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# Empowerment Agents: How Student Affairs Professionals Facilitate the Persistence of Undocumented Students

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# EMPOWERMENT AGENTS: HOW STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS FACILITATE THE PERSISTENCE OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated how student affairs professionals (SAPs) assist undocumented students in their designated institutional roles, and how their support empowers undocumented students to persist. This research sought to document and assess how student affairs professionals—who interact with undocumented students—identify and respond to the issues they face in their work. Built on the theoretical frame of social capital, and using a thematic analysis design set forth by Braun and Clarke (2012), the researcher interviewed seven SAPs and used a phenomenological approach to design the study and to collect and analyze the data.

Two findings and five corresponding themes emerged from the research. The first finding was that these student affairs professionals have a strong desire to support undocumented students and use various strategies to accomplish their goal. Three themes emerged from finding one. Theme one was that SAPs identify rapport-building as a strategy to assist undocumented students. Theme two demonstrated how forming and using connections with partners was reported to be beneficial to assisting undocumented students. Theme three demonstrated how participants use their skills to advocate for undocumented students.

Finding two was that these student affairs professionals reported facing similar obstacles in their efforts to assist undocumented students. Two themes emerged from finding two. Theme one was how limited or unclear institutional policies can hinder the effectiveness of SAPs in their work with undocumented students. Theme two documented how these SAPs perceive institutional support, resources, and training to

assist undocumented students. The findings also show that these seven SAPs experience similar challenges in their work with undocumented students, and these challenges are not dissimilar to those faced by undocumented students themselves. Despite these obstacle and challenges, findings reveal that these student affairs professionals are committed to their work and seek to find solutions and create avenues to empower undocumented students to persist. Additionally, the data revealed the accompanying ancillary findings and considerations that are worth mentioning: (a) intersecting identity with first-generation students and (b) covertly assisting undocumented students.

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Finally, thank you to my participants for sharing your experiences with me, because without you, this work would not be.

# DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate my dissertation to the following people:

My mother, the late Ms. Alice "Allie" M. Paige: I am who I am, because of you. I am so honored to be your daughter. You are loved and missed daily.

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# CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

## Background

Hoping to better themselves economically and/or educationally, people from other lands still voyage to the United States (U.S.) to seek a brighter future. They believe that in the U.S. they will have better life opportunities than in the countries from which they have journeyed (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The Migration Policy Institute (MPI), (2021) estimates there are approximately 11 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States. Unauthorized immigrants are defined as "individuals residing in the United States who are not U.S. citizens, who do not hold a current permanent resident visa, or who have not been granted permission under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for longer-term residence and work" (Garcia & Tierney, 2011, p. 2740). Those individuals can be but are not limited to those who either entered the U.S. legally with a visa but did not return to their respective countries after the visa expired or entered the country illegally (Olivérez et al., 2006). Many come with their families, including young children (Salsbury, 2003). Another term used to classify these immigrants and their families is undocumented (Abrego, 2008).

Undocumented students come seeking access to educational opportunities. The 1982 United States Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe* granted undocumented children the right to obtain a public-school education. Regardless of residency status, the Supreme Court mandates all public elementary and high schools allow undocumented students to enroll (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). Writing for the Court, Justice Brennan concluded that "if the State is to deny a discrete group of innocent children the free public education

that it offers to other children residing within its borders, that denial must be justified by a showing that it furthers some substantial state interest" (Plyler v. Doe, 1982, p. 230). The Court found no such showing. Since that time, primary and secondary school districts have allowed undocumented students to enroll (Olivas, 2009). The *Plyler* decision stopped at K-12 education and does not extend to post-secondary education (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Beyond K-12, there is no guarantee for continuing educational opportunities. These students are forced to live in the shadows (Russell, 2011).

Currently in the United States, an average of 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year (MPI, 2019). The Migration Policy Institute (2019) noted that this is a considerable increase from the 2003 figure of 65,000. About 5-10% of undocumented high school graduates go on to enroll in institutions of higher education (Ibarra & Sherman, 2012). Many of these students are some of the brightest as they are honor students, athletes, leaders in student activities, and are aiming to be professionals (UCLA Labor Center, 2007). When it comes to post-secondary access, these students are not able to obtain any federal and most state aid including work-study and scholarships (Munoz, 2009) due to their undocumented status (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010).

In most states, laws do not prohibit undocumented students from entering higher education institutions, but they will do so at their own cost (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Olivérez, 2007). Additionally, federal laws do not explicitly deny undocumented students' admission to U.S. higher education institutions (Gonzales, 2010). However, access to higher education is costly and, for these undocumented students, virtually impossible. Their hopes and dreams of a brighter future can dissipate (Russell, 2011).

How are these students to have brighter futures without higher education? These students came for the promise of the American Dream, but furthering their education beyond high school may just be that, a dream.

Mangan (2010) commented these students look ahead to uncertain futures because of their status. As such, they are unaware of what exactly their next step will be after high school graduation. They can enroll in post-secondary schools, but without funding most are unable to afford the cost of attendance (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Olivérez, 2007). By all accounts, their outlook is bleak. As such, their educational attainments lag drastically behind those of their counterparts (Vidal de Haymes & Kilty, 2007).

In addition to the "high unemployment and economic malaise" (Mangan, 2010, B17) undocumented students' worries are increased when adding their illegal status to the mix. Without postsecondary education, many will have no way to combat dismal economic outlooks (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Russell, 2011). Some of these students are talented and high achievers, and by all standards, have stellar records of academic achievements. But they also have limited prospects due to their undocumented status (Perez, et al., 2010).

Immigration issues continue to be a daunting concern for institutions of higher education (Salsbury, 2003). This is mainly because more undocumented students are seeking access (Olivérez, 2007). For some undocumented students, graduating high school is where their educational pursuits stop. However, in some states, they can attend postsecondary institutions, but they are not eligible for financial aid, and this makes advancing one's education after high school a seemingly unreachable goal (Olivérez,

2007). As stated earlier, court mandated equal access to education ends outside the boundaries of high school (Perez et al., 2010). However, not all is completely lost and hopeless. Some states have enacted laws to allow provisional financial aid for undocumented students.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) (2021), 17 states— California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington— and the District of Columbia have enacted provisions that allow undocumented students access to in-state resident tuition rates (ISTR). This benefit is provided through their state legislatures. Seven states— the University of Hawaii Board of Regents, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, University of Maine Board of Trustees, University of Michigan Board of Regents, Ohio Board of Regents, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and Rhode Island's Board of Governors for Higher Education —provide in-state resident tuition rates for undocumented students through decisions from their state university systems. Recently, the a bipartisan senate bill, Senate Bill 135, was introduced what would allow undocumented students who meet certain requirements to pay in state tuition rates (Weddle, 2023).

Just as there are states that allow in-state resident tuition rates for undocumented students, other states have taken the opposite stance. From NCSL (2021), there are six states—Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri and South Carolina— that prohibit undocumented students from in-state tuition benefits.

Olivérez (2007) remarked that the undocumented students who make the transition to college come to campuses with lived experiences that position them among those students who face the most difficulties and require information about necessary services and opportunities that will aid them in their educational pursuits that are both timely and accurate. Pomerantz (2006) remarked that accrediting agencies are calling for institutions to demonstrate in concrete ways how they are proactively improving the quality of educational experience for all their students. As undocumented students matriculate through campuses, institutional agents charged with providing guidance and support should become more proactive in ensuring their needs are met (Olivérez, 2007).

Pomerantz (2006) believed that student affairs professionals are pivotal players in designing the most effective learning environments for students. According to Long (2012), student affairs was created to deal with student conduct issues and handle administrative duties. However, the field has since grown to include other functional institutional areas such as admissions, academic advising, and housing (Long, 2012). Long (2012) goes on to explain how the needs, demands, and expectations of today's college students are changing, and those changes have led student affairs to become a rapidly evolving field.

With their long history in higher education, student affairs professionals have advanced to offering student learning activities outside of the classroom (Long, 2012). Pomerantz (2006) believes student affairs professionals have a unique perspective and contribute unique contributions to the learning experiences of students. One function of student affairs is to aid in developing students intellectually, psychosocially, and

emotionally (Long, 2012). Specifically, they "develop student's cognitive and interpersonal skills, foster leadership, ethics, and cultural understanding. The also stress the importance of wellness, help establish the students' identities, and spark their exploration of careers and of service to society" (Long, 2012, p. 2).

Long (2012) went on to say that student affairs professionals understand that students' college years are a critical time where most come into discovering their identities while developing core values in how they will ultimately perceive and experience their future selves. Student affairs professionals deliberately creating institutional programs, services, and experiences can aid in advancing students' growth and development in multiple spaces in their lives (Long, 2012). Long (2012) sees the most important and fundamental mission of student affairs professionals is to be of service to their student population. Pomerantz (2006) asserted that student affairs professionals are assisting and engaging with an ever-evolving population of students; a population that includes undocumented students. As such, new ways of functioning within their roles to provide more effective interventions in student lives should be considered (Pomerantz, 2006).

## Statement of the Problem

Undocumented college students are a unique subset of the U.S. population (Russell, 2011). Many whose second language is English and who are first in their families to seek a higher education, enter the collegiate world from vulnerable environments and require guidance to find their way through the college process (Contreras, 2009; Gamez, et al., 2017; Sanchez & So, 2015). Although growing, research

is still limited on undocumented students. Notably, literature examining the experiences of student affairs professionals and their knowledge of how to help undocumented students persist on their campuses is fairly scarce (Cisneros & Lopez, 2020; Hoy & Nguyen, 2020; Nienhusser & Espino, 2017; Southern, 2016; Watson et al., 2018).

Student affairs professionals are on the front line of supporting undocumented students as they transition into college (Long, 2012; Pomerantz, 2006). Knowledge of policies and programs is essential when advising undocumented students (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Competent assistance is necessary with this very important transition (Storlie & Jach, 2012). However, many institutional agents are under informed, or even uninformed about policies that affect undocumented students on their campuses (Olivérez, 2007). Moreover, some of the policies confusing (Gonzales, 2011).

