants. Study participants were permitted to select from among the available spaces the one that felt most safe. A recording device was set up before the start of the interview, and participants were given a small lavalier microphone to attach to their clothing. This microphone was connected by a long, thin wire to the researcher’s mobile telephone, on which a recording application was opened. These recording arrangements were intended to minimize participants’ discomfort about being recorded. As is typical in such interviews, students quickly stopped paying attention to the recording device. A copy of the interview questions was given to each participant. As well, participants had access to snacks, paper, pens, tissues, etc., to ensure their comfort during the interview process.

Each of the participants had two scheduled sessions during the period of the study. Most of the interviews were conducted during the summer months of 2016 with follow-up interviews conducted in 2017.

The interview guide for the first and second sessions contained 12 questions that served as prompts designed to help participants focus on their experiences in college as undocumented
students (see Appendix F). The questions asked were open-ended to elicit narratives so that participants could expand on topics they wanted either to assert or highlight (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Each of the two interviews per participant lasted approximately two hours. Additional short wrap-up sessions were held as participants desired or needed.

Participants were encouraged to talk beyond this framework about whatever they considered relevant within the scope of the interview. For example, a question about the steps a participant took toward gaining college admission was used as an entré to eliciting the participant’s feelings as well as the facts about that experience. Encouraging free-flowing conversation was an important and productive strategy during the interview process (Creswell, 2007; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

In keeping with the research protocol, each participant was asked the guiding questions in order. If a participant was unclear about the meaning or intent of the question, the researcher gave an example to better contextualize the response. Participants were told they could skip or return to questions that aroused difficult emotions. Participants were also encouraged to pursue any conversational threads they desired within the scope of an interview question. After the interviews, the researcher took notes about participants’ tone, affect, and body language as well as key phrases that would support understanding the interview transcripts during data analysis.

Some participants found that the interview aroused deep and difficult emotions, so the researcher encouraged them to take breaks or pauses as needed. The pace of interviews was kept comfortable (that is, relatively informal) and conversational so that participants would have time to reflect, to experience, to take care of feelings as they arose, and to pause as needed. Participants were told they could decline to answer a question or return to an issue later in the session if they so desired. If an interview topic prompted emotional breakdown (crying, sadness,
or anger), the researcher allowed the participant to gently probe the feelings that had been aroused and allowed the participant to decide how to proceed.

Each recorded session was saved in an encrypted, password-protected file on an external hard drive to which only the researcher had access. Each participant received a thank-you note explaining the next steps in this study as well as reiterating that their personal information was anonymized and that no identifying details would ever be revealed. The researcher transcribed each of the recorded interviews, which were triple-checked for accuracy and, like the audio records, stored in password-protected files on an external hard drive. These files will be kept for a maximum period of seven years, then later deleted.

**Data Analysis**

The seven student interviews were transcribed from verbal/oral data into written text documents. To transcribe the interviews, the researcher replayed the recorded interview sessions and typed all the responses from the student’s word-by-word. To ensure that these were transcribed correctly, the researcher reviewed the written documents two times while listening to the recorded interviews simultaneously.

Transcriptions and researcher notes were coded to identify emerging themes using MAXQDA (qualitative data analysis) software. MAXQDA allows the sorting of coded qualitative data in several ways. MAXQDA is qualitative data analysis system that allows written text documents to be uploaded to assign codes to organize themes and topics in research projects (VERBI Software, 2014). Using the categorization function, the researcher organized code segments that were automatically tagged with a participant’s pseudonym and interview date. Filters for participant, research question, topic area, code applied, and emerging theme were applied. The researcher also utilized the software’s mapping feature to organize data.
The analysis was first conducted using the research questions as an organizing principle. For example, in the section about how undocumented college students navigated through systems to find support, the relevant data was broken down to five topics: individuals who support undocumented college students, financial aid support, student advising and support, cultural competency in academic advising, and sanctuary college communities.

The next steps in the analysis consisted of creating memos and summaries that integrated information gleaned from the data with knowledge derived from the literature. Such information is conveyed by participants to introduce topics of discussion (Creswell, 2007). This reflective process helped to identify emergent themes in the study, which informed the findings discussed in later chapters.
Issues of Trustworthiness

To create a safe environment for the interviews, the researcher discussed his own experiences associated with being undocumented during his college years and described the confusion, consternation, and apprehension that often accompanied his journey through the unfamiliar world of American higher education. These disclosures were intended to establish rapport with study participants. Because the researcher serves as the instrument of data collection in qualitative research, it was important to assure participants that they could speak frankly. Beginning the interview process with descriptions of the researcher’s experience helped establish an interview environment characterized by common understanding, sensitivity, and respect. Participants were advised, however, that the researcher did not intend that these disclosures should shape their own in any way.

Delimitations and Limitations

Although the research protocol specified two interviews, some participants requested to meet more often because they had only small windows of opportunity to talk safely. As a result, the interviews in some cases were circumscribed by the time available. Each student was interviewed twice to ensure enough time to record and take notes. All of the interviews were transcribed into text documents.

Also pertinent to this study was the political context in which the study was conducted. Results of the presidential election in 2016 left many of the participants apprehensive about the future of immigration policy and their prospects for remaining in the United States. When the study began, questions about immigration policy were not part of the original plan. But the uncertain, even perilous, environment created by the recent election demanded that the researcher explore how participants viewed their experiences in light of the election. This area of
inquiry was not the focus of this research, however, and the relative absence of academic literature arising from the new wave of anti-immigrant sentiment argued against fully exploring that trajectory here, thus further study is indicated.

Summary

This chapter addressed the methodology used to study the educational experiences of seven Massachusetts undocumented college students and how they navigated U.S. college systems to find the support that enabled them to finish their degrees.

The study used a qualitative data collection method through interviews with participants. Participants were selected via snowball sampling, with the resulting group consisting of seven students representing the three categories of undocumented immigrant status: Temporary Protective Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and no-documentation status. All three categories render undocumented students ineligible for financial aid and other support services based on federal program eligibility and marginalized in college because of legal status.

Significant efforts were made to ensure the confidentiality and comfort of study participants and to establish an atmosphere of affiliation and trust. These efforts included approval of protocols for the protection of human subjects, data security, arrangement and equipment of interview spaces, and disclosure of the researcher’s prior experiences. Interviews were recorded, transcribed by the researcher, and coded using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. The coded transcriptions were initially organized according to the three research questions of the study (obstacles, navigation of college systems, and success in college) and then iteratively interrogated by sub-topics as relevant themes emerged. The researcher
supplemented these procedures by creating memos as the analysis progressed. The results of the study are discussed in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter provides contextual information to ensure a clear understanding of the study’s findings and is organized around the three guiding research questions that informed the study’s foundation. The following section headings are used: (a) Introduction; (b) Narrative Analysis; (c) Participant Data; (d) Guiding Research Question #1; (e) Guiding Research Question #2; (f) Guiding Research Question #3; and (g) Summary.

In investigating the experiences of undocumented immigrant college students, this study focused specifically on how students navigated U.S. college admission and administrative systems and used their academic and sociocultural relationships for support in finishing their degrees. The research was guided by the following questions:

GRQ #1: What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience?

GRQ #2: What are the various ways undocumented college students report institutional and economic factors that affect undocumented immigrant students’ college experiences?

GRQ #3: What factors did undocumented immigrant students report that contributed to their development of resilience in overcoming social and systemic setbacks in pursuing higher education?

Narrative Analysis

This qualitative study used a narrative research method to collect data from seven participants who were interviewed in English between April 2016 and August 2017 (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Participants were given open-ended questions to elicit narrative answers and
these were recorded. Each participant was interviewed twice for a minimum of one hour on each occasion. Codes were not established in advance but were derived using an inductive approach. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher and coded for thematic categories and subcategories using the qualitative data analysis software package MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2014). Four thematic categories emerged: Sociocultural Factors, Socioeconomic Factors, Institutional Barriers, and Resilience. Following is a description of each category and subcategory.

**Sociocultural Factors**

Participants identified several sociocultural factors that shaped their experiences in college. These factors stemmed, in part, from each participant’s community comprised of family, friends, and residential geography as well as their institutional contacts, defined as those contacts arising from school, work, and other official interactions. Also included in this category are the participants’ experiences, fears, and concerns regarding their leaving difficult living conditions in other countries, adapting to new lives in the U.S., and preparing for college. Three subcategories emerged from the analysis of sociocultural factors. These are Dislocation Struggles associated with adaptation to U.S. cultural norms; Immigration Status associated with college applications, and Supports and Pressures associated with family, community, and institutional influences.

**Socioeconomic Factors**

The second category, Socioeconomic Factors, captured the experiences participants described in securing sufficient financial resources while in college. These factors included identifying trustworthy individuals who could help with securing financial aid and resources to support participants in their academic endeavors. Within this category, the subcategories of
Employment and Financial Responsibilities emerged, which captured the participants’ concerns around safe employment and meeting their financial responsibilities.

**Institutional Barriers**

The third category identified, Institutional Barriers, captured participants’ experiences in identifying financial resources, culturally competent academic advising and support, sanctuary college communities, and trustworthy individuals within the college setting. Two subcategories emerged, Legal Limitations and Finding Support, which captured the participants’ experiences in dealing with the difficulties they encountered due to both federal law and institutional policy.

**Resilience**

The final thematic category, Resilience, captured how students develop resilience while managing the stresses associated with their undocumented status. Included in this category are the participants’ feelings and emotions regarding their dreams and aspirations, the value of a college degree, career strategy, perseverance when experiencing setbacks, and personal sacrifices. In this category, two subcategories were identified, Commitment to Education and Celebrating Success, which captured their hopes for the future, how they celebrated their successes, and their plans for finding pathways out of poverty.

**Participant Data**

Following is a sectioned overview of each pseudonymous participant, including their demographic information as well as their relevant personal circumstances and situation at the time of their interviews. A summary of each participant’s demographic characteristics and immigration status are presented in Table 7 and a summary of the characteristics of each participant’s educational situation immediately follows in Table 8.
Table 7

Demographic Characteristics and Immigration Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age at entry</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Year &amp; age at U.S. entry</th>
<th>English proficiency at U.S. entry</th>
<th>Immigration status during study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Early childhood</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>DACA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celly</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cabo Verde</td>
<td>2009 (16)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>2010 (14)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>TPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cabo Verde</td>
<td>2008 (13)</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardochee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>2010 (16)</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>TPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Early childhood</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>DACA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>2010 (14)</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>TPS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

Participants’ Educational Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>High school matriculation year</th>
<th>Age at matriculation</th>
<th>College type</th>
<th>Enrollment during study</th>
<th>Degree sought</th>
<th>Expected graduation</th>
<th>Area of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>A.S.</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celly</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardochee</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>A.S.</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Early Childhood Ed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Amanda

Amanda was a 23-year-old college senior studying nursing at a state school in Massachusetts. Her family was supportive of her academic goal and had provided some financial assistance. Amanda was granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) status in 2013 as an immigrant student from Venezuela. She worked part-time to help fund her studies.

Amanda’s parents and sister had legal status, but Amanda’s pathway to citizenship was not yet
clear. In 2015, Amanda received the final DACA renewal for which she was eligible and was uncertain about future options. Amanda was a member of the National Honor Society in high school and excelled academically in college.

Celly

Celly was a 24-year-old CaboVerdean female who arrived in the United States when she was in Grade 9. She spoke no English at that time. Because she missed the entry date requirement, Celly was ineligible for the DACA program in 2012 and was undocumented when she entered a bachelor’s degree program in liberal studies at a small private college that allowed her to pay for classes monthly. During a break in her academic studies, Celly had a baby, born in the United States. Through a lottery process, Celly was eventually able to obtain resident (green card) status. Her new status rendered her eligible for federal financial aid that allowed her to pay for full-time study, hold a steady job, and use the child care subsidies available as a single parent in college.

Davidson

Davidson was a 24-years-old Haitian who immigrated to the United States after the earthquake in 2010. His first American high school experience was in Miami, Florida, where he struggled with limited English. Davidson, his mother, and his brother later moved to Boston, where they applied for the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program open to Haitians displaced by the earthquake. They were granted TPS in 2011. In Boston, Davidson attended an international academy. While Davidson continued to struggle with English, he excelled in math and science, scoring highly on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam, a prerequisite for graduating with a high school diploma. Despite his English struggles, Davidson scored high overall on Massachusetts’ standardized assessment, earning him a scholarship in the
form of a tuition waiver to any Massachusetts public college or university. Davidson’s TPS status, however, rendered him ineligible for the award. Davidson completed his associate’s degree in 2015 and his bachelor’s degree in 2019. When interviewed, Davidson was working as a teller and customer service intern at the Bank of America.

**Jay**

Jay was a 23-year-old young man from Cabo Verde who came to the United States to live with his father. During Jay’s final years of high school, his father remarried and moved to Rhode Island. Jay opted to remain in Boston rather than join his new extended family, which resulted in periods of homelessness. After high school, Jay spent a year living and working on his own. With the help of a guidance counselor, Jay was able to obtain a state ID and other essential documents that would allow him to work legally and attend school. At the time he was interviewed, Jay’s new status also allowed him to receive financial aid towards his associate’s degree in business. Jay worked a night job to supplement the cost of living on his own and hoped to get assistance to obtain an apartment in the future. Jay was fluent in English as well as Portuguese and Spanish.

**Mardochee**

Mardochee was a 24-year-old female originally from Haiti. When interviewed, she was in her last year of study towards a bachelor’s degree in business management at a four-year private college. She and her siblings came to live in Boston after the 2010 earthquake on tourist visas; however, when the visas expired, they became undocumented individuals. Mardochee applied to the TPS program during her last year of public high school in Boston, which allowed her to work. Mardochee obtained a Certified Nurse’s Assistant (CNA) qualification while she was still in high school and worked in a nursing home. Mardochee saved her wages to pay for college
tuition and, as the eldest daughter, to contribute towards supporting her family. Through her savings, Mardochee was able to pay for her entire college education. When interviewed, she was working as a driver for an online car service to make extra money to pay for school. She had recently applied for the last extension of the TPS program for Haitians and was approved for six additional months but was uncertain about the future. She hoped to be able to register for all the classes needed to graduate with her bachelor’s degree in May of 2018. Mardochee spoke fluent English, French, and Creole and was knowledgeable of other languages.

**Pablo**

Pablo was a 22-year-old male from Colombia who came to the United States as a young child with his parents on a tourist visa, which the family overstayed. During his youth, he was unaware of his undocumented status. Pablo learned of his status when he was beginning to prepare college applications in the 11th grade. Pablo’s family and an attorney friend prepared the paperwork for DACA and for Pablo to attend a community college in Massachusetts. Pablo was an only child, and his father had saved some money to pay for his higher education. Pablo found a public community college near the family home and worked part-time to pay for his expenses. At the time of his interview, Pablo’s DACA status was in jeopardy due to the potential elimination of the program. He was afraid to renew his application because he was nervous that if it was not approved, ICE would find him and ask questions about his parents. Pablo was paying in full for his classes and took care to keep up to date with payments. Because he lived at home with his parents, he was also able to save enough to purchase a car. Pablo never revealed what town he lived in, but wanted to participate in this study.
Rose

Rose was a 23-year-old student enrolled in a small private college in Boston who came to the United States with her siblings after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. They lived with an aunt in Boston. Rose enrolled as an undocumented student in high school until her TPS status was approved and she was able to work legally. Although her TPS status did not allow her to access federal financial aid, she was able to identify a few philanthropically funded scholarships that did not require documentation of residency. Throughout her first years in college, Rose worked as a night parking attendant at a state university in Boston and then at an early childhood center. Rose decided on a career as a public-school teacher and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in education. She was selected for a teaching fellowship with the Boston Public Schools through which she received support and guidance to prepare her for a career in the classroom and for meeting state requirements for teaching licensure were she to successfully receive a TPS extension. Rose paid for her entire education on her own, without loans, using more than $50,000 of saved money that she earned.

Data Analysis

A thematic approach was used to code and interpret the interview transcripts and the researcher’s notes. MAXQDA software was employed throughout to facilitate the analytic process and data display. Analysis began with coding that addressed subject areas of the study’s three research questions: (a) social and economic factors, including obstacles or challenges, that shaped students’ experiences; (b) support systems students relied upon; and (c) strategies students used for obtaining and using college resources to scaffold their success. Initially, 424 extracts from the 14 hours of transcribed interviews and the researcher’s notes were identified as meaningful for further coding and analysis. These segments were then organized by topic.
Topics are loosely defined as explicit referents, that is, as subjects that speakers refer to (Ribeiro, 1994). Through further analysis, seemingly disparate topics coalesce to form emergent themes, which embrace meaningful references that may recur implicitly across topics (Ribeiro, 1994). Themes thus interpret topics at a higher level of abstraction. For example, when a participant discussed achieving a life goal concerning any topic, the thematic code “hopes and dreams” was applied. Similarly, the topics dreams taken away, fears, stigma, and concerns, preparing for college, and college advisors all may be captured by the single theme of "secrecy and trust."

**Guiding Research Question #1**

What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience?

The goal of Guiding Research Question #1 was to identify the influences on an immigrant student’s success in college from a cultural perspective. To provide a deeper understanding of these influences and to facilitate discussion, participants were asked questions from the list of Interview Questions each received before their interview (Appendix F). For GRQ #1, the relevant guiding interview questions included:

1. Tell me about you. Where you come from and about your desire to attend college in the U.S.?

2. What do you study? What is your vision for your career? What do you want to accomplish with your college degree?

3. Which of these categories applies to you: DACA, TPS, or No Documentation?

4. What do you remember about your experience in applying to an American college? Was there anything that you recall as a difficult step as a student with limited documentation?
Data Discussion

The families of Davidson, Mardochee, and Rose fled Haiti following a devastating earthquake in 2010 that significantly destroyed the already poor country’s physical, economic, and governmental infrastructure. Consequently, these participants and/or their families entered the United States with diminished material assets but with hope for economic opportunity and security like so many others before them. Mardochee recalled that following the few moments of the earthquake’s violence, “It was a complete disaster everywhere. It was dark and everyone was asking for help and asking for God. My home and my school collapsed, and one of my adopted sisters passed away.” Rose noted that “the earthquake left such disaster that my father had no choices but to send me [with her siblings] to the U.S.” to continue their education. Davidson echoed these words, stating there was “too much disaster after the earthquake.” U.S. law interprets immigration under such circumstances as stemming from an involuntary crisis and assigns Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to entrants fleeing a natural disaster. TPS is renewable but ultimately time-limited; those who hold it are protected from deportation but under the assumption that they will return to the home country when circumstances there improve. Thus, complicating Davidson’s, Mardochee’s, and Rose’s efforts to adapt to life in the United States was the inherently tenuous nature of their U.S. immigration status.

Amanda’s family fled disaster of a different kind: economic and political collapse in Venezuela. Given the conditions, Amanda said, “we had no choice.” Pablo, from Colombia, said that he was never quite sure why his family left the country but that they were both sad and relieved to do so. Venezuela’s decades-long history of civil and economic unrest suggests several possible circumstances underlying their departure. Both Amanda and Pablo had been brought to the United States outside legal immigration procedures, but because this had occurred before
they reached age 16, they became eligible for DACA protection in 2012 under President Barack Obama’s administration. Like TPS, DACA status offered protection from deportation, but it required renewal every two years. At the time of their interviews, the Trump Administration was actively attempting to cancel the DACA program. Like Davidson, Mardochee, and Rose, Amanda, Pablo experienced the demands of cultural adaptation while experiencing a tremendous amount of political and legal uncertainty.

For participants Celly and Jay, whose families joined relatives who had preceded them in coming to the United States, the stress of adapting to life in the U.S. was exacerbated by anxieties associated with their having entered the United States on expired tourist visas. This meant that they, unlike those with TPS or DACA designation, lived day-to-day under threat of deportation as well as exclusion from legal employment.

The effects of these legal and political pressures combined with differences in participants’ personal or cultural values served as obstacles these students had to negotiate in their journeys to college.

**Family Separations**

Each student’s family, friends, and residential community presented unique challenges for these students as well. Family dynamics emerged as important influences in their adjustment to life in the United States. Two aspects of family dynamics were evident in participant comments: family separation which was associated with the stresses of immigration, and familial obligation, which was associated with both their new families of families of origin. If the stresses of geographic and cultural dislocation fracture a family, this very personal disaster exacerbates the stresses of a young person’s adjustment to the new country environment. Although study participants were initially reluctant to share painful details of loneliness and separation from their
families of origin, some eventually shared stories of personal desolation associated with their immigration. Through the interview process, details emerged haltingly and some are omitted here to preserve participants’ privacy.

Rose spoke with exceptional poignancy about separation from her family in the wake of the Haitian earthquake and her resettlement in the United States. Brought to the United States at age 15 along with her two younger siblings, she was staggered when her father left them to live with non-kin strangers of Haitian extraction the children didn’t know and where the children faced a language barrier and physical neglect:

My father [said he] brought us here for a better life, and then left [us]…to stay here with somebody that we had never met. We could not communicate with them, we didn’t speak English and they didn’t speak good Creole. (…) I was very upset by that for a long time, for [his] leaving us with people that…didn’t really take good care of us. I felt neglected and unwanted, alone. We were afraid all the time.

Looking back, Rose said her father questioned the decision to break up the family in this way, despite his belief at the time that the sacrifice would yield opportunity for his children. Clearly, there was great pain on both sides, stemming first from the devastating earthquake and then the heart-rending decision to leave Rose and her siblings to confront a lonely and uncertain future unsupported. Yet Rose said she has reassured her father that coming to the United States was “the best thing that could happen to me.”

Celly’s journey to the United States came with a similar backstory of prior family separation and migration. When Celly was five years old, her mother’s solo move from Cabo Verde to Portugal left Celly first with an aunt and then her grandmother. Neither placement,
Celly noted, provided her with sufficient care. Eventually, Celly entered the United States to join extended family members living in Boston as a teenager in Grade 9. Celly had just missed the age of eligibility for DACA status, so when she outstayed her tourist visa, she became undocumented. She recalled:

> My mom then moved us to America. I didn't like it here and asked to go back to Portugal but she didn't let me. The “family” that we were supposed to live with did not act as family. (...) I felt isolated. (...) Being in a country undocumented, with no papers, is the most hurtful thing in my life.

Like Rose, however, Celly insisted that, despite the many hardships she has endured, “I still believe I can tell a story that illustrates that in this country dreams that seem impossible can be possible.”

For Jay, the family fracture occurred after they emigrated from Cabo Verde to the United States when Jay was 14. His father left the family while Jay was finishing high school. Jay then set out to live on his own in Boston. This additional transition resulted in Jay’s falling prey to misfortune:

> I was renting a room in a house. They [the people who rented space to me] were trying to kick me out of the house, trying to put in somebody else. (...) I was young, I was stupid. I was growing up, I was learning. What happened was somebody got into my room and stole my green card. So I lost my green card and I didn't have documents for a long time. Every time I went to get a copy I could not get it.
Jay interpreted this costly loss as his fault, although it was clear he’d been unequipped for living on his own. It was also apparent that Jay, as he related this dilemma, felt desperately dislocated for some time.

**Family Obligations**

Study participants spoke of two types of family obligations that impacted their sociocultural adjustment to American culture: those associated with supporting their family’s functioning in the present and those associated with a perceived duty to create future security. Immigrant youngsters often assumed parentified roles, acting, for example, as language and culture brokers (Brisk, 2013). Participants in this study reported that they believed that current family obligations added to their challenges as immigrant students even though they felt a sense of duty in providing future support to family members. This pressure motivated them to succeed in higher education and aim for a financially stable career.

Mardochee was the most forthcoming on such issues. For example, she explained that as the eldest child and a woman, she found herself assuming parental responsibilities for her siblings:

> When I first came to the United States, I translated all of our documents so my mom could understand their meaning and sign her name. To this day, I am the only member of my family with enough English knowledge to do basic tasks like paying bills, translating report cards and attending teacher conferences for my younger brothers and complete all of the paperwork related to our lives here in Boston.
She continued:

I would sign papers for one of my brothers. I remember on one occasion I had to sign a paper and pretend to be my mom. I had to dress like my mom, do my hair like my mom, and went to the school not even being 18 yet and I had to pretend to be my little brother's mother because we didn't know English. Can you imagine that I had to sign legal papers because my mom couldn't do it? I had to make sure that my family was taken care of.

Mardochee stated frankly that times when she needed to serve as the family translator repeatedly took time from her studies, noting that she had to “drop everything” when people came to the house so that she could interpret even when she was doing homework. Moreover, Mardochee connected circumstances like this directly to the limitations of the family’s temporary immigration status, stating “If I had a green card it would have been easier [because] my mom would not have needed me and she could get an interpreter. We were so ashamed to say that we had TPS.” This admission revealed two important sociocultural consequences of the hierarchical nature of immigration classification: variable access to supportive services and internalized social stigma.

Although other study participants declined to provide such specific details for inclusion in the study, across the board they reported that money they earned was used for two purposes: meeting day-to-day expenses and helping the family. Rose, for example, reported using earnings not only to pay tuition but also to help her siblings and her aunt back home:

[She] has nothing to eat. I know that I have some family members that is really hard for them to get the basic needs of life, to pay for rent, eating, getting some clothes, and taking care of their bodies. Believe it or not, whether I'm
undocumented or not, in this country life here is much better than back home in Haiti.

Rose emphasized that she spoke only about her circumstances, but she said she believed that others in her position likewise provided financial support both to family members in the United States and to those in the home country.

Pablo exemplified the other aspect of family obligation that study participants experienced: he viewed educational and financial success as a way of thanking his parents for his opportunities because they worked hard to provide for him. He hoped to reciprocate by providing his parents with financial security during their old age. Demonstrating exceptional maturity for a young man of college age, Pablo was aware that his parents had diverted what might have become their savings for retirement to providing him the opportunity to build a more secure future:

I am doing this for my parents, I know they have tried really hard to make sure I go to college and I make something of myself. I can help, I can really help my family if I can get a job, be legal one day and help them with money. They pay for my school and I will pay for them to be okay when they get older. I know this is my responsibility to help my family.