In the past, student affairs professionals in the U.S. rarely knowingly interacted with undocumented students pursuing a college degree. This was mainly because the numbers of undocumented college students were relatively low and their status in the U.S. was not something colleges considered. But as campus demographics shift, student affairs professionals are having to interact and engage with more undocumented students (Oliverez, 2007). At one time, only an estimated 200,000-250,000 undocumented students were enrolled in higher education in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). However, a recent report by New American Economy (2021) found "that undocumented students account for more than 427,000 or approximately 2 percent of all students in higher education in the United States." Considering the number of undocumented students present in the U.S., Gildersleeve et al. (2010) believe it is vital for student affairs

professionals to understand the complex issues they face if they are to effectively aid undocumented students. If student affairs professionals are equipped with skills appropriate resources, they could improve educational and career access for undocumented students (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). This research seeks to address the gap in the literature by focusing on those student affairs professionals who specifically assist undocumented students. Understanding the role these student affairs professionals play can be a step towards developing the capacity to be more effective in supporting undocumented students.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study investigated how student affairs professionals assist undocumented students and how their assistance empowers undocumented students to persist. This research sought to document and assess how student affairs professionals—who interact with undocumented students— identify and respond to the issues they face in their work. This research sought to address the gap in the literature by investigating those student affairs professionals and identifying the issues they face in their work with undocumented students.

## Research Questions

This research study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the major issues that student affairs professionals face when assisting undocumented students?
2. How are student affairs professionals assisting undocumented students?

3. What strategies are student affairs professionals using to assist undocumented students?
4. How do student affairs professionals empower undocumented students to persist?

## Theoretical Framework

Grant and Osanloo (2016) asserted that one of the most important aspects of research is the theoretical framework. It functions as an anchor that structures and supports the researcher's rationale for the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, study significance, and the research questions (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). For purposes of this study, a social capital framework will be used to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who serve undocumented students and how those experiences can be used to empower undocumented students to persist.

Portes (1998) explained social capital as a nonmonetary form of capital that houses significant sources of power and influence and assets gained through memberships in networks. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995), described social capital as the "social relationships from which an individual is potentially able to derive institutional support, particularly support that includes the delivery of knowledge-based resources" (p. 119). Simply stated, social capital is a type of resource derived from the social ties of individuals (Morrow, 1999).

Research on the relationship between social capital and educational development is growing (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Dika, & Singh, 2002; Gonzales, 2010; Ovink & Veazey, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995), and has

captured the attention of those seeking to improve educational institutions (Dika & Singh, 2002). Dika and Singh (2002) recognized a push by political and educational leaders to use social capital as a means of solving the persistent education and social problems that plague educational systems. Social capital is embedded in the foundation of relationships between and amongst actors within those relationships. These foundations and actors can be found throughout a variety of different entities with one such entity being higher education (Dika & Singh, 2002).

Hofferth et al. (1998) found that educational attainment remains an important investment students make about their futures as it allows them to make and save more money and acquire more stable employment. They further explained that educational success can be attributed to not only family support but also, the less emphasized, social and extrafamilial support. A student's social capital rests on the relationship between two spheres in a student's life: (a) family enterprise, and (b) other individuals or institutions that can affect a student's development (Hofferth et al., 1998).

Coleman (1988) argued that social capital is valuable because it allows individuals access to resources that help them to achieve their goals. Research supports the idea that social capital can be used to explain the role of nonfamilial social relationships play in undocumented students' ability to persist and allows for their growth and development (Coleman, 1988; Croninger & Lee, 2001, Portes, 1998). As it relates to this study, social capital will be looked at in terms of the other nonfamilial individuals or institutions, specifically student affairs professional in the college/university setting. While all the research questions listed above attend to aspects of the theoretical

framework, research questions 2 (*How are student affairs professionals assisting undocumented students*) and 4 (*How do student affairs professionals empower undocumented students to persist?*) use the theory directly to access how student affairs professionals support and empower undocumented students to persist.

Portes (1998) believed that group involvement and participation can have positive effects on both the individual and their networks. His commentary linked how social capital is used as a predictor of school attrition and academic performance, students' intellectual growth, and sources of occupational attainment (Portes, 1998). Educational related ties can impact a student's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Morrow, 1999). Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) found that educational success is directly dependent upon students being able to form genuine and supportive relationships with institutional agents. As related to minority students, supportive relationships are mostly found outside of their family units. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) uses the following terms to assess whether social capital is valued within social ties and networks:

1. Whether a tie or a network is oriented toward providing institutional support,
2. The quality of the resources provided, and
3. The degree to which support is tailored to the needs of the individuals (p. 119).

Coleman (1988) posited that an individual's actions are shaped, redirected, and constrained by social context. In essence, students are shaped by their environments. He asserted that social capital is a particular type of resource available to an actor who has control over or interest in certain resources. Being defined by its function, social capital is not seen as a single entity, but multiple entities. Coleman (1988) saw these entities as

having two common elements: they contain some aspect of social structures and they work to facilitate specific actions of the actors within the structure. Social capital allows achievement where there would be none but for its presence. Although less tangible than other forms of capital, social capital exists in the relationships among people (Coleman, 1988).

Croninger and Lee (2001) declared that institutions can provide students with valuable forms of assistance. Educational institutions are essential sources of social capital as they perform a vital role in preparing students for adulthood and beyond, because they are central players in a student's developmental process. They went on to explain how access to social capital provides individuals with an upper hand in society. Social capital provides students with valuable intangibles such as emotional support, guidance, and assistance in accomplishing educational tasks (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Croninger and Lee (2001) posited undocumented students are especially dependent upon educational institutions for support and guidance. They often come from home environments that face economic and social hardships due to their undocumented status (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Using social capital as a predictor of persistence moves some of the responsibility of succeeding from the student and places it with the educational system. Martin et al. (2020) suggested that social capital can develop strategies to influence the strength of a student's network as well as alleviate disadvantages. Students will have more resources that will aid them to succeed. Students' persistence is linked to the relationships they can

form with individuals on campus. Institutional agents provide important social capital to the students they serve on their campuses (Martin et al., 2020).

Ovink and Veazey (2011) found that minority students are at a disadvantage when it comes to college matriculation and persistence to graduation. They further posited that early interventions could assist in preparing students for using social capital as a means of upward mobility. As mentioned earlier, one of the basic functions of social capital is as a basis of benefits gained from extrafamilial relationships (Portes, 1998). When undocumented students leave their families and communities for other opportunities, these established bonds can be destroyed. Thus, there is a need for students to find social capital benefits beyond their immediate families and communities.

Social capital allows undocumented students to make direct contact with economic resources, increase contacts with experts of refinement, and connect with institutions with valuable credentials (Portes, 1998). Social capital requires that undocumented students form relationships with other individuals as it is those individuals who are the possessors of the capital. Connections with these individuals are influential in advancing one's upward mobility. Paraphrasing Portes (1998), social connections can provide undocumented students with privileged access to greater resources.

According to Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995), many minority students find that institutional agents are those who possess the needed professionally based information and who are able to provide helpful guidance. The authors also determined that the need for relying on institutional agents increases as students progress through their educational careers. Coleman (1988) asserted that providing information as a

resource is an important form of social capital. Student affairs professionals can "represent an especially important source of social capital available" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 554) to undocumented students and aids in them persisting in higher education. Students who receive positive support and guidance from institutional agents are more likely to persist in their educational endeavors (Croninger & Lee, 2001). In sum, social capital theory is used in this study to explain how institutional policies and networking with student affairs professionals can empower and boost persistence of undocumented students.

## Definition of Terms

1. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients: Individuals who entered the United States at a young age but did not have legal immigration status and will not be placed up for immigration removal status by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for two years (Adams & Boyne, 2015).
2. Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act: Proposed legislation what would provide a pathway to legalization for undocumented immigrant students (Gonzales, 2010).
3. Institutional agents: Individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly or to negotiate the transmission of institutional resources and opportunities (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).
4. Southeastern United States: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics).

5. Student affairs professionals: Individuals who are tasked with ensuring that "students are safe, cared for, well treated, and (more or less) satisfied with their higher education" (Long, 2012).
6. Unauthorized immigrants: Individuals residing in the United States who are not U.S. citizens, who do not hold a current permanent resident visa, or who have not been granted permission under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for longer-term residence and work" (Garcia & Tierney, 2011).
7. Undocumented students: An undocumented student is a foreign national who: (1) entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the United States without authorization (as defined by the National Immigration Law Center).

## Delimitations

This study gathered data from seven higher education student affairs professionals who work or have worked with undocumented students under their respective institutional roles in four-year, public and private colleges and universities as well as two-year community and junior colleges in the Southeastern United States. Specifically, student affairs professionals who work in housing, advising, and enrollment management will be interviewed. The central criteria will be whether the participant works directly with undocumented students on their campuses.

## Assumptions

It is assumed that all participants interviewed answered interview questions in an open and honest manner. This was facilitated by building rapport with the participants to establish a comfortable interview environment. It is further assumed the participants had a sincere and truthful motive in participating in the study because doing so may provide results that can be used to better serve the undocumented students on their campuses.

## Significance of the Study

Access and opportunity issues related to undocumented college students are on the rise. Although higher education access for undocumented students has drawn attention from researchers, there are still areas in need of more attention. One of those areas is the role that higher education student affairs professionals have in working with undocumented students. This study intends to bridge the gap in the literature that is currently present. There are also limited studies from the southeastern states. Additionally, this research may be useful in shaping policy to improve undocumented students' access and persistence by looking at how institutional agents work with these students.

# CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature concerning undocumented students presented the five following subtopics to be addressed in this chapter: (a) laws and policies, (b) access barriers, (c) experiences of undocumented students, (d) persistence of undocumented students despite obstacles, and (e) institutional support.

## Laws and Policies

A review of relevant laws and policies provides the background for how undocumented students are situated in their pursuit of higher education. Some laws and policies operate to the benefit of undocumented students while others contribute to their detriment.