Although study participants did not speak of these two varieties of filial support as burdens, clearly they felt their weight at a period in their lives when they already were confronting considerable challenges associated with their adjustment to U.S. academic and social norms. Among their families, these immigrant students were pioneers, and though they might welcome their relatives’ affection or support, they were not able to turn to them for advice about navigating their U.S. college experience.
Adapting to the environment of a new educational system posed challenges beyond simple English proficiency. Mardochee eloquently summed up her adjustment to U.S. culture in terms of pressures to conform at school:

Being an undocumented student you have to deal with everything, not even just being a student. You have to deal with the new language, the new country, you have to fit with everybody else, you have to worry about your accents or speaking English and (...) are you writing well? And the thing is that we do hear people judge you on, how well you speak or write English. The way you write English—this is how you measure in this country.

Her words served as a reminder that while some adult immigrants can ease their entry into U.S. society by operating within communities of common ethnicity, students must immediately conform to a school environment where success is measured in ways that are highly culturally encoded. For an immigrant student intent on higher education, this translated to immediate and crucial pressures to decode and adapt to new performance standards while at the same time experiencing stigmatization and marginalization.

**Stigmatization and Marginalization**

Similar to Mardochee, who disclosed that she and her family were embarrassed by their TPS status, other study participants admitted experiencing similar feelings. Among the seven students interviewed, all experienced stigmatization and marginalization resulting in feelings of fear, shame, and discouragement. Jay was most forthcoming about this obstacle to sociocultural adjustment. Recall that Jay’s status was somewhat ambiguous, in that he said he’d had a green card that was stolen. Jay recalled that when he still looked young enough that he had to show identification for admission to an R-rated movie, he found that the photocopy of his
identification card was not accepted. Jay was mortified when the denial occurred in front of his friends. He also recounted a frightening encounter with police—a prospect more alarming since Jay, like other interviewees, was uncertain about the extent to which local police communicated with ICE:

There was a girl that I was dating and we got into an argument and then she called the police on me. The police came to search me, asked to see my ID, I was like, how am I able to explain the situation to the police? I was scared to go outside where I could not identify myself.

Even more public, and therefore more humiliating, was an encounter with a professor during Jay’s first course at a community college:

[In the middle of the class], the instructor said, “What are you doing here if you don't have documents? That means that you're undocumented or illegal.” They kicked me out! She said that [the] financial aid [office] was missing documents. I didn't understand what was happening, just that they asked me to leave for financial aid reasons. No one would sit down and actually talk to [me]. I tried my best. Everyone wanted a physical document, which I just didn't have.

Jay recalled feeling “just lost [without] anything that could identify [me] as a person.”

Davidson expressed similar feelings of isolation, stating “For the whole [first] summer I did not go out. I stayed home and worked on the computer.” At that time, Davidson knew little English and had not yet started school.

Study participants also recounted times when they overheard their fellow students discussing immigration issues, which were frequently in the news given President Trump’s highly publicized anti-immigrant rhetoric and his support for a border wall with Mexico.
Participants found such comments deeply humiliating, and they sought to conceal their immigration status from all but a very few trusted individuals, believing that even a casual remark could get them deported. Davidson summarized his frustration thusly: “I am tired of what people think and say [about immigrants], that they're not good enough for society, they're stupid or something, they cannot achieve greatness. (…) It wasn't really fair! I came here for a reason.” In Davidson’s case, the precipitating reason was Haiti’s 2010 earthquake, but the underlying sentiment was America’s reputation as a place where one could find opportunities for a better life. It was this faith in an American Dream that was shaken for each of the study participants as they confronted the limitations imposed by their immigration status.

**Data Analysis GRQ #1**

The data collected in this study was organized into groups using a thematic analysis methodology (Creswell, 2007). Codes for Guiding Research Question #1 are captured in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Overview of Interview Codes for Guiding Research Question #1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question #1: What role do sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful experience in college?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content codes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving difficult living conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to a new life in America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparing for college</td>
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<td>Support in the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status and restrictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fears and concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Guiding Research Question #1 Findings

Three findings emerged from Guiding Research Question #1.

Finding #1

*Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing limited opportunities as new immigrants that contributed to feelings of dislocation and isolation.*

All the young people in this study initially described the background for their immigration with some dispassion, but all admitted feeling emotional pain, isolation, and marginalization due to the circumstances associated with their arrival in the U.S. Each family’s immigration decision was driven by conditions of duress, which contributed to the participants’ vigilance and anxiety concerning their family’s safety and security as undocumented or vulnerably documented individuals in American society. Efforts at cultural adaptation were constrained by each participants’ immigration status.

Finding #2

*Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing strong feelings of cultural pressure and financial responsibility towards their families both in the U.S. and in their home countries.*

Participants in this study reported that current family obligations added to their already difficult array of challenges as immigrant students and that, at the same time, a sense of duty to provide future support to family members—principally, parents or siblings—motivated them to succeed in higher education and a future career. In addition to structural conditions that impelled study participants’ immigration, family dynamics emerged as important in their adjustment to life in the United States. Families often experienced fractures associated with the stresses of
immigration, and some participants’ experienced a strong sense of current and future obligations to their families of origin as a result.

Finding #3

Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing stigmatization and marginalization resulting in feelings of fear, shame, and discrimination because of their immigrant status.

All participants said they were constantly afraid they would be deported, and those fears led them to routinely conceal the fact that their presence in the United States was either temporary or legally proscribed. As a result, they reported that they shrank from forming close relationships with peers and instructors and from taking advantage of ancillary offerings, such as clubs or off-campus travel opportunities. They equated intimacy with the risk of disclosure and potential deportation, thus forfeiting some of the social support that college students enjoy and rely upon. They acknowledged that these circumstances left them feeling profoundly isolated. Those with overstayed visas felt especially at risk, worried that any disclosure of their status would expose them to expulsion from the United States. Those with TPS and DACA protection said that they worried about what would happen when their eligibility expired or when the program would be discontinued.

Guiding Research Question #2

What are the various ways undocumented college students report institutional and economic factors that affect undocumented immigrant students’ college experiences?

The goal of Guiding Research Question #2 was to identify the institutional and socioeconomic factors that most affected an undocumented student’s success in college. To provide a deeper understanding of these influences and to facilitate discussion, participants were
asked questions from the list of Interview Questions each received before their interview (Appendix F). For GRQ #2, the relevant guiding interview questions were:

3. Which of these categories applies to you: DACA, TPS, No Documentation?
4. What do you remember about your experience in applying to an American college? Was there anything that you recall as a difficult step as a student with limited documentation?
5. Can you reflect on the people who helped you during the application process and academic advising? What was helpful to you? And what could have been different?
8. Tell me about how you handle paying for school and your education? Is there anyone at the college that helps you with these things? How do you feel about financial aid for undocumented students?
9. Have you thought about seeking support for financial aid? For example, writing to the financial aid department or finding an outside scholarship source?
10. When you have questions about your courses or activities in school how do you find help? Is there a person or department that can help you?
11. Do you feel that you can trust the college staff to know about your status? How about your professors (or your advisor)? In college, who do you mingle with? Are some of your friends also undocumented? How do you know?

Data Discussion

Legal Barriers

For all study participants, fear of legal/criminal reprisal and deportation cast a long shadow over all aspects of their daily lives. It must be emphasized that participants’ fears of
deportation were rooted in reality. In an era of turmoil surrounding immigration, those who lacked any form of legal status (Celly and Jay) indeed lived in ongoing jeopardy. According to a report on ICE arrest and deportations under the Trump administration (Pew Research Institute, 2020), administrative arrests made by Customs and Border Patrol rose by 30% in 2017 after Trump signed an executive order to detain unauthorized immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2018). Those with TPS (Davidson, Mardochee, Rose) or DACA status (Amanda and Pablo) nominally enjoyed legal protection, but both of these programs were subject to cancellation, and the students worried constantly that they would lose this coverage and be forced to either leave the United States or withdraw from school and try to live underground. Moreover, both immigration programs required recipients to reregister periodically, processes that entailed not only fear of losing eligibility but also significant fees. Of course, these students do not bear similar risks of lethality, but given the circumstances under which some of them fled to the United States, it is fair to posit that, to them, the specter of deportation represented a kind of annihilation.

Another way in which fear of legal reprisal shaped study participants’ experiences as undocumented college students concerned the constraints their immigration status placed on their relationships with persons and activities on campus. Participants described reluctance to acknowledge their immigration status to avoid negative social interactions (regardless of documentation) and in response to fears of deportation that were exacerbated by the bellicose anti-immigrant stance of the Trump administration. Indeed, all participants said they were constantly fearful they would be deported, and those fears led to routine concealment of the fact that their presence in the United States was either temporary or legally proscribed. As a result, they reported that they shrank from forming close relationships with not only peers but also
instructors, resulting in an unwillingness to take advantage of ancillary offerings such as clubs or off-campus travel opportunities. They equated intimacy with the risk of disclosure and potential deportation, thus forfeiting some of the social support that college students enjoy and rely upon. Those with overstayed visas felt especially at risk, as they were worried that any disclosure of their status would expose them to expulsion from the United States. Those with TPS and DACA protection said that they worried about the expiration of their eligibility and whether the program would be discontinued.

Rose acknowledged her semi-secure TPS status as a near-constant source of stress. On the one hand, she noted, “[TPS] guarantees me that I am protected from deportation. It says that I am temporarily protected; that means I am not completely illegal.” On the other hand, she conceded:

I am terrified. I don't know what my next move will be. Undocumented students are always afraid. What happens if they do not renew TPS? That means I have to go back to Haiti. I don't have a home back home. I don't have anything left, everything has changed, and I might not even know my way to get home because Boston is my new home.

Having to apply for TPS renewal only exacerbated Rose’s stress about her status:

Every time it is about to expire, you have to apply again. It's for 18 months [but] you have about 15 months to reapply. It's all money all the time that you have to pay for TPS. (…) With all this experience, I have to grow up fast.

Thus, Rose lived under the constant weight that she was living in the United States on sufferance and that she needed not only to observe the educational and cultural norms that would
allow her to succeed academically but also to remain vigilant about her vulnerability as an immigrant.

Davidson, too, expressed fear that the TPS program for Haitian immigrants would be terminated, and Mardochee, despite holding TPS, expressed pervasive fear:

I was so afraid someone was going to catch me because I had an expired passport. Home for us was always safe, we would not go outside, and we would not spend time outside because we were afraid someone was going to catch us. We didn't even talk about TPS. (…) We are so afraid, my mom has not been able to sleep well [since the 2016 presidential election]. She often thinks [about] whether she is safe in her own home.

All of these students spoke about “hurrying up” completion of their degrees to avoid getting “caught short” if their status were to expire. At the time of the interviews, TPS for the 46,000 eligible Haitian immigrants was scheduled to end on January 2, 2020; however, in response to litigation, eligibility was extended through January 4, 2021.

Pablo, who was protected by DACA, echoed Mardochee’s fears that the threat of deportation was increasing:

I’m really scared of what the new president might do. I think he hates immigrants, and since I am in college, all I want to do is finish and get a job. I don’t know what is going to happen, but I don’t have plans of leaving my home. No way. I need help to understand everything that he says on TV, I don’t know if they will come for me.

Amanda also felt her DACA protection under threat from political changes expected under a Trump presidency:
I feel frustrated. I'm scared a little bit of what's going to happen with this new president. You never know that is the only thing that I have that gives me hope that I want to finish school, I already set up my plan I'm going to finish school. Without DACA I wouldn't be able to work. With everything going on, I’m a little bit nervous DACA is the only thing I have. I think other people are scared as well, they don't know what to expect.

Particularly fearful were those students with no documentation at all. Celly, for instance, revealed:

I am scared. Even though I have papers I'm still not a hundred percent confident that everything's going to be okay. A couple of months ago I was traveling and people look concerned they were looking at the news, I was so worried. I saw that other people from other countries were worried about traveling.

Economic Challenges

As is the case for many college students who are United States citizens, finances represented a challenge for study participants in two principal ways: paying for basic living expenses and paying for the tuition and fees associated with college attendance. But unlike their citizen counterparts, undocumented students found that meeting these expenses was profoundly more difficult due to their immigration status. While those with TPS or DACA could legally work, those without such documentation were forced into the informal economy, where employment was scarce, ill-paid, insecure, and exploitative. And while American students and their families are certainly challenged by the spiraling costs of college attendance, immigrant students, regardless of their academic performance, are excluded from the academic financing
sources available to most American students, such as federally guaranteed loans, grants, and most other scholarship programs.

All the students participating in this study said that they were employed during their time in college, and all experienced difficulties in finding paid work. Those with temporary documentation (DACA status or TPS) could work using their valid Social Security numbers and work permits; however, those who lacked documentation were forced to find work in the informal, or off-the-books, economy. For example, Amanda, whose DACA status afforded her a work permit resembling a green (residency) card, was employed part-time in her high school as an assistant librarian. The students with TPS, although legally allowed to work, tended to have more unstable employment, however, working in areas such as food delivery, parking lot attending, and home health. Students without documentation turned to odd jobs in local stores or positions in overnight security, the food industry, and ride-sharing services. To avoid detection, they sought work in their own, typically close-knit, neighborhoods. Celly, for example, reported that undocumented workers were particularly vulnerable to wage exploitation, forcing students to be resourceful and diligent in managing their finances:

I started working the minimum wage was like $8 but because I was working under the table because of my situation I was making like $6. Even though that was super low I ended up saving money to pay for school from there. When the bill came home I spend all of my money paying for school.

All of the students in this study reported that they had to assume the responsibilities for providing financial support for basic living expenses for both themselves and their families while saving for college expenses. The cost of higher education in the U.S. posed a significant obstacle for the students in this study. In interviews, most said they were aware of the high cost of tuition,
but most were initially unaware of the extent to which their immigration status would constrain their access to the sources of funding that students with citizenship typically rely upon. Their high schools’ academic guidance departments encouraged them to complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and scholarship forms to see whether they would qualify for aid, but of the seven students participating in this study, only one was eligible to apply for enough small private scholarships to cover any tuition. This student received a $2,500 scholarship from the city of Boston, renewable annually, as long as she maintained a GPA above 3.0. The amount was sufficient to cover the costs of one or two courses.

The geographic location of the participants in this study is relevant, as well. Metropolitan Boston has one of the priciest rental markets in the nation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), the cost of housing averaged $22,048 per year. For Mardochee and other students, living in the Boston area typically meant saving over $1,500 every month to pay for rent. Nevertheless, saving money for school was a priority for most of the students interviewed who described the need to become especially strategic about earning and spending. They noted that their school selection was largely driven by financial concerns and less by whether or not the school was the best fit academically. For Mardochee, the sacrifices of not attending the college of her choice were frustrating; she saw these sacrifices as unnecessary and felt strongly that students should not have to sacrifice their hard work and high academic achievements, like her 3.8 GPA. Making matters worse, Mardochee noted, were the costs associated with maintaining their immigration status:

What happens if they don't renew TPS in January? TPS FEE? for $500 for 6 months. I used to pay $200 for 2 years, now we have to pay $500 for 6 months. Where am I going to come up with that money? How am I supposed to do that
when I have to worry about coming up with $500 every 6 months? And the worst, if they cancel it, I have to go back home.

The fees Mardochee referred to were related to federal filing fees for TPS re-registration and employment authorization. Currently, the fees to apply for TPS are significant for undocumented students of limited means. To request Temporary Protected Status, an individual must complete an I-821 (application for Temporary Protected Status), which costs $50 to file plus $85 for required Biometric Services as well as the completion of an I-765 (Employment Authorization Document), which costs $410 for a total of $545. The cost of re-registering is $495.00 and must be renewed every six months (Bray et al., 2017; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Application for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), 2019). Table 10 illustrates the change over time in the expenses associated with TPS application:

**Table 10**

*Immigration Applications Costs 2007 – 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application components</th>
<th>2007 costs</th>
<th>2020 costs</th>
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<tr>
<td>I-821</td>
<td>$130.00 (included Biometrics)</td>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biometric Services</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-765 Employment</td>
<td>$175.00</td>
<td>$410.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorization Document</td>
<td>(EAD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>$305</td>
<td>$545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College Enrollment Challenges**

In addition to economic barriers, participants often experienced college-related challenges while still in high school. Amanda, who held DACA status, said, “I was kind of sad
that the guidance counselor wasn’t giving me the same options as the other students to go to
college.” Mardochee, who had earned a 3.8 cumulative GPA, had a similar experience as did
Rose, who was advised that her TPS status would limit her choices for college despite having
parents who could provide at least some financial support. Amanda resisted her counselor’s
advice and applied to 12 schools. Celly, who lacked any legal status, recalled:

I see students applying for six, seven, eight colleges but when it comes to us [the
undocumented students] the guidance counselor sees few options for me to go to
college. That made me feel terrible. I don't even have the words for this, it's
embarrassing. Why is everybody applying for different colleges and I have to
apply for less?

Like other study participants, Celly said that she felt devalued by her adviser’s
recommendations and that her hard-won academic accomplishments were eclipsed by her
immigration status and financial realities. It may have been the case that the counselors’
approach was appropriately pragmatic, given the constraints these students’ immigration status
imposed. Mardochee, for example, reported that she was completely unprepared for the
limitation in her choice of colleges because of her high academic achievement in high school.
Only Jay regarded his guidance counselor positively as someone who “helped me get into
college.” Given Jay’s unhappy family circumstances, it may be that his expectations were lower.

It was certainly the case that facts weighed against study participants’ educational
choices. The Common Application, utilized by more than 800 colleges in the United States,
requires applicants to disclose their residential address and their citizenship status. Study
participants reported that they found both of these conditions threatening. Disclosing a
residential address was problematic because, even if the immigrant applicant was in the United
States legally, others in the household might not be, and disclosing an address could put household members at risk. Pablo was typical of many young persons who hold DACA status in that he was reluctant to disclose his address on forms of any kind. Amanda, too, was hesitant to disclose her status, saying that she “was just looking for any place that would take me where they wouldn’t ask too many questions.” Such fears were not entirely warranted, in that educational institutions are not required to report an applicant’s immigration status to the government, but the trepidation providing such information caused reflects the level of exclusion they felt.

The Common Application’s citizenship question provoked even greater anxiety than the residential address question among study participants, who perceived the question as invasive and appeared to interpret its purpose as threatening. The question asks citizenship status, list citizenship, do you currently hold a valid Visa? And if you intend to apply for a new or different U.S. Visa, please indicate that type of Visa. Some study participants claimed they left it blank. The purpose of the question, however, is largely benign and is used to determine eligibility for the in-state tuition rate at public colleges and universities as well as publicly funded loans, grants, and other financial awards. A few states permit undocumented immigrants to pay the lower in-state tuition rate and to apply for state scholarships or other forms of state financial aid. Like most states, however, Massachusetts, where the participants lived, does not, which effectively caused them to be treated as international applicants. This meant that they were subject to paying the much higher out-of-state tuition rate at public community colleges, colleges, and universities and were barred not only from federally guaranteed loans, grants, or scholarships but also from Pell grants reserved for low-income applicants, federally funded work-study awards, and state or municipal scholarships. Study participants with DACA or TPS
allowed them to obtain a Social Security number, which enabled them to complete a FAFSA, but given the restrictions listed above, there was no benefit in doing so.

All seven study participants met the academic criteria for merit-based financial awards. Some won full-tuition scholarships to their schools of choice but could not accept them if they required citizenship. Pablo was one of these and recalled:

I did get a scholarship. There was a state school that sent me a financial aid letter that had almost everything paid for, it said that my contribution was only $1,200. I was so happy, I thought all my dreams had come true...later I found out that they needed me to be a U.S. [permanent] resident to use the scholarships, but I just didn’t have papers.

Similarly, Davidson received a tuition waiver to any public institution of higher education in Massachusetts thanks to his high scores on the required MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) test but was ineligible to accept it because he lacked citizenship. He said:

I was the first student ever to get that Adam scholarship which pays for any state school. I was devastated, [and] because of that reason I didn't think I could go to college. I couldn't believe that I couldn't take advantage of that scholarship when I got the highest score. I don't know who exactly selected the students. But I do know whoever has the highest score in the MCAS can get that scholarship, and I did.

Davidson’s recall regarding the specifics of his award here was somewhat inaccurate. In Massachusetts, all students whose MCAS scores in Science, English, and Mathematics exceed a designated target qualify for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship, which provides the
student with a tuition waiver. Students, however, are responsible for all other fees and expenses associated with admission and attendance. That aside, Davidson was denied the award because he lacked U.S. citizenship.

Study participants felt these denials deeply. They had not sought to live in the United States without documentation but were subject to the consequences of their family’s, i.e., parents’ decisions. All had excelled at public high schools on the same terms as their citizen peers—and, in some cases, outmatching them. Rose, who was exceptionally reflective, observed that denying students like her the means to obtain a college degree, whether through awards or publicly guaranteed loans, constituted a disservice not only to a young person committed to self-improvement but also to the community and the nation who would benefit from the contributions such an individual was capable of making. This observation applied to each of the study participants whose academic achievements and determination to overcome the systemic barriers they encountered in their college application process demonstrated their motivation to learn and productively use their higher education.

Participants described discrimination throughout their years in high school, with many of their teachers and peers either unsupportive or indifferent to their plans to attend college. Mardochee, Amanda, and Rose were told that choices for colleges would be limited to them because of their status. As they navigated the stages of their college journey—preparing applications, accepting an offer of admission, and preparing for college study—participants became increasingly aware of the limitations imposed by their lack of U.S. permanent residency or citizenship. Study participants described guidance counselors who were not prepared to address the many obstacles that the students faced in getting accepted, getting a scholarship, and attending a college in the United States. In some cases, like for Mardochee, the guidance
counselor did not prepare the student to understand how her status would affect attending college, and the news was a shock:

Until today, I have never told anyone that story. When I got out, he was waiting for me in the auditorium, he told me I could understand why you are mad, then I told him, I said: "you know why I am mad? It's because I know that it is not easy, but no one told me that it would be that difficult.

Barred from accessing the most common sources for financing higher education, study participants’ were forced to view affordability as their top criterion for college applications and selection. Few had family members who commanded the resources to offer more than minimal financial support, and some knew that they would have to be entirely self-funding. This meant that, regardless of their academic proficiency, they would be unable to study at a school away from home, unable to afford the in-state tuition and fees they would be charged at public institutions nearby, and certainly unable to afford tuition and fees at out-of-state public institutions and most four-year colleges, regardless of whether they could qualify for admission. Moreover, those who were ineligible for legal employment (Celly and Jay, who held neither TPS nor DACA status) were locked out of a way to accumulate savings to support college attendance.

Study participants revealed, however, that, although they were frustrated, they remained determined despite these realities. Mardochee, who was accepted to 11 colleges, recalled:

After a lot of crying, praying and frustration, I had to come up with a solution, and my parents suggested that I go to community college. I said to myself, "I worked for a 3.8 GPA to go to a community college? I can go to Northeastern University, but you want me to go to a community college?" I said to myself “if I
can’t go to a real college, I'm just not going to go to college, but I'm not going to a community college.”

Rose’s account clarifies the determination that set in for study participants once they grieved their lost possibilities:

Some of the colleges said congratulations [on admission]…but it’s $40,000…I have to say “Rose you have to focus.” So, I don't give up. If not, it's a waste of time and money. I will fall and pick myself up because I don't have those parents looking after me. (…) So that means Rose has to pay for school. It’s all me.

Pablo and Davidson echoed these experiences, as well. Pablo noted:

One of the schools that I wanted to attend would cost, like, $30,000, which was a lot of money. I couldn’t tell my dad that. So, later when we moved I found through my friend that a community college was a lot cheaper. I just had to get used to the idea of living at home and not the dorms. I was unhappy with that.

And Davidson recalled:

I started to get excited about the idea of going to [a specific] college. I knew it was pricey but I [wanted to] try to pay for tuition. My family didn’t have enough money [for me] to go to college. I wasn’t sure if I was going to be accepted to any school [because of the barriers]. That was one of my most stressful moments.

Pablo and Amanda (both of whom held DACA status) chose a community college, citing cost as a factor. Mardochee, Davidson, and Rose (all with TPS) found a small private college with lower costs and payment plans. Celly and Jay (who lacked legal status) also chose a low-cost private college but attended part-time. These decisions were tremendously painful for all participants and required dedication as well as a measure of luck.
Once their college journeys began, study participants revealed that they faced new challenges to academic success and opportunity, often mirroring the challenges experienced during the admissions process. All participants experienced financial stress as they sought to maintain their own (and sometimes their families’) economic survival, struggling to keep current on college costs and juggling employment and school schedules. As a result, most study participants’ progress through their degree programs was slow. For example, some enrolled only in as many courses as they could pay for in a semester while others were forced to interrupt their education to gather sufficient resources to continue. As well, several participants pointed to educational or career-preparation opportunities that were either unavailable to them because of their immigration status or were deemed too risky. Overall, these factors combined to overtly constrain participants’ college experiences in ways they described as both painful and exclusionary.

One of the ways that study participants routinely concealed their immigration status was by limiting their interactions with others—in particular, those with institutional affiliations. Their use of this strategy, as discussed earlier in the chapter, was primarily guided by two factors: an overwhelming dread that some malevolent—or even benign—contact could lead to their deportation and reluctance to differentiate themselves because they feared that doing so could trigger social (or academic) exclusion. As a result, study participants generally experienced going to college more as a transactional rather than a socially developmental endeavor. For example, Rose remarked, “I am the sort of person that doesn’t ask for help. (…) I think of myself as strong because I was trying to handle things on my own and I didn’t ask for help.”

This is not to say that study participants were met with uniformly hostile institutional environments. Most were able to identify important pockets of educational and emotional
support. But it is important to recognize that these supports existed within a structural context that was tightly bound to legal and economic constraints. Moreover, supports tended to operate on the edges of institutional structures, rather than as integral aspects of their functioning.