In 1975, the Texas legislature passed a law that would withhold funding that could be used for educating children of undocumented immigrants. The law went even further to allow public schools to deny entry to these students. With these restrictions in effect, plaintiffs filed a lawsuit (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). The issue before the Court was whether Texas could deny undocumented school-age children the free public education it provided to children who are citizens of the United States or legally admitted aliens and still be consistent with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court ruled that it could not. In essence, a state cannot constitutionally deny a distinct group of individuals the rights it offers to others. If it does, the denial must be justified by a showing of a legitimate state interest. This case provided undocumented students the right to have access to education in grades K-12.

Yates (2004) examined the history of access to primary, secondary, and higher education of undocumented students under the ruling in *Plyler v. Doe.* The author provided some background on both federal legislation that prohibits offering in-state tuition and on some states that seek to bypass those laws. Referring to Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), Yates pointed out that undocumented students cannot be charged in-state tuition rates based on residency unless states also provide the same rates to nonresident students. While still being compliant with Section 505, some states circumvented this by basing in-state tuition rates on something other than residency. For instance, Texas and California based in-state tuition rates on attending and graduating from a state high school. The article concluded with the author's suggestion that additional legislation should be enacted so that future undocumented students can enjoy the benefits of their documented counterparts.

Olivas (2009) added to the literature about undocumented students and higher education by also examining the *Plyler* case. The study specifically addressed studies showing that some parents of undocumented students pay and file taxes. As such, their child(ren) should be allowed access to financial aid. The author then turned the discussion to some state laws. Olivas pointed out the changing state laws as it relates to educating undocumented students. As one example, at one time Georgia allowed undocumented students to claim in-state status for tuition purposes. However, by 2008, the state legislature no longer allowed it. He briefly introduced and discussed some federal issues surrounding undocumented students (Olivas, 2009).

Belanger (2001) examined issues related to immigration laws and education by focusing on the Hispanic population of Texas. Texas was the first to allow students access to higher education at resident tuition rates. She asserted that educating undocumented students would not only benefit undocumented families but also society by providing for increased participation in the economy. The author pointed out how important education is to those seeking to be economically stable in society. She went on to explain that even when some view educating an undocumented workforce as not attractive, it would be in Texas' long-range interest to do so. She based her position on the fact that many of the undocumented youth will remain in Texas, unless there are drastic changes in immigration procedures.

In an earlier work, Olivas (2004) reviewed articles to track college residency of undocumented students. Examining the complex practices and conflicting policies of college residency, the article reviewed the issue in three parts. In part 1, the discussion explored undocumented college residency before the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA). Here, Olivas (2004) pointed out that navigating the residency requirement of enrollment was an intimidating process even for resident citizens with each state having their own separate and oftentimes, confusing policies. He examined the issue as it related to undocumented students through the lens of the *Plyler v. Doe* decision. Although, it does not speak to allowing postsecondary attendance, it was the first case to review educational residency with the backdrop of immigration.

Part 2 reviewed the IIRIRA and postsecondary residency benefits. As previously mentioned, Section 505 of IIRIRA did not allow undocumented students access to financial aid. However, Olivas begged to differ. He posited that residency is strictly a state issue that should be determined by states. In his reading of the Act, he wrote, "the IIRIRA, however badly written, allows states to confer (or not confer) a residency benefit upon the undocumented in their public postsecondary institutions" (Olivas, 2004, 452-453).

In part 3, Olivas (2004) turned his attention to Post-September 11 developments as they related to residency. At the time, he saw the most crucial development that would cut out the confusion of IIRIRA was the introduction of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. He believed that if it passed in its present form it would completely repeal Section 505 of IIRIRA. The article concluded with a summarization of developments at the state and federal levels where he believes the issue will be resolved with a combination of laws from both levels.

Flores (2010) questioned whether in-state rate tuition policies affected the likelihood of enrollment of undocumented students? To answer the question, the study reviewed data collected from states that granted undocumented students in-state tuition and compared them to data collected from states that did not offer in-state tuition. The author used Becker's cost-benefit framework. It was used to speculate on college-enrollment as it relates to price reduction. She used the Current Population Survey sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, for 1998 through 2005 and focused on the Latino population of the sample. The data reported

showed that there was a significant increase in college enrollment after enactment of an in-state tuition policy.

Howard (2014) provided some insight into the experiences of undocumented students with guidance about national education equity, laws, and what was proposed legislation. One piece of proposed legislation Howard presented was the DREAM Act. Introduced in Congress in 2001, it would provide a pathway to permanent residency and access to federal benefits including financial aid. In conclusion, the author gave recommendations on how institutional agents can provide resources to and for undocumented students. Howard suggested institutions create informational pieces about general student services with specific information pertaining to undocumented students.

Adams and Boyne (2015) surveyed the updates to federal and state laws as well as various policies related to higher education opportunities for undocumented students from the previous decade. The article begins with an examination of federal initiatives, specifically the development of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Announced June 15, 2012, DACA meant that individuals who entered the United States at a young age but did not have legal immigration status would not be placed up for immigration removal status by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for two years. An undocumented individual would have to meet the following criteria to qualify: (1) have entered the United States before his or her sixteenth birthday; (2) have been continuously present in the United States since June 15, 2007 and, more specifically, been physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012; (3) be currently enrolled in school, graduated from high school, obtained a General Educational

Development (“GED”) certificate, or be enrolled in or have successfully completed another qualifying educational program (e.g., GED preparatory course and/or English as a second language course); (4) be at least fifteen years old at the time of the application, but not more than thirty as of June 15, 2012; and (5) have never been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or more than three non-significant misdemeanors, and not pose a national security or public safety threat (Adams & Boyne, 2015).

Additionally, DACA recipients would be eligible for a Social Security number, work authorization, and in most states, a driver’s license (Adams & Boyne, 2015). Under the program, recipients would no longer be considered “undocumented” because the federal government determined them to be lawfully present in the United States. Since 2012, DACA, which is an Executive Order, has been modified based on the perspective of the Executive in office (Adams & Boyne, 2015). Recently, a court held that DACA was unconstitutional in part (*Texas v. United States*, 2021). That holding may be appealed.

As shown, state and federal laws have put student affairs professionals in a precarious position with mixed messaging. Gildersleeve et al. (2010) outlined some legal context surrounding undocumented students and higher education while providing student affairs policymakers with tips for serving undocumented students. Undocumented students find struggle in their everyday lives and continue that struggle once they enroll in colleges and universities across the country. Student affairs professionals are on the

front line in assisting students, including undocumented students, navigate their campuses.

## Access Barriers

Another major issue that undocumented students face in their pursuit of higher education is access. Abrego and Gonzales (2010) examined the limited research that specifically observed the educational and occupational barriers of Latino undocumented students. They found that few studies undertook to understand the placement undocumented students found themselves in their educational pursuits. The authors found that a plethora of barriers hindered undocumented students' access ranging from poverty to postsecondary institutional bureaucracy, while Perez (2010b) provided background on the plight of undocumented students. Perez began by sharing a story of an undocumented student. Discussing some of the historical context surrounding educational access for undocumented students, he provided ways to support undocumented students in their quest for gains in higher education.

Cisneros (2013) further added to the literature by discussing several issues that are faced by undocumented students and their access to higher education. The article asked two questions: 1. What are the most significant factors that hinder undocumented students' access to higher education and 2. What solutions can assist? The main issue presented was a lack of money. Cisneros (2013) asserted that it was not merely the cost associated with attending college, but the financial burden undocumented students face when needing to contribute to their families and relatives be it their parents with whom they live or those who reside in their home countries.

Diaz-Strong.et al. (2011) discussed how undocumented students are restricted by the denials of financial aid access in higher education. The article examined what the authors described as the interlocking relationship between federal immigration and higher education policies. Diving a little deeper, the authors' findings detailed the link between the stressors of being undocumented and Latino student retention and graduation rates.

Drachman (2006) revisited *Plyler* asserting that the basic arguments set forth in the 1982 United States Supreme Court case should also apply to higher education. In essence, denying access would have a lifetime of negative hardships on children who cannot be held accountable for their status. The author explained that supporting state and federal aid to undocumented students is a logical end supported by some of the same points set out in *Plyler*. These students are being punished for actions of their parents or guardians. Also, most are here to stay and should be able to become productive members of society. Society would benefit more than it would hurt.

Frum (2007) presented one main issue and three sub-issues related to undocumented students and their access to higher education. The author believed the main issue is whether undocumented students are entitled to attend public postsecondary institutions. The three narrower issues are 1. Whether undocumented students are eligible for in-state tuition; 2. Whether it is the federal or state government who should determine in-state tuition eligibility; and 3. Whether there are any social or economic gains from investing in higher education for undocumented students? The author examined these issues solely as it relates to public colleges and universities. The article concluded with

the author offering policy options to states who are looking to improve educational access to undocumented students.

Munoz (2009) detailed her experience in working with undocumented students at City University of New York (CUNY). At the time, she was a professor of immigration. Five of her students sought her out in hopes that she would be able to help them become legal citizens. Her article explained why she feels that higher education access to undocumented students is one of fundamental right. She discussed how these students are going to stay in the United States and thus should be given the opportunity to be "good citizens." Having an education increases one's chances of getting a better job. She believes that our immigration policy says that undocumented students are disposable. Moreover, she remarked on the fact that even though New York has laws that allow for in-state tuition rates, undocumented students still have a hard time.

Nienhusser (2014) also used CUNY to highlight how it addresses college access for undocumented students. It examines the day-to-day work of those who are tasked with implementing New York's college in-state resident tuition policy. The article found that CUNY attempts to ensure proper implementation of the policy. It concluded with practices that could be used to increase undocumented students' engagement and participation in community colleges, because research concluded that a large number of undocumented students often enroll in them.

Perez (2010a) outlined the most significant influences that impacted undocumented student college choices. The author found this aspect important for the following reasons:

1. Low educational attainment is seen as a crisis at all levels of the educational system;

2. Undocumented students would help the economy by spending and paying taxes;

3. Future job growth requires a college education;

4. Research shows that enrollment at community colleges will often stall undocumented students' desire to transfer;

5. Focusing research on this area will improve practice.

Using both qualitative interviews and a quantitative questionnaire, it was concluded that the most important influence was that of cost. Further, she found that outreach efforts must be enhanced to increase opportunities for undocumented students.

Ruge and Iza (2005) discussed some common misconceptions about undocumented student access to higher education. One common misconception was how undocumented students' enrollment is prohibited by federal law. The authors first presented how federal law in fact permits undocumented student admission at higher educational institutions. They contend that it would be both socially responsible and good public policy. To inhibit their ability would result in limited opportunities to be full participants in society by creating a class of under-educated and under-utilized individuals. Ruge and Iza (2005) went on to explain how permitting in-state tuition to undocumented students is permitted under federal law. They close by explaining the policy that would support admission and in-state tuition for undocumented students. Examining the roles of student affairs professionals through this lens, one may contend

that these professionals are perfectly situated and can provide adequate and effective support to undocumented students in their experiences in gaining access to a higher education.

## Experiences of Undocumented Students

Prior research of the experiences of undocumented students provides a critical lens through which to examine what resources will be most beneficial for their success. Bjorklund (2018) believed it was vital to explore research that examined the lived experiences of undocumented students as a way of better understanding their placement within higher education in hopes of coming up with viable solutions to assist them. One study suggested college experiences were the strongest predictor of degree attainment (Arbona & Nora, 2007); while another study found that students experienced issues related to having foreign-born parents that created disadvantages (Escamilla & Trevino, 2014).

According to Gonzales (2007), the political debate has long focused on undocumented immigrants, but has, for the most part, "ignored the plight of undocumented children" (p. 1). As such, his research sought to draw attention to the experiences of undocumented children. Gonzales reported that only about 5-10% of undocumented students that graduate high school go on to college. The report also found that undocumented students who are allowed better access to postsecondary education would be able to pay taxes and spend and invest in the economy.

Davidson and Precidao (2017) continued to explore the experiences of undocumented students within the context of college and university housing. The authors

started by reviewing the ever-changing polices at the state and federal levels to put into context the regulations that make it possible for undocumented students to have access to higher education. Explaining how research detailing the lived experiences of undocumented students continue to increase, a gap was found as it relates to them navigating the complexities of wanting to live on campus. The authors provide administrators with recommendations for how to best assist undocumented students who seek to live on campus.

Additional research suggests the experiences of undocumented students may differ depending on the type of institution at which they are enrolled. Using a sample population from the Texas Community College system to examine the experiences of undocumented students, Jauregui et al. (2008) showed that there is a yearly increase in undocumented student enrollment. The authors sought to examine the relationship between the size of Texas Community Colleges and those undocumented students who are enrolled, and concluded there has been a steady increase of enrollment of undocumented students at these institutions. Furthermore, the authors pointed out this uptick in enrollment might be attributed to the idea that community colleges are committed to being openly accessible while adding a degree of safety and assurance.

Using a social capital framework, Enriquez (2011) examined the educational experiences of undocumented students. Enriquez's research was seeking to understand how Latina/o undocumented students developed and used social capital to successfully steer their way to educational success. Undocumented students gain support from many sources, but she found that the information they need concerning their legal status comes

from other undocumented students. These students are not independently successful, but rely on a network of individuals to advance their educational pursuits. She found that a central part of a student's success depended on being able to develop and build social networks.

Intending for her research to be used as a model for other undocumented students to follow, Enriquez (2011) set forth the premise that it is important for undocumented students to have access to a wealth of resources if they are to be successful in advancing their education. Suarez-Oroco et al. (2015) research continued to examine the college experience of undocumented students with the intent of exploring ways to improve those experiences across US campuses. The authors concluded by making recommendations for creating, what they term, undocufriendly campuses. Accordingly, it was suggested for campuses to create and provide a safer space for undocumented students. Staff and faculty trainings would lend a hand in this endeavor as a means of being able to effectively advise and guide undocumented students on campuses.

Perez and Roderiguez (2011) sought to understand undocumented student experiences by interviewing 15 Latina/o undocumented college students. The students attended a public Hispanic-Serving Institution. The following three themes surrounding familial support were found: listening and understanding; goal setting; and motivation. The study found that support from institutional agents in facilitating the college-going process was mixed among study participants. Many of the students sampled spoke highly of institutional agents who aided in them being able to pursue higher education. The

study also found some students were skeptical because of previous experiences where institutional agents lacked efficient knowledge to assist them.

Garcia and Tierney (2011) used the social capital theoretical frame to study a small sub-set of undocumented college students. By interviewing 40 students and 5 educators, they wanted to explore the most pressing challenges faced by undocumented students when pursuing higher education. Paying close attention to the issues related to financial obstacles, academic preparation and perceptions of belonging, two themes were identified: finances and relationships. Having someone they trust to guide them in the process was a big part of attending college.

Gildersleeve and Ranero's (2010) wanted to focus on the experiences of Latinas and Latinos before college to put in perspective how those experiences may ultimately shape their college experiences. They explored those issues in hopes of providing tools for student affairs professionals' efforts to better assist these students. The authors use of soci-cultural theory and Gildersleeve's college-going literacies framework to show how the participation of undocumented students are shaped by their precollege lives.

Using in-depth interviews and a focus group, Munoz and Maldonado (2012) examined how undocumented Mexicana students navigate identities. They used counterstorytelling to provide room for pushing against those stories about communities of color being culturally deficient. According to the authors, counterstorytelling are stories told from the viewpoint of the marginalized in order to share their experiences. Additionally, counterstorytelling allows for students to create environments where they feel they can persist by being acknowledged and valued. The authors also considered if

there are implications for counterstorytelling as it relates to educational theory and policy.

Authors Perez et al. (2010) examined the socio-emotional experiences and characteristics of undocumented college students. The authors contend that these students cope differently due to their legal status. Here, a socio-emotional development framework is used. The authors asserted that undocumented students cope in several ways through their relationships with different people at different stages. The authors provided additional ideas to help assist undocumented students with coping with their unique situations. They suggest that colleges train their faculty and staff to be sensitive to the needs of undocumented students. The study found that student affairs professionals heavily impact the experiences of undocumented students by creating a sense of hope and motivating them to persist. Additionally, they believe colleges should form multicultural support groups for these students.

With various studies examining the lived experiences of undocumented students, Munoz (2016) took a different focus. He examined the process of disclosing one's undocumented status with a specific focus on those that self-identified as "undocumented and unafraid." The author used the Latin@ critical race theory (LatCrit) to examine how undocumented students "come out." Munoz (2016) explains LatCrit in terms of how it breaks down power relationships while including "issues of language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype, which are intersecting markets of identities and inequality" (p. 718). Diving deeper, LatCrit goes beyond the binary line of Black and White when discussing issues of race by considering those experiences of the Latin@

population. By discussing issues and experiences of undocumented students, Munoz believed that institutions should make undocumented students aware of the campus resources that are available to them. The author examined three specific areas: 1. Admissions, 2. Financial Aid, and 3. Academic advising.

Gleeson and Gonzales (2012) used over 200 in-depth interviews to examine how the effects of two key institutions, work and school, conversely shape how immigrants see their relationship of their rights in American society. The authors posited that work and school differently shape experiences of the undocumented. The findings showed that undocumented students do not face the same types of obstacles as undocumented workers even though they both share an undocumented status. Even still, it was determined that undocumented students often develop survival skills that might create barriers to any rights they might be afforded. Often, undocumented students find themselves not wanting to expose their undocumented status for fear of what that might mean for their families. They tend to fly under the radar while still surviving and seeking ways to succeed despite their status (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Bjorklund, 2018).

### Persistence of Undocumented Students Despite Obstacles

Despite the hardships faced by undocumented students, studies show they continue to thrive in their desire to continue their education post K12 (Contreras, 2009). According to Perez (2010b), a vast majority of college-aged undocumented students possess high levels of academic achievement. These students show resiliency and persistence in the face of numerous obstacles associated with their immigration status. The article concludes with presenting several research-based solutions for counseling

professionals in their efforts to better support undocumented students and their desire for higher education. Perez asserted that there is a need for professionals to not only be trained to be sensitive to the needs of undocumented students but also on their social and emotional experiences. This training would consist of the tools and resources in how to effectively assist undocumented students.

Perez et al. (2009) studied the academic resiliency of undocumented students. They specifically examined Latino immigrant students. The results showed that even with all the challenges undocumented students face, they exhibited a higher level of academic achievement when certain personal and environmental support factors were present. These factors ranged from supportive parents to participation in school activities. While Arbona and Nora (2007) believed that a better display of educational access would be viewed through the lens of persistence to graduating rather than merely looking at enrollment. Although data detailing access to higher education for Hispanic students is encouraging, there is still a comparative gap when comparing their graduation rates to their African American and White counterparts.

Sanchez and So (2015) profiled the Undocumented Student Program (USP) at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley). The authors shared their first-hand experience as former students and then leaders of the program, before detailing its history and development. Sanchez recounted the conversation of the first time he shared his family's undocumented history and his journey to UC Berkeley. Founded in 2012, the USP was the first program of its kind to be specifically dedicated to the needs of undocumented at a U.S. university. They discussed the holistic strategies employed to

support undocumented students in hopes of offering up tools for how other colleges and universities can encourage institutional support, create staff, and develop allies for undocumented students. Escamilla and Trevino (2014) surveyed students who are in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) to examine factors that helped with degree attainment. The CAMP program is for students who are migrant or seasonal workers or their children in the first year of undergraduate studies.

As previously mentioned, much of the literature addresses the psychological and emotional aspects undocumented students often face while trying to navigate higher education. Gamez, et al. (2017) specifically explored what factors, if any, helped to facilitate the success of undocumented students. Factors such as mentors, individual resiliency and "ganas" were discovered through interviews with current or former undocumented students. Ganas are described as those internal motivating factors or passion and will that drive undocumented students to persist while continuing to face the uphill battle towards their educational endeavors (Bjorklund, 2018; Contreras, 2009; Gamez et al., 2017).