Another limitation that participants faced was exclusion from educational enrichment experiences, such as field trips, study abroad, or internships. Such activities not only deepen learning but also enhance post-college career opportunities. For example, Mardochee, an ambitious high achiever, confessed that she wanted dearly to study abroad:

I would love to study abroad because my school has so many campuses. One of my friends went to Iceland! I want to go to Iceland or London… I just can't. There’s so many restrictions it's hard to do everything when you don’t have documentation.

Mardochee held TPS and was afraid she would lose it if she left the United States. Pablo expressed similar feelings:

There are college trips, college abroad programs. I can’t do any of them, even if it's going to just another state, I am afraid that someone will ask me for papers. What if I get stopped at the airport? Now they ask people to have their passports [as identification, even for domestic travel]. I don’t even have a current one.

Rose emphasized another important reason for declining extracurricular opportunities: having to work long hours:

I don't participate in any activities I just go to class and then go home. I have work. I have so many different types of jobs. That’s another thing that's hard. Regular college students get everything paid [parental support, loans, or
scholarships cover the cost of attending a college], they do regular activities. I don't have time for that, I have to work.

The circumstances described here suggest that the college experience for undocumented students is a lean one—that is, one that is constrained by eligibility, fear, or the practicalities of affording college costs without the benefit of typical financial supports.

**Data Analysis GRQ #2**

The data collected in this study was organized into groups using a thematic analysis methodology (Creswell, 2007). Codes for Guiding Research Question #2 are captured in Table 11.

**Table 11**

*Overview of Interview Codes for Guiding Research Question #2*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Content codes</th>
<th>Thematic category</th>
<th>Thematic analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial responsibilities</td>
<td>Socioeconomic factors</td>
<td>Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping others financially</td>
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<td>Financial responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balancing work and college</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Family positions</td>
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<td>Cost of college</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dreams taken away</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying trustworthy people</td>
<td>Finding support</td>
<td>Institutional barriers</td>
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<td>Financial aid support</td>
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<td>Legal limitations</td>
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<td>Cultural competency in academic advising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctuary college communities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Guiding Research Question #2 Findings

Finding #4

Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing unique socioeconomic and institutional barriers in trying to further their post-secondary education.

The participants in this study sacrificed greatly to pursue their college plans and to have a normal sense of life in America. For many of these students, the financial burdens they bore routinely meant foregoing enriching opportunities and material goods commonly enjoyed by their peers. To fulfill their familial responsibilities and obligations, participants described working arrangements of questionable legality arising from their lack of documentation. Moreover, given the realities of their immigration status, participants found themselves ineligible for most of the financial supports in place for low-income students.

Although these pressures evoked very personal challenges, their nature was structural, the result of exclusionary administrative policies, institutional shortcomings, and economic conditions that combined to circumscribe immigrant students’ educational opportunities. Simply by their presence in the population of college students, study participants demonstrated the strength of their determination to obtain a post-secondary degree, most evident during the application stage that highlighted the harsh reality of their exclusion from opportunities their American-citizen peers enjoyed. These exclusions extended well beyond the typical hurdles of qualifying for admission and confronting the massive hurdles of college costs. And to these undocumented students, the constraints they faced felt like a betrayal in relation to their degree of commitment and the seriousness of their social, cultural, and community values.
Guiding Research Question #3

What factors did undocumented immigrant students report that contributed to their development of resilience in overcoming social and systemic setbacks in pursuing higher education?

The goal of Guiding Research Question #3 was to identify how students developed resilience while managing their documentation status as they navigated college. To provide a deeper understanding of these influences and to facilitate discussion, participants were asked questions from the list of Interview Questions each received before their interview (Appendix F).

For GRQ #3, the relevant guiding interview questions were:

5. Can you reflect about the people who helped you during the application process and academic advising? What was helpful to you? And what could have been different?

6. Tell me about one of your days in school? What are your classes like? Do you like your courses?

7. What kind of activities do you participate in at school? Do you think that you are limited to participating in any of these because of your immigration status? For example, how do you feel about a career or a job fair?

10. When you have questions about your courses or activities in school how do you find help? Is there a person or department that can help you?

11. Do you feel that you can trust college staff to know about your status? How about your professors (or your advisor)? In college, who do you mingle with? Are some of your friends also undocumented? How do you know?
12. In your own words, what can colleges do to help students who are undocumented? What can be done to make sure students feel like they have all the support they need in order to be successful?

The final thematic category, Resilience, captures how students developed resilience while managing the stresses associated with their undocumented status. Included in this category are the participants’ feelings and emotions regarding their dreams and aspirations, the value of a college degree, career strategy, perseverance when experiencing setbacks, and personal sacrifices. In this category, two subcategories were identified, Commitment to Education and Celebrating Success, which capture their hopes for the future, how they celebrate their successes, and their plans for finding pathways out of poverty.

**Data Discussion**

**Commitment to Education**

Despite the hurdles and setbacks participants experienced in their journeys from high school to college, none of the participants wavered in their belief that a college education was the key to a successful future. Davidson understood that fluency in English was going to be essential in his academic success and made decisions accordingly:

> Boston International High School has two parts. One [is a] newcomer's academy, for those that don't know anything, don't speak any English, and the other part was Boston International. I decided to speak English to understand the language and when I was in that school they named me the school ambassador because there were school students that could not speak English at all.

Davidson’s hard work resulted in his skipping Grade 10 after his remarkable performance
on Massachusett’s MCAS. Rose similarly displayed a commitment to improving her academic skills while in high school, which resulted in her not only qualifying for some private church scholarships but also for the City of Boston scholarships, one of the few scholarships available to undocumented students, multiple times:

One of the scholarships is the city of Boston scholarship. It’s about 75 applicants and only 10 of them got it, and I was one of those 10. (...) So the scholarship wasn't [a] one year thing. I could get [it] every year as long as I keep a certain GPA which I did, I got it 4 times. It was $2,500, as long as my GPA was good, they gave it to give me again. So I got it four times. So that's like $10,000 total.

Several participants also noted that as their academic confidence grew, so did their personal confidence. Rose found that she would have to learn to advocate for herself, both academically and socially, once she left high school, stating:

I didn't even know how to present myself, but at the end of it all I learned. I have a good presentation at work because of all of those classes, even though I complained. This helped me and now my confidence is better. I learned a lot like about PowerPoint. I didn't know that these skills were necessary to learn.

Rose learned, too, that independently advocating for herself was necessary to ensure her success:

The school listened to me. I remember we didn't have a fridge (...) to put my food in and then warm it up. I spoke up and the school bought me a fridge within two weeks. There was a microwave to warm up the food. Food is very expensive in downtown Boston.
Many of the participants in talking about their commitment to education noted the essential importance of locating trustworthy and supportive individuals along the way. Almost all of the students felt that trust was essential to them, and all mentioned individuals who gave them a safe place to talk, to discuss their undocumented realities, but more importantly, to hear about their successes and obstacles in college. For example, the male students all made observations that they had good trust relationships with male counselors, while the female students sought the advice and guidance of female college staff. Pablo also mentioned that, in hindsight, the problem with high school guidance counselors in advising undocumented students is that they may not know how to advise and help undocumented students. Celly described similar feelings:

I see students applying for six, seven, eight colleges, but when it comes to us [the undocumented students], the guidance counselor sees few options for me to go to college. That made me feel terrible. I don't even have the words for this, it's embarrassing. Why is everybody applying for different colleges, and I have to apply for less?

Mardochee observed:

If someone understands your culture, your background, or language it feels more comfortable. I would feel more comfortable with someone like you [referring to the researcher, who is bilingual] that [speaks] another language, than somebody else who only speaks English. I might sound funny to them, but you would say “she speaks English, she's trying,” and you wouldn't judge me for my accent.

Also, all of the students thought that they could trust the college staff who spoke their language and understood where they came from, crediting them with making their college
success possible. Rose described the importance of diversity in college staff if immigrant students are to achieve their goals:

I also think it's important to have people that look like immigrants working as administrators in college, because sometimes just having a similar background even one thing in common, can mean a huge thing. I might feel more comfortable. Telling my story to someone that could relate to me, then someone might judge me because they didn't have this type of life or they didn't have to go through that. Like having immigrants like me working in a college, I would understand very well I once was in their position.

If they did not feel safe, participants refrained from requesting the resources or help they needed. One of the students mentioned not doing anything "extra" that would bring attention to her and that she did not want to be in the spotlight as someone who needed help. Many students viewed the staff that they could trust as "advocates" on their behalf. Rose described one individual in particular:

She showed me that she cared, even before she knew that I was undocumented, she knew other things going on in my life. I trusted her, she would go out there and ask questions for me, because as an undocumented student you can't ask questions, but when you have that person that you trust, you can tell them that they can go and advocate for you; they are not at risk of getting deported, but I was.

Pablo described similar experiences:

The professor that I knew at the school help me understand some information. I was afraid to ask questions at the Bursar's office or at the Registrar. He was able
to guide me to the forms that I needed to complete. I could trust him since he worked there; he knew what to ask. I told him that I had DACA and that I could not use financial aid. This was one professor I knew in my school who came from a country like mine. I spoke to him a few times, and he told me what classes would be interesting. He was better than my advisor because he wanted to know me or know how to help me. I was not afraid to share with him that I was a Dreamer.

Celebrating Success

As the participants found themselves academically and personally successful in college, many who had underlying anxieties regarding their abilities to be successful at college-level work found their worries were unfounded. Celly, who was still enrolled at college at the time of the study, noted:

Right now, I'm in college and I'm doing great. My grades are awesome. I have a 4.0. I feel great that I have As. People in high school tell me that I would get Cs and Ds—they would [be] very discouraging. Here you have to work hard for your grades. I get A/s because I work hard for those As. I was so proud of myself because I got an A.

Amanda noted that she “feels pretty happy, like almost there” as she nears her college graduation. “[I] already know the date that I’ll be graduating [and] I’ll be working. I’ll be a nurse once I finish.” Jay, who had left home to live on his own, admitted to having grown significantly over this time, reflecting:

Now I have money saved, my dad talks to me he has asked me to move in with him. I feel like I have choices now I've learned from this. I respect everybody. I
didn't grow up with my mom or dad. I made some poor choices when I came to America but I am such a stronger person right now. I passed that phase of when you move out and you know that face where you got to learn how to pay things. Sometimes save up money, you know, grow up. I had to do it it was no other way. I have my own place now with nobody's help. It's a start.

Rose, who is now out in the workforce, reflected upon her college graduation and the speech she was asked to give as a milestone in her life that was particularly meaningful for her family:

I feel I was very emotional. See my dad doing his thing and being so proud of me kind of made me feel like wow I made it. The joy that he show for that weekend kind of says it was all worth it. I feel very I don't know. I feel important not that I didn't feel important before I think that my importance was validated. People told me that it was a great job, great speech, [and] people were shaking my hand. That was a great feeling to have. The most important thing was to see my dad coming from Haiti to make him proud. I was happy to mention his name because he was waving at me. Yeah it feels good to be the one the first one in my family [and] specifically having no mother, my dad did his best for us. My dad, he never expected that he was so happy he could not believe that it was coming through. If he passed away tomorrow, I feel like I gave him the satisfaction seeing me graduate and giving a speech.
Analysis of Data

The data collected in this study was organized into groups using a thematic analysis methodology (Creswell, 2007). Codes for Guiding Research Question #3 are captured in Table 12.

Table 12

Overview of Interview Codes for Guiding Research Question #3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content codes</th>
<th>Thematic category</th>
<th>Thematic analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dreams and aspirations</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Commitment to education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of a college degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrating success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers and aspirations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience and perseverance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effort and sacrifices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrating success</td>
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Guiding Research Question #3 Findings

Finding #5

Undocumented college students in this study reported that they experienced resilience and support from individuals whom they trusted (mentors) in overcoming negative financial, social, and institutional obstacles.

Resilience was achieved through family and peer support, as well as perseverance. Also, college students located allies in the system who would advocate and mentor them. These were not necessarily their advisors.
All participants in this study shared the common vision that post-secondary education was essential if they were to be successful in achieving their future goals. Each, in some fashion, described the idea that the reward at the end of their collegial journey would serve to offset the pain and hardships they endured along the way and that, essential to this success, was uncovering allies, networks, and communities of support who were willing to engage with them in their pursuit.

**Summary**

In this chapter, three guiding research questions were used to guide data collecting in this qualitative study with a narrative methodology (Creswell, 2007). The data was analyzed and organized by the themes and topics that emerged from the data. Five findings emerged from this study:

Finding #1: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing limited opportunities as new immigrants that contributed to feelings of dislocation and isolation.

Finding #2: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing strong feelings of cultural pressure and financial responsibility towards their families both in the U.S. and in their home countries.

Finding #3: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing stigmatization and marginalization resulting in feelings of fear, shame, and discrimination because of their immigrant status.

Finding #4: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing unique socioeconomic and institutional barriers in trying to further their post-secondary education.
Finding #5: Undocumented college students in this study reported that they experienced resilience and support from individuals whom they trusted (mentors) in overcoming negative financial, social, and institutional obstacles.

Each finding will be presented with discussion, implications for practice, and recommended action steps in the next chapter, which will conclude with an overview of the opportunities for further research and final reflections.
CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the study, a discussion of the study’s findings that includes a consideration of the implications for practitioners as well as action steps for stakeholders. As well, recommendations for future research are offered as are final reflections. Sectioned headings include (a) Study Summary, (b) Discussion, (c) Future Research, and (d) Final Reflections. For clarity in organization, sectioned sub-headings under (b) Discussion include Findings, Implications for Practice, and Recommended Action Steps.

**Study Summary**

The purpose of this research was to study the educational experiences of seven undocumented immigrant Massachusetts college students and how they navigated the U.S. college systems to find the support and resources they needed to finish their bachelor's degrees.

In the United States, undocumented college students need academic, social-emotional, financial, career, and employment support; however, few supports are in place to meet their needs. This study explored how undocumented students navigated a college system to find support and success and what they recommended to improve the current reality.

Little academic literature exists that directly addresses the needs of college students with DACA, TPS, and No-documentation status. To contextualize the experiences of the participants in this study, an examination of the extant literature relevant to undocumented students was conducted. Much of the literature examined several facets of the undocumented student experience in college; however, most focused on the advising, the preparation for college, and the lack of financial aid that is available for students once they are in college (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Oliverez et al., 2006). Some literature described how students navigated different
departments and agencies to receive services (Bailey, 2013; Del Razo, 2012; P. Perez, 2010), and most described the public policy, legislation, and advocacy that is needed to support the immigrant student in college (Alcantara, 2013; Gelatt, 2019; Gonzalez, 2009; Guggenheim, 2013). As well, the literature reviewed considered the context and history of undocumented immigrants in the United States as well as the myriad system barriers and obstacles that pose major challenges for the undocumented individual in college.

To ensure a full and deep understanding of the experiences of these undocumented college students in Massachusetts, a qualitative narrative method was selected (Creswell, 2007). An interview approach was deemed the most likely to be effective in starting conversations and creating trust with college-student participants. This personal approach helped the participants feel safe answering sensitive questions about their immigration and their experiences in college (Beverley, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

The participants who met the criteria of being undocumented and in college represented three groups: DACA, TPS, and No-documentation students. The participants were selected through a snowballing approach and participated in two interviews over two years. All participants lived in Massachusetts, graduated from a U.S. high school, and enrolled in a private or public college in Massachusetts. Four women and three men were interviewed. Of the seven students, three were from Haiti, two were from Cape Verde, one from Venezuela, and one from Colombia. They all had different times of arrival in the US. Seven participants completed the study (two DACA, three TPS, and two No-documentation). Interviews were conducted in off-campus private locations where participants felt comfortable and safe. Participants were also offered the option to use pseudonyms for confidentiality. Interviews started in 2016 and were completed in 2017, and all of the participants have subsequently graduated from college. The
study was conducted in Massachusetts with participants attending four colleges, two public community colleges, and two private colleges.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

GRQ #1: What role do undocumented college students believe sociocultural factors play in influencing an immigrant student’s successful college experience?

GRQ #2: What are the various ways undocumented college students report institutional and economic factors that affect undocumented immigrant students’ college experiences?

GRQ #3: What factors did undocumented immigrant students report that contributed to their development of resilience in overcoming social and systemic setbacks in pursuing higher education?

Five findings emerged from this study. These were:

Finding #1: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing limited opportunities as new immigrants that contributed to feelings of dislocation and isolation.

Finding #2: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing strong feelings of cultural pressure and financial responsibility towards their families both in the U.S. and in their home countries.

Finding #3: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing stigmatization and marginalization resulting in feelings of fear, shame, and discrimination because of their immigrant status.
Finding #4: Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing unique socioeconomic and institutional barriers in trying to further their post-secondary education.

Finding #5: Undocumented college students in this study reported that they experienced resilience and support from individuals whom they trusted (mentors) in overcoming negative financial, social, and institutional obstacles.

Each finding was considered in the context of its relevance to practice, with twelve recommended action steps emerging.

**Discussion**

Five findings emerged from this study. Each will be discussed in the context of the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter Two, connected to relevant implications for practice, and used to inform recommended action steps for stakeholders at both the local and national levels.

**Finding #1**

*Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing limited opportunities as new immigrants that contributed to feelings of dislocation and isolation.*

Although most of the participants in this study were teenagers at the time of their immigration, all of the agency related to leaving their home countries resided with the adults in their lives. Immigrant minors are sometimes faced with having to leave abruptly, lacking time to prepare emotionally for a new country and a new school. As described by Suarez-Orozco (2001), immigration is a transformative process with profound implications for the family. Some of these implications include preparing financially to travel to a future home, learning a new language, and, for the children, adjusting to different standards of schooling (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-
In the case of these students, many of them were sent to the United States by family who made difficult decisions in bringing these children and adolescents; like so many other immigrants some of the students in this study did not know why they were moving or when (or if) they could return home. These relocations caused the family to experience separation from both their native cultures and families, which made adapting to their new homes in America challenging. In the case of several study participants, the family’s immigration decision was driven by conditions of duress, including financial challenges, political upheaval in their countries, and natural disasters. Adding to the negative and isolating experiences associated with their departure and arrival was a dawning awareness of the constraints associated with their legal documentation. Once their travel visas or permits expired and with few or no choices available to resolve their legal status, these individuals became illegal or undocumented in the context of the policies currently in place in the U.S. At a minimum, immigration was often complex for these study participants and, at best, challenging, as their sociocultural adaptation to life in the United States demanded strengths and resiliencies they had not yet begun to develop or imagine they possessed.

Currently, immigrant children and youth continue to experience inhumane and uncaring policies that impact their overall wellness and experience in the United States. For the participants in this study, the fear and discrimination they faced as students was an additional stressor-factor. In addition to having to leave their home countries, adapt to new cultural customs, including a new language, school, and society, they also had to ensure they could go to school right away, work to earn money to help themselves and others in their families, and plan for college on their own. These were challenging experiences for many of them and reflective of
how current policies both undermine and discriminate against undocumented immigrant students.

For some of the participants, their dreams of attending college were seen not as an option for themselves but rather as an honor to their families. Del Razo (2016), explained that *familia* is an important source of the hope to make it to college. Students in this study frequently associated advanced education with increased financial security, which translated to increased financial security for their families. An understanding and appreciation of their parents’ sacrifices as immigrants contributed to their vision of themselves as successful despite the immigration obstacles they faced (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

**Implications for Practice**

Although the current national political climate affects undocumented immigrant students most profoundly, there are meaningful decisions and actions to be made at the local and school levels. Educational leaders at all levels are well-positioned to address the feelings of dislocation, isolation, and lost opportunity described by the immigrant students in this study. Regardless of the age of the student, fostering a school environment that acknowledges, validates, and honors the often traumatic circumstances underlying a student’s immigration should be a priority, and, certainly, schools are uniquely situated to mitigate not only the emotional toll but the practical toll in lost opportunity that undocumented students pay as a result of their status. For the participants in this study who were attempting to earn college degrees, there appeared to be few individuals or institutions that fully understood the costs imposed by the students’ immigration status.

While in high school, many of the study participants revealed that they did not fully understand their immigration status, the relief programs that might be available to them, or the
challenges they would face once they attempted to launch their college careers. The undocumented immigrant college students in this study often did not receive support in the form of accurate, timely, or relevant advice from their high school guidance counselors, who were largely well-intentioned but ill-informed about immigrant students. Informed culturally responsive support is a critical step in preparing undocumented students to navigate college campuses and to learn how to become a full member of a multicultural college community (Sidanius et al., 2008). Del Razo (2013) asserted that policies like the DREAM Act that help the undocumented student to thrive in college are essential in helping students overcome the sociocultural hurdles they face. DACA is available for those that qualify, but the cost to apply is extreme and typically outside the means of most immigrant students. Undocumented students typically save money for survival and education, not for legal situations.

Beyond the school and college levels, it is incumbent upon local and state leaders to acknowledge and act upon the mental stresses and lost opportunities undocumented immigrant students experience through meaningful and action-oriented change. Resolving an immigration problem is no small task for anyone at any age or level of education, but it is especially daunting for youth and adolescents who don’t have the resources to seek the help needed to resolve their undocumented realities within the current system. Because general public policy continues to be unfairly and discriminatorily complex for immigrants (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020), legislative change at the local levels is an important element in reducing the discrimination as well as the feelings of isolation and dislocation the students in this study described. Immigrant families contribute to the economy by paying taxes regardless of legal status documentation.
**Recommended Action Steps**

**Step 1: Provide targeted professional development.** Professional development designed to enhance practitioners’ understanding of both the social-emotional stresses undocumented students experience as well as the socioeconomic realities undocumented college-bound high school students face would help mitigate the negative emotions and experiences students in this study described.

**Step 2: Advocate for legislative change.** Much of the anguish undocumented immigrant students experience would be eliminated were Congress to pass DREAM Act legislation and extend the DACA and TPS programs so that immigrant college students can find immigration-status relief and immigrant college graduates can secure employment and possible sponsorship for professional H1B or H1A visas. At the state level, Massachusetts must join the other 21 states that have DREAM Act legislation in place that provides in-state tuition programs for undocumented immigrant students (Durbin, 2011; Gonzalez, 2009; Guggenheim, 2013; Romo et al., 2018). Stakeholders can lobby their local state legislator through phone calls, visits to the State House, letter writing as well as through involvement with local and national immigrant advocacy groups dedicated to legislative change. Interested stakeholders can also influence policies in place at state colleges and universities that prevent undocumented immigrant students from fully engaging in post-secondary learning opportunities by similarly lobbying local elected officials and becoming active in non-profit immigrant support organizations.

**Step 3: Advocate for visa reform.** The development of a new lottery-based Non-Citizen and Resident College Graduate visa category for undocumented college graduates who find employment in their field of study would alleviate significant barriers to employment that many undocumented college graduates face. Through phone calls, written communication to state and
federal elected officials, and involvement with immigrant advocacy groups, interested stakeholders can articulate the need for visa reform that provides a path forward for undocumented college students.

**Finding #2**

*Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing strong feelings of cultural pressure and financial responsibility towards their families in the U.S. and in their home countries.*

All participants in this study described enormous challenges to be successful in their education, including completing high school, attending college, and sustaining a life in the United States. All of the participants reflected on their responsibilities at home and felt a need to continue supporting family members living here or back in their home countries. Studies by (L. J. Abrego, 2006; Bailey, 2013; Del Razo, 2012) all explored how students felt about their families’ efforts and hard work to ensure their children could go to college. These pressures seemed to strengthen students’ resolve to be successful academically as well as financially (Gonzalez, 2009; Laurin, 2013; P. Perez, 2010). Students often held jobs while working hard to learn English so that they could effectively communicate in school and in their communities and serve as translators for family members. Because of language barriers and parents’ fears and anxieties, many of the students in this study were parentified, forced to assume leadership roles in their families in guiding the family to needed information, resources, and services. As well, families were supportive of their children attending college but could not actively participate in supporting their college dreams.

Suarez-Orozco (2008), Del Razo (2012), Yosso (2005) all described the importance of community organizations and individuals who can support the immigrant student in college.
academically as well as socially and who fully understand students’ undocumented challenges. The theoretical framework of Community Cultural Wealth by Tara Yosso (2005) is useful in understanding the cultural situation of the participants in this study:

Aspirational wealth: The students found strength and encouragement to succeed in college and saw themselves as college graduates, which was validated and supported by their families, friends, and people who supported them along the way.

Linguistic wealth: The students used their new bilingual skills to help their families, to advocate for themselves, and to master a second (or third) language to be successful in college.

Familial wealth: The students saw their families as a central part of the goal to be in college and viewed college degrees as a way to honor their families and to follow their cultural consejos [advice], e.g., “going to college is important.”

Social wealth: The students had networks, friends, and individuals who wanted to see them succeed in college, an accomplishment important to immigrant students.

Navigational wealth: They used their cultural knowledge to ask questions and find resources and individuals who could help them. The students in this study all found ways to communicate what they needed using their dual language, cultural capital stories, people, neighborhoods, and churches.

Resistant wealth: The students faced macroaggressions, rejection of their undocumented identity, and discrimination, all of which caused them to grow into vocal advocates for themselves. They resisted these oppressions in college and found ways to communicate what they needed through other caring individuals.

While the familial and cultural sensibilities and values instilled in study participants by
their families helped inform their responsibility, independence, and resourcefulness, these same influences resulted in resilience despite the stress and anxieties participants often found challenging to manage.

**Implications for Practice**

Understanding the cultural values and sensibilities of undocumented students is essential in helping immigrant students manage the acculturation process. Consequently, primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational institutions have a role to play in supporting undocumented immigrant students as they adjust to a new culture. Appropriately trained staff, faculty, and administrators would help establish in each setting a climate of support and respect for each student’s experiences and background. Many of the students in this study worked long hours after their high school day to financially support the family while still being expected to achieve academically. Students in high school, whether undocumented or not, often see a deterioration in their grades when pressured to work long hours. Guidance counselors, teachers, and administrators might better serve undocumented immigrant students if they have an informed understanding of the driving forces at work in the student’s life, including the cultural and linguistic challenges inherent in acculturation.