## Institutional Support

Despite barriers and obstacles to the contrary, some undocumented students do find themselves enrolled in higher education programs. At times they find solace and support within those programs and institutions. As immigrants migrated to the nation's cities, Jesuit colleges and universities offered them a place to be educated (Sander, 2013). According to Sanders, impending immigration legislation caused these Jesuit colleges and universities to look at getting back to their mission of educating immigrants. Sanders

further asserted Jesuit colleges and universities were the first institutions of higher learning to specifically pledge to educate those who are in the country illegally. Additionally, they are hoping to produce a model on which other institutions of higher learning can follow, be they religious or not. The leaders of these Jesuit colleges and universities see the education of undocumented students as a moral issue. Private institutions such as Jesuit colleges and universities are in a better position to educate undocumented students. They are not bound by as strict political and financial restrictions as public college and universities. As such, they are the ideal institutions to bring this topic to the forefront.

Burkhardt et al. (2012) took a different approach by examining how higher educational institutions respond to pressures related to enrollment of undocumented students. The study concluded that although laws may influence institutional practice, they do not conclusively determine them. They showed how institutions can respond to laws and went into how they construct what it means to be compliant while staying true to their values and beliefs regarding access to education.

Reason and Broido (2005) examined the necessity of developing the next generation of allies in doing social justice work. The authors felt there needs to be some self-understanding in those who are in the trenches. They provided strategies to further the work of allies. They also used the space to discuss some of the obstacles that come with being an ally.

In their 2010 article, Chen et al. discussed the challenges that undocumented students face from cultural and linguistic barriers to fear of deportation. They believe that

school counselors are well situated to assist in addressing the needs of these students. They present tools and strategies for these professionals to advocate for and provide empowerment to undocumented students.

According to Kantamneni et al. (2016), undocumented students face a myriad of barriers. They explored the factors that affect three areas in these students' lives: academic, career, and work development. The authors discussed how these specific areas are directly impacted by the barriers associated with a student's immigration status. They concluded that higher education vocational psychologists and career counselors are uniquely positioned to provide services to and advocate for undocumented students.

In 2003, Gibson used a single California high school as a case study to explore factors that might contribute to migrant high school students persisting and achieving academically. The author used both qualitative and quantitative methods to follow students' performance from the 9$^{th}$ through 12$^{th}$ grades of 160 migrant students. The findings suggested that with the help of the Migrant Education Program and its staff, students had a greater outcome of succeeding. The staff provided various academic and support services to those students.

Barnhardt et al. (2013) conducted a case study centered on the academic success of an undocumented student, Kaitlyn, at Hillborough College (Hillborough). The case study sought to demonstrate how effective administrative support can foster students' growth and development as they deal with their unique challenges. They looked at the importance of administrative commitment, clarity, and consistency. Hillborough had a clear and consistent policy for admitting undocumented students. Additionally,

Hillborough provided staff trainings around the ins and outs of their financial aid as it related to undocumented students (Barnhardt et al., 2013).

Kaitlyn was assigned to an administrator as part of Hillborough's "regular academic and developmental supportive infrastructure" (Barnhardt et al., 2013, p. 24). The case study provided insight into how Kaitlyn's connection with her campus administrator was beneficial to her positive educational experience at Hillborough and allowed her to gain access to necessary resources.

Flores and Oseguera (2009) described community colleges as the most local institutions of higher education. They explained that community colleges have been historically geared towards individuals who do not readily have access to four-year institutions. The authors also explained how community colleges adjust and change with the demographics of the communities they serve. Highlighting the states of California and North Carolina, the authors present a theory of localism and its motivation as it relates to "immigrants and higher education." As the authors posited, policy context had "significant influence on local implementation of postsecondary educational opportunity in particular state" (Flores & Oseguera, 2009, p. 81).

According to Teranishi et al. (2011), immigrant youth make up a large number of the nation's population and will soon make up a large majority of the U.S. workforce. With this in mind, the authors argued that priority should be on increasing educational attainment, economic productivity, and civic engagement of undocumented students. They posited that community colleges are well situated to meet this demand and objective.

Watson et al. (2018) studied how San Jose, California handled being a tale of two cities. It has immense wealth and a vital technology sector, but also has a growing immigrant population. To combat these two tales, the San Jose Evergreen Community College District created opportunities that combines what they describe as "required and optional collaborative change initiatives" for students with professional development programming for student services staff (Watson et al., 2018, p. 778). The student programs were partnerships used to further retention efforts, while professional development programs for student services staff was to increase skills and cultural responsiveness with its Student Services Academy.

Huerta and Ocampo (2017) discussed the framework being developed and to be used by the Evergreen State College (TESC) in Washington in its support of undocumented students. At TESC, there was an effort to make it a "sanctuary campus." Although not having a definitive legal status, a sanctuary campus is one that offers a safe space for undocumented students. The article detailed the challenges faced by undocumented students and how the college used its framework to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of its undocumented student population. A part of being supportive called for identifying staff and administrators who are well versed in the needs and lived experiences of undocumented students and can assist and advocate for them at the campus. The authors also presented how other state supported institutions are responding to the needs of undocumented students. At the time, no higher education institution within the state had officially declared itself a *sanctuary campus*. However,

there were efforts across other institutions to not only raise awareness of undocumented students' needs, but to shore up support services.

Using social capital theory, Ortega (2011) examined the agency practices of national associations of higher education and how they can use their status to push policy. The social capital theory stands on the idea that members of certain networks can secure certain benefits by their association to social structures. The findings point to members being able to favorably influence educational policy.

Nienhusser and Espino (2017) focused on the necessary skills institutional administrators needed to effectively assist undocumented/DACAmented students by examining undocumented/DACAmented students' competency (UDSC). Undocumented/DACAmented status competency is described as having the "awareness, knowledge, skills related to addressing undocumented/DACAmented students' needs and to propose a form of practice" (Nienhusser & Espino, 2017, p. 1). Using a tripartite framework, the authors hoped to inform institutional agents' work. Here, tripartite framework was composed of the following three parts:

1. Awareness of undocumented/DACAmented students and their needs where institutional administrators recognize the needs of these student differ from the needs of other underserved student groups on their campuses.
2. Opportunities that contribute toward UDSC knowledge where institutional agents participate in both formal and informal training to share what they have learned in their working with undocumented/DACAmented students.

3. UDSC skills where institutional agents share practices and skills they use in working with undocumented/DACAmented students (Nienhusser and Espino 2017).

Stanton-Salazar (2011) dived into the concept of institutional agents. It added new points to the discussion of how effective institutional agents can be is heavily dependent upon their devotion in supporting low-status students through empowerment. The author posited that institutional agents are in the position to push for support. It draws on the social capital theory to explain how institutional agents can create change by using empowerment. Maton and Salem (1995, as cited in Stanton-Salazar, 2011) explains empowerment "as the active participatory process of gaining resources, competencies, and key forms of power necessary for gaining control over one's life and accomplishing important life goals" (p. 1090). As empowerment agents, institutional agents enable authentic empowerment in students by participating with them to change their lives in a significant manner (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Stebleton and Aleixo (2015) understood that the experiences of undocumented college students are different and unique from the needs of international students as they relate to immigration status. As such, the authors felt it necessary to spend more time studying trying to understand the experiences of undocumented students. One area the authors felt needed more exploration was how undocumented students interacted with institutional agents. The results found that students encountered many obstacles when attempting to form relationships with institutional agents.

Southern (2016) presented a three-phase institutional model that classified internal practices used to support undocumented students. Data was gathered from California higher education professionals. Institutional agents also included ally educators. Possible implications concluded were for individuals seeking to advocate for or build more comprehensive policies in support of undocumented students.

Nienhusser (2018) studied forty-five (45) community college institutional agents across four states to assess their roles in implementing policies that might affect undocumented and DACAmented students. The author looked at several roles that these institutional agents fulfill and how they influence or engender internal conflict. According to the study, institutional agents perceived themselves in various roles ranging from facilitator to support and advocate as they related to implementing policies that would possibly affect undocumented students on their campuses. Additionally, some institutional agents reported grappling with the conflict between their job duties as compliance officers and wanting to assist undocumented students. Many attempted to assist within the confines of policies while others leaned on their roles as compliance officers. Understanding how policies are implemented might assist in reshaping the practices of expanding education for both documented and undocumented students.

Gildersleeve and Vigil (2015) investigated how institutions support undocumented students. They surveyed states to determine if extending or denying in-state resident tuition to undocumented students had any effect on practices. Campus policies and programs were often informed by their state policies. The study highlighted some practices that institutional agents can provide that they found promising in

supporting undocumented students. Two years later, Barnhardt et al. (2017) continued to examine the importance of administers and their roles in assisting undocumented students. They examined campus diversity administrators' (CDOs) organizational and administrative practices and how they might contribute to experiences of undocumented students on their campuses. It drew on previous scholarship emphasizing how campus administrators can aid and influence their campus response to and support of marginalized students. The authors discussed a connection between "substantive inclusive organizational action and everyday administrative routines" (p. 1). The authors contend that CDOs are the institutional agents tasked with being attentive to campus issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As such, it is not a far stretch to extend their helping hands to assist undocumented students in navigating their campuses. They concluded by offering tools CDOs can use to create inclusive environments for undocumented students.

Storlie and Jach (2012) suggested school counselors and student affairs professionals have an important role in assisting undocumented students. The authors call for the two to work collaboratively to serve the best interest of undocumented students. Social action and encouragement on the part of school counselors and student affairs professionals will help to advance the educational endeavors and pursuits of undocumented students. The authors set forth a model for the two groups to use in the hopes that it will educate other professionals in how to facilitate the opportunities for undocumented students. The authors believe they not only have a professional responsibility but also an ethical duty to advocate for undocumented students. Bjorklund

(2018) found that there have been policies at the institutional level to address the manifold of barriers or issues that undocumented students face. However, there is still much work to be done in improving access and ensuring institutional agents are well trained to address those needs.

It is critical to review the existing literature to gather a fuller picture of undocumented students, how they are situated within higher education, and identify any existing gaps in scholarship. Studies have shown undocumented students to be a resilient population. Laws and policies are at a stalemate on both sides of the aisle. Despite the many obstacles they face, undocumented students have found ways to persist in their quest for high education. Research suggests that their experiences, good or bad, are shaped by those willing to advocate on their behalf. The research further suggests that little is known as how best to provide support. However, institutional agents are well situated to be on the front lines to be advocates. As such, it is imperative that a better understanding of the role student affairs professionals play in assisting undocumented students.

# CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

This research study was conducted using a qualitative methodology. This chapter describes the reasons for selecting a qualitative methodology and explains why phenomenology is the most appropriate form of qualitative inquiry employed. In addition, specific elements of the study addressed are the research design, research questions, research participants, data collections and procedures, data analysis, positionality, and ethical and validity concerns.

## Research Design

Although there is no fixed definition for qualitative research, Creswell and Creswell (2018) described it as a way to study and gain meaning from how individuals ascribe to experiences. This study sought to not only understand the experiences of student affairs professionals who serve and assist undocumented students, but how they empower them to persist. Additionally, qualitative inquiry seeks to provide understanding of more complex and detailed problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers gain access to this information by direct contact with individuals who have experienced this problem or issue. Creswell and Poth (2018) further asserted that qualitative inquiry allows individuals to share their stories in their own words.

Specifically, a phenomenological research approach was employed to explore and gather the lived experiences from student affairs professionals. Finlay (2009) posited that phenomenological research is conducted when the researcher is seeking to focus on a thorough account of individuals' lived experiences and the meanings attached to those

experiences. The research goes beyond the surface and dives deeper to unearth rich descriptions. Because the researcher was drawn to the experiences of student affairs professionals who have served or are serving undocumented students, phenomenology was best to describe their shared experiences. It provided the most relevant approach to encourage them to share their stories openly (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Phenomenology collected the views of the participants and described what all participants shared as they experienced the phenomenon being researched (Creswell et al., 2007). This study sought to gather participants' first-hand accounts and in-depth information regarding assisting undocumented students. Neubauer et al. (2019) explained that phenomenology explores the essence of an event by examining the perspectives of those who have experienced the event. It sought to define not only what was experienced but how it was experienced. Studying the lived experience of individuals who have faced or are facing the same phenomenon helps to broaden our knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Phenomenology provided a first-hand description from those who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Groenewald, 2004). Eddles-Hirsch (2015) observed that it does not merely focus on the participants and the phenomenon separately but describes the meaning of the entwined relationship between the two.

Although qualitative inquiry is used to investigate meaning from the subjective view of the participants (Wertz, 2005), there is a chance that the researcher's bias would come into play while using the phenomenology method (Finlay, 2009). To reduce the influence of this issue, Finlay (2009) described how the researcher can "bracket" their

past knowledge and assumptions about the phenomenon and focus solely on the experiences of the individuals being researched.

Bracketing required that the researcher put aside her own theories and past knowledge about the phenomenon being studied prior to and throughout the duration of the study (Chan et al., 2013; Gearing, 2004). Chan et al. (2013) added that the researcher sets aside any preconceived notions to exactly describe how the participants experience the phenomenon. Since the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection, being able to be aware of and own up to one's own preconceived notions and thoughts is vital in bracketing. As such, bracketing should be on the researcher's mind throughout the study. A primary goal of phenomenological research is to unearth an in-depth understanding of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009). To do this, phenomenology requires the researcher to leave behind his or own attitudes and instead, be fully present in the participants' responses (Finlay, 2009). Bracketing is an ongoing process and should be performed throughout the study (Finlay, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

## Research Questions

This study investigated the role of U.S. student affairs professionals who serve the needs of undocumented college students. To that end, the researcher used the following questions to guide the current study:

1. What are the major issues that student affairs professionals face when assisting undocumented students?
2. How are student affairs professionals assisting undocumented students?

3. What strategies are student affairs professionals using to assist undocumented students?
4. How do student affairs professionals empower undocumented students to persist?

## Research Participants

To limit bias, the researcher carefully chose seven participants (Thompson, 1999). According to a Pew Research Center (2020) study, roughly one-third (34%) of immigrants live in the South. The criterion for selecting participants for the study included higher education student affairs professionals who work or have worked with undocumented students under their prescribed institutional roles in four-year, public and private colleges and universities as well as two-year community and junior colleges. Originally, the focus was only in the Southeastern United States. However, the study was expanded outside of the Southeastern United States to attract more participants (See Table 1).

Those selected were practicing student affairs professionals, specifically those individuals who are tasked with ensuring that "students are safe, cared for, well treated, and (more or less) satisfied with their higher education" (Long, 2012, pp. 7-8). The types of functional student affairs roles recruited included housing, advising, and enrollment management. However, those student affairs professionals who mainly serve administrative functions, such as assessment, were not included in the sample. The central criteria was what researchers consider 'front-facing' professionals; those who work directly with students (Long, 2012; Pomerantz, 2006).

The specific number of participants was determined at the time of data collection from the sample population of student affairs professionals. Per Thompson (1999), qualitative research calls for non-probability sampling, because not all participants will have an equal opportunity to be a part of the study. Participants were identified and selected based on whether they fit within the guidelines of the study. The main guidelines for selecting participants were whether they are or have assisted or supported undocumented students within their prescribed institutional roles.

For purposes of this study, a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling occurred. Suri (2011) asserted, combining two or more techniques can assist in gathering the needed participants to address the research issue. Typically used for qualitative studies, purposeful sampling looks directly to the qualities of the participants and does not require a set number of participants (Etikan et al., 2016), but represents the stated conditions of the study (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). After deciding what needs to be known, the researcher finds participants who are willing and able to share their knowledge and experiences (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants were purposefully recruited through the recruitment letter (Appendix B) being posted or emailed to issue-based listservs, social media platforms and professional organizations such as, but not limited to the following, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and from Facebook groups such as, but not limited to, Student Affairs Professionals, Deltas with Careers in Higher Education/Student Affairs, and BLKSAP (Black Student Affairs Professionals).

Through the second technique, snowball sampling, other student affairs professionals who were not identified during the initial recruitment period were recruited. At the conclusion of the interview, a snowball recruitment request was read from the Interview Protocol (Appendix I). Suri (2011) described snowball sampling as using key informants to identify others who might meet the study criteria and possess information pertaining to the study. Choosing two sampling techniques increases the chances of having a sufficient number of participants

Sample sizes for qualitative studies are usually small but should be large enough to satisfactorily answer the proposed research questions (Marshall, 1996) as size can "can only be set by reference to the specific aims and the methods" (Luborsky &Rubinstein, 1995, p. 10) of the study. One researcher suggested that looking at citing recommendations from qualitative methodologists would be helpful in justifying the sample size used in a study (Marshall et al., 2013). Guest et al. (2006) recommended six to twelve interviews when conducting a phenomenological study, while Creswell & Creswell (2018) suggested three to ten. Wertz (2005) remarked that it is not always possible to determine a fixed number of participants before performing the study and conducting the analysis. With no specific number in mind, the number would become obvious to the researcher once new themes or categories stop developing from the collected data (Marshall, 1996). Fugard and Potts (2015) suggested using the thematic analysis guidelines as set forth by Braun and Clarke (2013). Braun and Clarke (2013, as cited in Fugard & Potts, 2015) recommended the number of participants needed would be based upon "the type of data collection and the size of the project" (p. 671). For small

studies using interviews, 6-10 participants would suffice (Braun & Clarke, 2013, as cited in Fugard & Potts, 2015). Accordingly, this study ended with 7 participants sharing their experiences.

## Data Collection and Procedures

Before attempting to recruit any participants for the study, the researcher applied to and was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research (Appendix A). Once approval was granted, the researcher used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit participants using social media platforms by posting the recruitment letter which contained information on how to contact the researcher for those that were interested in participating (Appendix B). For participants who contacted the researcher directly, an email (Appendix C) was sent thanking them for their interest with the prescreen questionnaire (Appendix D) linked to capture if they met the recruitment criteria. The prescreen questionnaire was created using the Qualtrics XM platform. Additionally, emails containing a link to the prescreen questionnaire and a copy of the IRB approval letter were sent using issue-based listservs and contacts from professional organizations to seek out potential participants (Appendix E).

Eligibility was determined by reviewing the prescreen questionnaire. Eleven participants submitted the questionnaire with seven meeting the criteria. For the seven participants who met the criteria, an email was sent inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix F). It is important to obtain written consent from each participant before collecting any data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The email contained a copy of the informed

consent letter (See Appendix G) to be signed and sent back before the interview, a Qualtrics XM link to collect demographic information (Appendix H), and a Calendly link to schedule the interview.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) remarked that one way for qualitative researchers to collect data is through interviewing participants. Interviews were one-on-one, semi-structured, and ranged from 14 minutes to 86 minutes long. Research interviews serve as one of the most vital data collections methods for qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Qu & Dumay, 2015). According to Qu & Dumay (2011), semi-structured interviewing "involves prepared questioning guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses" (p. 246). The semi-structured interviews were intentionally designed to solicit subjective answers from the interviewees concerning their experiences assisting and empowering undocumented students. Semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interviews for qualitative inquiry because they allow for adaptability when needed and allow for important facets of the human experience to be uncovered by allowing interviewees to provide responses on their own terms and in their own words (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Rabionet, 2011**).** Although an interview protocol was used, it only served as a guide to keep the conversation flowing. The participants were asked the same four questions to begin. However, any additional questions were asked based on the flow of the conversation and participant responses. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are appropriate because the product is knowledge (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Finally, semi-structured interviews are useful when there is sufficient objective knowledge of the area

being studied, but the phenomena being studied lacks subjective knowledge that can be provided by the interviewees (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

The interviews were conducted via the Zoom video conferencing platform. The interviews were guided using an interview protocol (see Appendix I) developed by the researcher. It is vital for semi-structured interviews to be "open-ended and formulated to elicit unstructured responses and generate discussion" (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 4).

For this study the researcher developed an interview guide that aligns with the study's methodology (McGrath et al., 2019) as well as the aims and objectives of the study (Ryan et al., 2009). A semi-structured interview guide allows for freedom and interaction during the interview (Adams & Boyne, 2015). The guide starts off with non-threatening questions (Ryan et al., 2009).

During the interviews, the researcher took handwritten notes of observations of the participants and of any information she deemed important. A useful way of learning about experiences of others, qualitative interviews require both thoughtful planning and preparation and uses various skills such as note taking (Qu & Dumay, 2011). With participants' permission, interviews were recorded using the recording feature in the Zoom platform and then transcribed using the Otter transcription platform. The transcriptions were then used during the data analysis. Recording the interviews allowed the researcher to be more engaged in and focused on the conversation.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the study participants and began during the collection process with the handwritten notes.

The general process of analyzing data for a qualitative study involves "organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 181).

For purposes of this study, the data was analyzed using the thematic analysis design set forth by Braun and Clarke (2012). Braun and Clarke (2012) describe thematic analysis as being accessible and flexible and most accurately used for facilitating the naming and analysis of themes in a data set. The Braun and Clarke model of thematic analysis has six phases. Phase one starts by becoming familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As mentioned, this process began with the handwritten notes taken during the interviews. Any notes taken during the interview were typed up for each interview. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. It is critical that the interviews be transcribed word-for-word and not paraphrased (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). To ensure that the software captured the conversation accurately, the researcher checked the transcripts by relistening to the recordings and editing any issues the software might have made. The transcripts were then read and reread to start gathering any appropriate or interesting information related to the research questions. Additional notes were made when necessary.

Phase two is generating an initial list of codes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). After being immersed in the data, these codes were a list of relevant ideas about the data that would later become themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2021). This phase involved coding all the data before identifying and reviewing for more specific key themes. Data

coding can be a laborious process with qualitative studies. Coding methods will generally depend on the researcher, but can fall in to two categories, manual manipulation or electronic (coding software) (Basit, 2003; Côté et al., 1993; Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). As there were only seven interview transcripts, the researcher chose to manually code. This also allowed the researcher to spend more time with the data. Additionally, Phase 2 involved more reading of the data to code any items that would be useful in addressing the research questions. Initially, the research questions were used to identify the codes. To demonstrate each code, the codes were matched to specific data excerpts in the interviews. Equal attention was paid to each dataset without skipping over any portions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase three is where the analysis of the data started to include more focus with generating themes. The interviews were used to pull together and understand central themes in the interviewees' life (Qu & Dumay, 2011). For this study, the interviews were analyzed with a focus on interviewees' experiences working with undocumented students. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested a range of five to seven themes that represent the major findings from the interviews. This active process called for identifying similarities amongst the codes and grouping them into related themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes developed were to capture important ideas in relation to the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2012) stressed that themes are not hidden within the data, but it is the job of the researcher to be intimately engaged to the data in order to generate the themes. At this point in the analysis, potential codes were continually

reviewed to find any overlap and collapsing similar codes into each other to form themes or doing away with unnecessary ones. This phase ended with a list of possible themes.

Phase four involves repeatedly reviewing and revising the potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). McIntosh and Morse (2015) suggested analyzing the interviews by comparing each interviewees' response item by item. Responses were then grouped by themes for further analysis. Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 65) suggested researchers address the five following questions during this phase:

1. Is this a theme (it could be just a code)?
2. If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the dataset, and my research question)?
3. What are the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)?
4. Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme 'thin' or 'thick')?
5. Are the data too diverse and wide-ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?

As with the codes, some themes from this phase were found to be similar and collapsed into each other while other were excluded all together and still some themes needed to be further broken down.

Phase five starts by defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). After organizing themes, the data was then represented and interpreted. For phenomenological studies, the data can be represented in various ways. One way is what Creswell and Poth (2018) describe as textual description. Textual descriptions use words to reflect on what the participants experienced. Detailed descriptions were used to narrate the themes. Once

key themes were identified, each theme was then examined to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences assisting undocumented students. For this part of the analysis, extracts from the interviews were pulled that represented and explained the theme as it related to the research questions. As Braun and Clarke (2012) explained, the data does not have a voice of their own. It is up to the researcher to explain how the selected extracts are related to the themes and research questions. The extracts from this phase were used to support the final product in Phase six.

The last and final phase, Phase six, ends the analysis by producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As Phase five involved extensive writing, it should be pointed out there is little that separates Phases five and six. Additionally, qualitative studies weave writing and analysis throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For the conclusion of this report, Chapters IV and V provides a detailed write up of the themes as related to the research question and final discussion of those findings, respectively.

## Positionality and Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers admit that they approach their projects with biases, preconceived assumptions, and beliefs, about the phenomenon they are exploring, and these biases make up the researcher's positionality (Hopkins et al., 2016). Rowe (2104) explained positionality as the researcher's stance as related to the social or political context of the phenomenon the participants have experienced. Positionality allows for the researcher's invisible decisions and interpretations to become visible (Hampton et al., 2021). Not acknowledging how one's positionality plays in designing the study can affect the credibility of the results. Finlay (2009) asserted that phenomenological research needs

to be actively aware of not only the phenomenon that is being researched but also the "subjective interconnection between the researcher and the researched" (p. 7).

Positionality and reflectivity require that "both acknowledgment and allowances are made by the researcher to locate their views, values, and beliefs about the research design, conduct, and output(s)" (Holmes, 2020, p. 2). Holmes (2020) pointed out that positionality is unique to the researcher, and for that, it is vital for new researchers to acknowledge this uniqueness and how it can affect all aspects of the study. Another point within positionality the researcher should be aware is whether the researcher is positioned inside or outside of the phenomenon being studied. Positionality here refers to the researcher as seen as a member of the group or phenomenon being studied (insider) or as a non-member (outsider) (Holmes, 2020). Chavez (2008) explained possible fears associated with being an insider or outsider while conducting qualitative research. The insider might come across as sharing only positive observations while leaving out less favorable interpretations of the data. On the other hand, the outsider might lean to imposing their perceptions on the lived experiences of the participants thus overshadowing their voices.

Using Creswell & Creswell (2018) as a guide this researcher is a Black woman and a first-generation college student with over ten years of experience working in higher education in various roles ranging from admissions to student services. Prior to conducting this study, she served at the Assistant Dean for Student Services at a small, private, Christian law school located in the Southern U.S. For purposes of this study, she identifies as an outsider as it relates to the phenomenon being studied, student affairs

professionals who have served undocumented students, because in her previous work, there were no identified undocumented students she assisted.

Although the researcher has no insider knowledge of what it is like to navigate higher education processes as an undocumented student, she recognizes there are values and biases she possesses as they are related to aiding undocumented students. As a first-generation college goer and person of color, she has run into obstacles and challenges in navigating the large complex system of higher education. She believes that everyone should have the right to education and should not be hindered by their immigration status. Additionally, she understands how vital it is to be supported by those who might be gatekeepers and possess the necessary information and tools for a successful matriculation through higher education. She is a proponent and supporter of undocumented students being allowed access to higher education institutions and resources. She is an advocate for creating services and polices to empower undocumented students.

## Ethical and Validity Concerns

Ethical issues are present whenever research is conducted (Orb et al., 2001). Simply stated, ethics is the commitment to do good without causing harm. Orb et al. (2001) believed there is the concept of power between researcher and participants found within the bounds of qualitative inquiry. As such, there is a need for awareness of ethical dilemmas that might arise during qualitative studies. Anticipating ethical concerns is an important part of the research process and should be actively addressed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qu & Dumay (2011) commented that there is a

need to consider the ethical issues related to conducting interviews and there should be an awareness of some strategies to establish mutual trust between the researcher and the participants.

Chan et al. (2013) pointed out that researchers conducting qualitative inquiry might inadvertently distort or filter information which affects the validity of the study. With this acknowledgement, strategies can be introduced to increase the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring participants' experiences are accurately recorded. LeCompte (2000) declared that for research to be credible and valid it must produce meaningful results, i.e., the results will be meaningful to the intended audience and presented in a way they understand. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), validity assesses how credible and accurately the findings represent the participants' lived experiences as told to the researcher.

Krefting (1991) explained the need for different strategies to ensure the quality of findings when conducting qualitative studies without forfeiting relevance, because not all studies can be evaluated using the same criteria. Also, various strategies can be employed throughout the study to ensure and increase the worth of qualitative findings (Krefting, 1991). Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) termed the following strategies for increasing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For purposes of this study, a combination of strategies was employed to establish validity and trustworthiness.

At the institutional level, the researcher has completed the basic CITI course required of all USM graduate students and additional CITI training in Human Subjects

research. The researcher secured approval from USM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before conducting interviews.

## Summary

This study made use of phenomenological inquiry to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who have served or are serving undocumented students within their prescribed institutional roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. The interview questions are located in Appendix I. Data was analyzed to determine themes for interpretation. The researcher recognized she might bring certain biases to the project and took care to limit them by bracketing out any of her prior knowledge of the subject area. Further she presented ethical concerns and considerations and strategies to produce a valid and trustworthy study.

# CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how student affairs professionals assist undocumented students in their designated institutional roles and how their support and assistance empowers undocumented students to persist. This research sought to address a gap in the literature by focusing on those student affairs professionals who routinely assist undocumented students and identifying the issues they face in their work with undocumented students.

This chapter provides a detailed account of seven student affairs professionals who met the criteria discussed above. After data analysis (using Braun and Clarke's (2012) design), two findings and five accompanying themes emerged. The first finding revealed that all seven participants had a strong desire to assist undocumented students and used various strategies to support them. From this finding, three themes were uncovered. The themes revealed that participants used the following strategies to assist undocumented students: (a) building a rapport with undocumented students, (b) forming and using connections with various partners, and (c) using their skills to advocate for undocumented students. The second finding revealed that student affairs professionals faced obstacles that hindered their ability to adequately and effectively assist undocumented students. Two themes were uncovered from the second finding. One theme revealed that SAPs operate at institutions that lack or have unclear institutional policies. A second theme revealed that SAPs operate at institutions that lack or have limited institutional support, resources, and training.

Additionally, the data revealed the accompanying ancillary findings and considerations that are worth mentioning: (a) intersecting identity with first-generation students and (b) covertly assisting undocumented students.

Before discussing the findings and accompanying themes, a sample description of the participants is presented to provide background information. To protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms are used.