While resources may be scarce for professional development that would enhance this type of understanding at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, there are resources more readily available at the college level. As well, there is greater flexibility in how colleges might design and implement programs and training that would result in better support for undocumented students as well as opportunities that allow undocumented students to use and demonstrate their resourcefulness or “wealth” in ways that benefit both the individual and the college community.
**Recommended Action Steps**

*Step 4: Provide cultural awareness and competency training.* Educational institutions, particularly colleges and universities, must consider assessing their staff’s knowledge, sensitivity, and cultural competency relevant to understanding and supporting the unique cultural pressures and financial responsibilities that undocumented student’s experience. Training that addresses an institution’s gaps in knowledge and understanding of cultural competence, social justice, educational equity, and civil rights would be of immeasurable value in supporting students who bear significant financial burdens in assisting their families, given that these gaps exacerbate the stresses and challenges undocumented immigrant students face.

**Finding #3**

*Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing stigmatization and marginalization resulting in feelings of fear, shame, and discrimination because of their immigrant status.*

All participants in this study described managing the sociocultural aspects of their journeys toward and within college life as painful and difficult. Each reconciled their expectations and needs with the sometimes shattering circumstances that precipitated their move to the United States. Facing stigma and marginalization, each struggled in becoming accustomed to their new home and school environments and managing the isolating precariousness of living in President Kennedy’s “country of immigrants” that grows increasingly hostile to immigrants. Perez (2010) notes that immigrant students experience persistent fear and discrimination despite having lived many years in the United States. As well, fear of deportation is constant, influencing how students can interact with their families and communities as well as their peers and
instructors in college (Perez, 2012). The feelings of fear, shame, and discrimination the students in this study described are consistent with those described in other studies (Bailey, 2013; Del Razo, 2012; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; W. Perez, 2012).

Implications for Practice

Providing a safe and affirming educational environment is a priority for any educational institution or setting in Massachusetts and the United States. Thus, mitigating and, if possible, eliminating institutional factors and conditions that contribute to students’ fear, shame, or discrimination is seen as a priority. Once again, training for college staff, faculty, and administrators is essential in creating and maintaining an educational environment that celebrates differences and values each student no matter their background. All schools are enriched by increasing their cultural competency, irrespective of the number of immigrant students it educates. Knowing the nature and composition of a college’s student body would be beneficial in designing responsive efforts that best address students’ needs. Perez (2012) reported that some community colleges did not even know that they had undocumented students, which contributed to the creation of unwelcoming campus environments for immigrant students. Schools, colleges, and universities that understand the composition of their student bodies are more likely to foster academic success (Perez, 2012). The leadership of more traditional educational institutions, however, may have to increase their willingness to devote resources to efforts aimed at diversity, equity, and inclusion where it can impact the success of the undocumented college student.

Recommended Action Steps

Step 5: Establish Sanctuary College Communities. The establishment of Sanctuary College Communities (SCC) with trained academic staff in immigrant cultural competency is highly recommended. Colleges must work with their offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion to
ensure there is mandatory training on cultural competency, immigration policy, and cultural customer service sensitivity, preferably involving non-profit organizations that work with immigrants, such as Immigrants Rising in California, or more locally in Massachusetts, the Immigrant and Refugee Association (MIRA) (Del Razo, 2012; Romo et al., 2018).

**Step 6: Hire culturally competent college staff.** When possible, new college staff with knowledge and experience working with immigrant communities should be hired, especially in admissions and academic advising. As well, the opportunity to add new staff in entry-level positions presents an opportunity for colleges to demonstrate their commitment to educational equity by hiring the immigrant students they’ve educated. As well, institutions should consider establishing a designated staff position for those with training or experience in working with immigrant college populations.

**Finding #4**

*Undocumented college students in this study reported experiencing unique socioeconomic and institutional barriers in trying to further their post-secondary education.*

Participants in this study consistently noted that they experienced difficulty in launching and sustaining their post-secondary education. The barriers to admission that study participants described raised several questions:

- Why do many high school guidance counselors lack sufficient knowledge to advise immigrant students on how to best access higher education?
- Why do federal and state policies so vigorously prohibit academically promising immigrant students from accepting scholarships, loans, and work-study opportunities?
● Why do most states structure their tuition and fees such that immigrant applicants are charged at the same rate as international students?

● Why does a “nation of immigrants” erect so many systemic barriers to contemporary immigrants’ academic advancement?

A study called the Immigrant Student National Position Paper (Ford Foundation, 2014) reported on many of these questions and focused attention on how federal and state policies financially affected the undocumented learner. Almost all of the studies reviewed in this research noted that high school guidance counselors do not have the appropriate training to advise undocumented students (Bailey, 2013; Burman, 2013; Del Razo, 2012; Laurin, 2013; W. Perez, 2012).

Despite the challenges and barriers, though, all of the participants in this study established the importance of having a trusted advocate (Del Razo, 2012; Perez, 2012; Yosso, 2006). Each had identified a person both in high school and in college who helped them manage and navigate their undocumented realities in finding the right college, securing financial support, and overcoming institutional barriers. That said, all participants expressed disappointment, for example, at not being able to travel abroad like other college students as well as work or participate in typical college activities. None of the students were able to live in college dormitories, an experience they all had hoped to have.

Implications for Practice

The questions raised by the experiences of the participants in this study illustrate the daunting challenges immigrant students experience in pursuing post-secondary education. Not only did most participants’ guidance counselors in high school failed to effectively explain the logic behind their recommendations but it was apparent that they also did not possess sufficient
knowledge of workarounds that helped undocumented students plan effectively. Of course, it is also possible that participants did not fully understand or absorb the explanations they were given or that the counselors allowed cultural bias to limit their vision of what immigrant students could accomplish. What is clear, however, is that the staff in the high schools attended by participants adopted a cookie-cutter approach to college-selection advice that suited U.S.-born students but failed to discern and honor the individuality or promise of those students who were immigrants. Improving the training of guidance counselors and relevant high school staff and faculty to deal effectively with undocumented and immigrant students is essential in providing useful and accurate information to high school seniors as they evaluate their college prospects.

Change is likely to be better effected at the college and university levels. One place to start is with institutional policies. Colleges and universities must consider evaluating their existing policies or develop new policies to address the needs of the immigrant and undocumented student, specifically in policies that pertain to admission, registration, financial aid, and academic/emotional support.

**Recommended Action Steps**

**Step 7: Train guidance and admissions staff in immigration rights.** Providing guidance counselors and college admission staff with professional development that improves their knowledge and understanding of the status definitions and eligibility restrictions for U.S. immigrant communities would be greatly beneficial. The students in this study described experiences consistent with the experiences of other undocumented students who reported that they consistently experienced mixed messages, erroneous information, and broken promises when it came to paying for their college tuition and expenses through grants, loans, and scholarships (Bailey, 2013; Gonzalez, 2009; W. Perez, 2012). Accurate information clearly
communicated by both guidance counselors and college admissions staff would reduce the disappointment and confusion the participants in this study described.

**Step 8: Establish definitional clarity.** Undocumented immigrant students would benefit greatly if colleges and universities were to ensure that staff fully understood the difference between an undocumented immigrant student and an international student. International students have visas to study in the United States and have opportunities available to them that undocumented immigrant students do not have. Study participants indicated this confusion often led to unnecessary stress and dashed expectations for financial aid, often with serious consequences.

**Step 9: Re-evaluate required gateway information.** Re-evaluation of the information required at essential gateways, such as the Social Security number requirement found on college applications, registration, and financial aid applications, would significantly reduce the barriers undocumented students face in trying to further their education. Substituting ID numbers for Social Security numbers would be a helpful reform as would more transparent explanations of a college’s registration policy on the school’s website. As well, making financial assistance available in the form of scholarships, grants, stipends, and incentives for undocumented students without having to demonstrate a legal status or Pell-grant eligibility would minimize the extraordinary financial burden of paying full tuition (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Oliverez et al., 2006). Program flyers that clearly state that "anyone can apply" or "non-Pell eligible students can apply" can facilitate access to supports. Lastly, an improved application process would eliminate unnecessary questions about citizenship for financial aid that is not federal- or state-funded.

**Step 10: Expand payment and scholarship options.** Once the student has secured resources to cover college expenses, an expanded array of payment options would significantly
ease undocumented students’ financial stress. Undocumented immigrant college students often must pay the cost of courses personally and usually do so with limited resources. The students in this study reported that more widely accessible information on the payment options available to them would have been helpful. As well, securing donor funds for programming and scholarships that focus on raising funds to sustain scholarships for this student population would help alleviate the substantial financial burden undocumented immigrant students experience.

**Step 11: Establish a Dreamer Task Force.** Most colleges and universities have offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that can be leveraged for creating a more welcoming and supportive environment for undocumented students. The development of a Dreamer Task Force comprised of staff representing financial aid, the registrar, bursar, academic advisors as well as faculty and immigrant college students that could assess and evaluate policies in the context of the unique needs of this student population could substantially mitigate or even remediate many of the institutional barriers undocumented immigrant students encounter. Such a task force would make recommendations for policy and programmatic change, as well, and would monitor the institution's progress in meeting the needs of its undocumented college students (Gelatt, 2019; Gonzalez, 2009; Laurin, 2013; W. Perez, 2012).

**Finding #5**

_Undocumented college students in this study reported that they experienced resilience and support from individuals whom they trusted (mentors) in overcoming negative financial, social, and institutional obstacles._

Participants in this study developed an instinct for finding people they could trust early in their academic experiences in the U.S. Given their precarious legal standing, participants prioritized the need to find trustworthy individuals who demonstrated a desire to protect the
student from negative and intimidating attitudes towards immigrants (Del Razo, 2012). These individuals typically took the form of a guidance counselor, community member, teacher, professor, academic advisor, or financial aid advisor. Through these individuals, the participants learned how to navigate the system and develop the resilience and resourcefulness they needed to sustain their educational journeys. Unfortunately, however, participants also noted that often the "designated helpers" were poorly informed about immigration law and thus ill-equipped to recommend truly effective strategies, which resulted in setbacks and disappointment. Multiple searches for literature addressing this aspect of the undocumented immigrant experience were unsuccessful.

Despite the challenges the participants faced in securing admission to college, paying tuition, and finding support in a vast and complex system not attuned to the needs of this student population, they found the courage to continue achieving their dreams and aspirations to become professionals in their fields of study. The disappointing irony of students’ finding trustworthy individuals to help and guide only to discover that these individuals were poorly informed is evident in Burman’s study of 2014 in which institutional agents were found to be important for success in navigating college but were simultaneously found to do a poor job of it for undocumented students. All of the participants clearly expressed, however, how important a role their small campus communities played in their success. As well, participants’ cultural wealth and skills played important roles in the successful navigation of their worlds both inside and outside of college (Romo et al., 2018; Yosso, 2006).

Implications for Practice

As previously established, stakeholders tasked with guiding and advising undocumented immigrant students are often poorly trained and ill-prepared for the job. Good intentions aside, it
is imperative that clear and accurate information be provided to this student population both in high school and in college. The importance of positive trust relationships in schools, whether with teachers, guidance counselors, or other practitioners, is widely accepted, but those guiding and advising undocumented immigrant students bear a greater trust burden.

In addition to the mentoring functions performed by practitioners, emphasis should be placed on preparing undocumented students to participate in internships and job readiness opportunities that build their resumes, irrespective of their college plans. Knowledgeable mentors who can assist in this mental and practical preparation are essential in helping immigrant, particularly undocumented, students.

Social and emotional isolation combined with financial insecurity commonly contribute to poor mental health; however, the students in this study overcame the stresses associated with these conditions to become successful college students. Examination of their outlook on the future, the strategies they used to overcome obstacles and setbacks, and the habits of mind that informed their resilience could be beneficial for those stakeholders interacting with all students in similar social-emotional and socioeconomic circumstances.

**Recommended Action Steps**

**Step 12: Offer Immigrant Fellowship Programs.** One way to provide opportunities for immigrant students to develop meaningful and sustaining relationships is through an Immigrant Fellowship Program in which DACA, TPS, and Undocumented students participate in social and academic programs that offer a stipend or grant for their education. As long as students participate in the fellowship by attending monthly meetings, demonstrating leadership in their college sanctuary communities, participating in school activities, and maintaining good grades, financial support can be earned. Such a program could help students to explore future
relationships with employers and individuals who can assist the student in their post-graduation planning.

**Future Research**

While this qualitative study was inclusive of three levels of experience among undocumented college students, its small sample of college students in Massachusetts presents difficulties in generalizing its findings. Given the precarious legal standing of undocumented students, acquiring larger sample sizes will be a challenge. That said, to enhance our understanding, more and larger studies are needed that include participants from other categorical groups and other regional and geographic areas whose experiences and insights may reflect or differ from those of the participants in this study. Such a study might include DACA, TPS, Refugee, Asylee, and no-documentation college-bound and college-enrolled students.

As undocumented immigrant students juggle the myriad responsibilities they have while attempting to further their education, it would be helpful to gain a better understanding of the role colleges and universities might play in helping immigrant college students learn and improve their academic English language skills while in college. A study that examines the support and resources available to this student population in this respect now would be helpful in further designing and implementing new programs and policies aimed at improving both student learning and career readiness for students whose English acquisition is poor or delayed. While poor English language skills negatively affect all college students’ learning, immigrant student populations are significantly disadvantaged, both socially and academically.

Lastly, another opportunity for further research concerns the impact on the country’s economy when undocumented college graduates are precluded from jobs that match their educational skill sets. Undocumented workers in the U.S. contribute significantly to society
through taxes without receiving the associated benefits, e.g., Social Security, unemployment, workers’ compensation benefits. Society is not served when a skilled and educated individual is shut out of the employment market. A robust analysis that focuses on quantifying the lost productivity of skilled but unemployable undocumented college graduates would help inform policies and legal reform designed to remediate the squandering of valuable talent and productivity.

**Final Reflections**

Colleges themselves did not, by policy, exclude undocumented students, but neither did they act affirmatively to safeguard these students’ ability to partake of them. Absent such affirmative protection, study participants remained fearful that to stand out in any way was to risk exposure to deportation. Such fears not only cast deep shadows for those whose residency was not legal but also darkened the prospects of those who held TPS or DACA visas. In other words, the uncertainties that attended study participants’ sociocultural, secondary school, and college application processes continued during their journeys through higher education.

These constraints raise questions about how colleges can provide compensatory enrichments for such students, or indeed, for all students subject to financial or other limitations. For example, how can colleges foster vigilance and comfort to reduce fear and isolation among undocumented students? Could colleges provide experiences that emulate some aspects of study abroad through online partnerships with institutions outside the United States? To what extent can colleges offer on-campus jobs for immigrant students who are eligible for employment or create informal arrangements to mitigate costs in exchange for volunteer contributions by those ineligible for work?
Many recommendations have resulted from this study that can be implemented at the institutional and political levels. Supporting and welcoming undocumented college students should be a reflexive inclusive and equitable act. It is not sufficient that colleges and universities allow undocumented students who are ineligible for financial aid to apply and register for courses on the front end only to be denied any additional support because of their status on the back end. Thousands of undocumented high school students graduate with high honors hoping to attend great colleges, but they cannot afford the tuition and cost of living on those campuses. Not being able to work legally does not mean that an internship or apprenticeship experience can’t be valuable to the college student. Supporting undocumented students means developing an inclusive and welcoming environment that gives them a fair chance to feel and perform like any other college student.

There are many challenges ahead for immigrants in the United States. It is important to acknowledge that public policy efforts are needed to advocate in Congress on behalf of immigrants. The DREAM Act can still be passed with majority support, and it will create a pathway to careers and futures for the undocumented community as well as lead towards a solution that creates a fair and equitable pathway to U.S. citizenship and status.

When I started this project, I wasn’t sure that my research would be important to the college community—or to anyone for that matter. For so long, the topic of immigrants, especially the undocumented college student, had not been at the center of any consequential conversation at the policy level; however, I have learned that the timing could not be more perfect for this study or for defending the dreams and aspirations of undocumented college students in America. Years ago now, there was much excitement in the nation about the possibilities of meaningful change at the federal level under the presidency of Barack Obama.
His dream of “yes, we can” gave me hope when DACA was introduced. I believed in this vision of solidarity that, for many immigrants, echoed Cesar Chavez’s vision of “Si, Se Puede.” Alas, little beyond that has been accomplished.

When I reflect on the challenges that I faced as a young Latino immigrant student trying to figure out how to survive in this country, little has changed. Families are separated, with parents deported and forced to leave their loved ones—sometimes even their children—behind. I, too, had to face that reality when both my parents left the country—one was deported and the other left under the stress. These memorable, even traumatic experiences gave me the strength to pursue my dream of becoming a lifelong learner, researcher, and college professor.

When I conducted this study, I was overwhelmed with emotion. I took the advice of one of my committee members to remain true to myself and even allow myself to become an immigrant like the students that I would interview. I had to train myself to focus so that I could facilitate conversations of trust and support, but there were times this was difficult. The day came when I broke down in one of those sessions when a young man spoke about his isolation and being alone in this country. He reflected on how frightened he was to not have an identity, to not be able to work, find help, or build strong relationships. Telling someone that you are called “illegal” and undocumented labels an individual for life. I, too, was frightened to share with anyone that this was the case for me. I found myself reliving that reality, and I had to stop for a moment to let the tears flow and share my pain with this young man. I told him, “I know what your pain is. I know where it comes from.” A clear and strong voice, however, emerged from his sorrow, and I felt his strength was making me stronger, too.

I plan to use this study to support best-practices in working with undocumented college students and to present the findings in conferences and training for college advisors and staff.
There are also opportunities to help the undocumented college-bound be better prepared for college admission, enrollment, and graduation by sharing these findings with high school guidance counselors and other high school staff.

My personal goal is to ensure that we continue to support immigrant students in college and to create an inclusive environment in which they have a fair chance to enjoy and flourish during their academic journeys. Colleges and universities have the opportunity and the resources to help undocumented immigrant students find their dream careers. I intend to publish this work in the form of a college guide for advising and supporting undocumented college students entitled “Dream Careers: A Guide for Undocumented College Students” and start a scholarship fund to celebrate a nation of immigrants committed to the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
References


http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0701/2006031956-d.html


UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192717752816


http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1965_immigration_and_nationality_act.html


Appendices

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

DATE: May 30, 2017

To: Marcelo Juica

From: Robyn Cruz and Terrence Keeney, Co-chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: IRB Number: 16/17-049

The application for the research project, “A qualitative study about the college experiences of students who are undocumented” provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants’ identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

Date of approval of application:

May 30, 2017

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.
Appendix B: Study Invitation Flyer

Are you a DACA, TPS or Undocumented Student in College?
PhD Research study (Confidential & Anonymous)
Participate in an important research study about your experiences in college

Did you know that...
Over 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools every year and many attend colleges and universities without any financial aid or academic support.

Students who are undocumented, DACA or TPS deserve the same type of support to be successful as college students.

they need...
- Admission advising
- Financial aid advising and scholarship support
- Career orientation & job placement
- And advise on what to do once you finish college...

This study will help identify the ways in which colleges and universities can help students who are undocumented (DACA, TPS or no documentation at all) - this research will collect the stories from actual college students about their experiences and their ideas that could help others students to be successful as undocumented individuals. This study is part of a doctoral research project and will not be shared with anyone (Anonymous and confidential).

Marcelo Juica is a Ph.D candidate at Lesley University.
Help with this study to tell the story of the Undocumented College Student... To participate send an email to mj18ca2@lesley.edu
Appendix C: Consent Form

Dear participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part of my study about “undocumented students in college”. The purpose of this study is to focus on the obstacles that undocumented students face when they enter college in the United States. This study is part of an academic project for my doctoral studies with Lesley University. Your participation in this study will be significant and important for the findings that will be reported in my dissertation. All information will remain anonymous and confidential. No personal information will be shared, nor published.

Process

If you decide to participate, you will be invited to complete an intake form with several questions about your experience as a college student, and your experiences as an undocumented student. To participate in the study you must be a student who has an undocumented status (no legal papers in the U.S., Deferred Action Status or Temporary Protective status). You will also be invited to participate in an individual interview session (of no more than 1 hour) where you will participate in a discussion about your experiences in college. This session will be recorded, and it will be transcribed as part of the study. These transcribed notes will not be published or shared with anyone else except with the researcher. The researcher will seek permission in writing from the participant if the notes from the interviews could be used later in a presentation to a community or during the dissertation defense. The researcher will guarantee anonymity by securing files with passwords, and the notes or any identifying information will never be used in published work. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the dissertation to ensure anonymity.

Risks

The researcher will not be collecting any legal documents, nor proof of citizenship from the participants. There are minor risks in participating in this study- mainly the story that you are telling about your experience, which can describe your feelings, recollections, and disclosure of your legal status in the United States. The research will guarantee anonymity for this purpose, and will ensure that no names, addresses or personal information is shared with anyone. Files will be secured with encryption (transcripts from the interviews, and any files will be locked up – not accessible by anyone other than the researcher). All files will be destroyed or deleted once the dissertation has been successfully accepted and presented at Lesley University.
There are no costs to participate in this study. You are participating as a volunteer and you acknowledge that there are no benefits from participating in this study. The researcher will provide an incentive gift card to those students that participate in the focus group.

Acknowledgement of participation
- I am volunteering to participate in this study. I have been told that I can stop at any time, and I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to. No one will know my answers except the researcher and the dissertation committee.
- I also have been told that I can reach out to the Lesley University office of Doctoral Studies if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about my participation in this study.
- I am willing to participate in an interview with Marcelo Juica, at a location that I feel comfortable. The interview may last up to one hour long. If needed I would also join Marcelo Juica for a second interview.
- I am willing to participate in a focus group discussion with other participants in this research (there may be a group of 4 to 6 participants altogether).

__________________________________________
Name

__________________________________________
Signature

__________________________________________
Date

Researcher: Marcelo Juica
marcelojuica@gmail.com

Ph.D Committee Chair:
Dr. Maria Serpa (mserpa@lesley.edu)
There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the committee Co-Chairs irb@lesley.edu at Lesley University, 29 Everett Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02128.
(a copy will be available for the participant)
Appendix D: Demographic Intake Questionnaire

Participant Intake form

(CONFIDENTIAL)

Participant Identifier: choose any 3 letters from your name and year of birth
Example: XAV1973

Your participant identifier:___________________

Which of these apply to you:
- I don’t have a legal status in the U.S. to receive federal financial aid or work
- I have Temporary Protective Status (TPS) which allows me to work, but not receive federal financial aid
- I have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Education Plan Questions:
Did you attend high school in the United States? Yes No
Did you graduate from high school? Yes No
Are you currently attending college? Yes No
Do you have plans to attend college? Yes No
What are you interested in studying in college? ________________________

Financial Aid & Cost of Education Questions
Do you plan to apply for private or public financial aid? Yes No
Are you planning to cover your own cost of education? Yes No
If so, how?_________________________________________________
Is someone or your family helping you with the cost of education? Yes No
Are you earning any compensation for your work (status irrelevant)Yes No
Are you receiving any incentive or financial support for school Yes No
Is the cost of your career in school an obstacle for you? Please explain

Participation in the study

After learning about the research study “Undocumented College Students” are you willing to participate in an individual interview? YES NO
Can we call you to set up a time for an individual interview? YES NO

Thank you! – please return this form to Marcelo Juica (Researcher)
Appendix E: Email Message

Dear friends and colleagues,

I hope you are doing well. I wanted to share an opportunity for some of your students who are enrolled in a college or university program to participate in Doctoral study about the “experiences of college students as undocumented, DACA or TPS students in Massachusetts”. The purpose of the study is to understand the challenges, obstacles and strength of immigrant students as they enroll in colleges and universities to complete an undergraduate degree. I am conducting individual interviews with students who are currently enrolled, and that have not yet graduated with their degree. Students will volunteer for this study, and will not be paid.

To participate in this study, students should send an email to mjuica2@lesley.edu and they will receive a intake form with a few questions. Selected participants will be invited to attend two 1-hour sessions (2 hours total). No personal information is needed; no names or identifying information will be shared with anyone.

This study is extremely important to understand what institutions of higher learning can do support undocumented, DACA and TPS students while studying to get a degree.

If you know anyone who meets these criteria for the study, please share the attached flyer and my information to get in touch with them. I can answer any questions about this study and how the interviews will be used.

Thank you so much for your continued support with immigrant students.

Kind regards,

Marcelo Juica, Ph.D student (Lesley University)
mjuica2@lesley.edu
Appendix F: Interview Guiding Questions (Protocol)

Interview guiding questions

Participant Identifier___________________________________________________

1. Tell me about you? Where you come from and about your desire to attend college in the U.S.? Take as much as time as you want.

2. What do you study? What is vision for your career? What do you want to accomplish with your college degree?

3. Which of these categories apply to you?
   - I have DACA
   - I have TPS
   - I have no documentation

4. What do you remember about your experience in applying to an American college? Was there anything that you recall as a difficult step as a student with limited documentation?

5. Can you reflect about the people who helped you during the application process and academic advising? What was helpful to you? And what could have been different?

6. Tell me about one of your days in school? What are your classes like? Do you like your courses?

7. What kind of activities do you participate in at school? Do you think that you are limited to participating in any of these because of your immigration status? For example, how do you feel about a career or a job fair?

8. Tell me about how you handle paying for school and your education? Is there anyone at the college that helps you with these things? How do you feel about financial aid for undocumented students?
9. Have you thought about seeking support for financial aid? For example, writing to the financial aid department or finding an outside scholarship source?

10. When you have questions about your courses or activities in school how do you find help? Is there a person or department that can help you?

11. Do you feel that you can trust college staff to know about your status? How about your professors (or your advisor)? In college, who do you mingle with? Are some of your friends also undocumented? How do you know?

12. In your own words, what can colleges do to help students who are undocumented? What can be done to make sure students feel like they have all the support they need in order to be successful?