## Sample Description

As presented in Chapter III, interviews were conducted with seven student affairs professionals. Participants were given the following pseudonyms to protect their privacy: Lee, Shemeka, Jacinta, Laverne, Monique, Nicole, and Patrice.

Lee, a multiracial female, works as a Director of International Student and Scholar Services at a 4-year public institution. Her institution is governed by a Board of Governors. She has over 10 years of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution between 5-10 years. She is located in Florida.

Shemeka, a Hispanic/Latina female, works as a Latinx/Hispanic Diversity Recruiter at a 4-year public institution. Her institution is governed by a State Board System. She is bilingual and has 5-10 years of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution between 3-5 years. She is located in Kentucky.

Jacinta, a Hispanic/Latina female, works as a Student Program Coordinator at a 4-year public institution. Her institution is governed by a Board of Regents. She has 3-5 year of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution during that time. She is located in Texas.

Laverne, a White female, works as a Director in the Center for Support and Intervention at a 4-year public institution. Her institution is governed by a Board of Regents. She has over 10 years of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution during that time. She is located in Kentucky.

Monique, a White, Hispanic female, works as an Academic Advisor at a 4-year private institution. Her institution is self-governed. She has over 10 years of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution during that time. She is located in Indiana.

Nicole, a Black, Hispanic female, works as a Director of Housing and Residence Life at a 4-year public institution. Her institution is governed by the State Board System. She has over 10 years of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution between 5-10 years. She is located in Florida.

Patrice, a Hispanic female, works as an Assistant Director at a 4-year public institution. Her institution is governed by a State Board System. She has over 10 years of experience working in higher education and has been at her current institution during that time. She is located in Texas.

## Findings and Themes

### *Finding One: Using Various Strategies to Assist Undocumented Students*

The interviews generated rich data from the seven student affairs professionals who assist undocumented students in their various institutional roles. The interviews revealed that student affairs professionals have a strong desire to assist undocumented students. Student affairs professionals expressed empathy towards the plight of

undocumented students and believed that undocumented students should have access to higher education. As such, student affairs professionals believed it is their responsibility to assist undocumented students with navigating their institutional systems. The first finding indicated that student affairs professionals used various strategies in their work to assist undocumented students. When sharing about her experiences assisting undocumented students, Lee remarked, “It’s something that I care about a lot, you know, [I] want to be able to help students navigate higher education, even despite any type of immigration status.” She went on to say, “I want, I really want to support however I can.”

Other participants gave similar sentiments when asked about their attitudes towards assisting undocumented students. They looked past the immigration status of undocumented students and wanted to provide the same services they would any other students who are enrolled on their campuses. For instance, Laverne explained,

> My attitude is we are an institution of higher education. And if the student is here and otherwise qualified to be here academically and meeting the other standards of the university, their documentation status is irrelevant to the, to the conversation. In general, I think specifically, I have a lot of just compassion for students who are undocumented.

Likewise, Nicole commented,

> I think if we didn't assist them, we would be doing them a disservice. I am a child of immigrants as well. So, for that reason, I think it's important that we give those that do make it to the United States the opportunity to be able to strive and better themselves.

In the next section of this chapter, I explore the three themes that emerged from finding one: (a) building a rapport with undocumented students, (b) forming and using connections with various partners, and (c) using their skills to advocate for undocumented students.

*Theme One: Building a Rapport with Undocumented Students*

The first theme revealed an important strategy in being able to effectively assist undocumented students, building a rapport with undocumented students. Participants explained that in order to understand the needs of undocumented students, they needed to hear from undocumented students themselves. The student affairs professionals stated they understood that undocumented students needed to feel comfortable enough to come to them and share about their experiences and needs. Specifically, all 7 participants reported need to and importance of building an initial rapport with undocumented students before jumping in to assist them. Lee stated,

> You have to build that rapport first. And so, I think, for me, when working with undocumented students is creating an environment where they feel safe and comfortable, and know that I'm there to help. I think the, really the idea about safety, and just approaching the situation, and allowing them to share whatever they feel comfortable sharing, and not jumping in with tons of questions.

Lee's statement shows her empathy toward undocumented students and not assuming she knows what they need without hearing from them first-hand. It also speaks to her awareness of and concern for the safety of the undocumented students she assists.

She clearly displays an awareness of what it means to build a rapport with undocumented students.

Monique provided insight into how student safety is a component of rapport-building:

> I identify as being someone on campus, it's kind of like an activist like that, like, I'm, I want students to know, I have signs in my, you know, my space, my own space that I can, as much as I can, like, make a welcoming, safe space, right. And there's signs that like, literally say that in my office, you know.

Monique's statement alludes to her understanding a part of being able to bond with undocumented students is creating a space that makes them feel welcome. She believed undocumented students are more likely to be open about their needs if they feel they are welcomed at their institution. She has visible representation welcoming undocumented students into her space.

Patrice described how she handles issues of safety when building a rapport with undocumented students. Specifically, she stated,

> In the work that I do, yes. I think the first one that always comes into my mind, whether I'm collaborating with other offices, or when I'm working with, just in general, for a program, it's keeping in mind the confidentiality of students.
>
> We're not asking them to disclose their status or anything at all whatsoever. We know that there might be conversations in which they're going to be disclosing their immigration status. So, we want to keep it private, as much as possible. It is not recorded if they're undocumented or not in our system.

> That being said, when we have all of these events that are in our, specifically part of our workshop series, then it is marketed still through our social media, it is marketed still through other communication methods, but we do not disclose time, we do not disclose location specifically. That's going to be the most important.

Patrice's comments indicated that she ensures that undocumented students' statuses are not shared without their consent. She further reported that there is no requirement for undocumented students to share their immigration status, and she works to protect their rights on this matter.

Lee and Monique seemed to be saying they recognize there are lived experiences undocumented students bring with them to their institutions. Lee and Monique report that they want to be sensitive to those experiences as they seek to assist them, while Patrice expressed an awareness of how harmful it might be to expose the status of undocumented students. As such, she explored ways to keep undocumented students safe in those instances when sensitive information might be shared. A part of that assistance is creating a rapport so that undocumented students know they are in a safe space and can get the assistance they need without worrying about their private information getting into the wrong hands. Continuing to share about her desire to build a rapport, Monique explained,

> What keeps me going every day is that relationship building, like actually sitting with students, you know, and helping them through what it means to be a college student, and coming from high school, that transition from high school to college and what it you know, how campus life influences their academics, so all of these

> things that I also experienced myself good and bad, is, you know, those are the kinds of conversations that keep me in my job. This is why I do my job, because I really enjoy being able to listen, like listen to someone's like story.

In this passage, Monique shows her desire to listen to the experiences of undocumented students in order to meet them where they are situated. She seems to take pride in forming those connections and hearing from the students themselves as she worked to provide them with the needed resources to navigate through their post-secondary lives. Likewise, Jacinta expressed similar sentiments when she stated she is "not always just taking conversations at face value with students, but really building a relationship with them and getting to know what's really going on, and why they don't want to go to college."

Laverne also expounded on the need for building a rapport to understand each students' needs, she explained,

> I want to be mindful for the individual student of what does success look like to you? So obviously, we're an institution of higher education, our goal is retention and graduation degree completion. Occasionally, we meet with students who that is not their current definition of success for a variety of reasons. And if that's the case, then what other options exist? And how do we make those transitions so that you don't end up having sort of a stain on your academic record? That should later you want to return to higher ed, that be a barrier because you may be had an academic suspension, or some disciplinary infraction or something.

Here, Laverne is saying she is aware that students view success in different terms based on where they are in their lived experiences. She is working with students where they are and attempting to assist in a way that will create the least amount of strain on their academic endeavors. She is assisting by providing undocumented students with other options they might not have been aware were available. Building a rapport with undocumented students is her way of understanding their desires as it relates to being successful in their academic journeys.

Laverne also expressed a similar awareness as Patrice as it related to undocumented student safety by being careful not to disclose a student's undocumented status.

> Um, I'm very careful about what I write in their student file. Because I don't want to inadvertently include a detail that might like if there were an open records request, or court subpoena, could be something that could hurt them, and so I don't, I'm not even going to necessarily put in a student's record, they are undocumented.

When speaking about building rapport, Shemeka added, "But I can also then be, you know, the one to create opportunities so that the information is more accessible, that the families were more welcomed that the language barrier is, you know, somewhat, you know, taken down." Here, Shemeka sees her building a rapport with undocumented students as a way to be a bridge for them and their families to information and opportunities.

Elaborating, she said,

> You know, this isn't a one size fits all type of thing. Like, we need to have, you know, things in place for, you know, specific situations, you know, that I deal with, you know, I'm working with students who have mixed status families, you know, I'm working with students who don't qualify for FASFA, like, you know, like, we're trying to make it work for all these other situations. So it's not the, you know, one size fits all mold of like, yeah, you know, they're ready to go to college.

In this passage, Shemeka explains how building a rapport allows her to be more holistic in the way she assists undocumented students. She reports being able to assess each student individually and tailor her assistance to their needs specifically. She sees that this type of support and assistance varies; simply applying the same resources to every situation or undocumented students is not appropriate or helpful.

Other participants' statements compare favorably to Shemeka's. As stated earlier, there is a realization that undocumented students come onto their campuses with their own lived experiences. Oftentimes, those experiences are attached to other parts of their identities outside of their undocumented status. With this in mind, participants reported that they needed to understand what other services were required in order to provide what was best for the students with whom they came into contact. Laverne simply stated, "So being more holistic in what actually do you need right now? And how do we work through them?"

While Jacinta remarked,

> I think my willingness to support them in a holistic manner and to see them not just as a student, but as a human being, with multiple identities, I think influences the way that I approach my work and how I help these students. Oftentimes, people who try to support this community don't see beyond their undocumented community. They don't see that they're undocumented and queer or undocumented and black, undocumented and Asian, right?

Here, Jacinta indicates her awareness that building a rapport assists in understanding the intersecting identities undocumented students bring with them to campus. Understanding these identities helps to provide more effective and well-rounded support to undocumented students.

Patrice added her own spin on how she builds a rapport with undocumented students. She explained,

> I went through a lot of training on counseling, group counseling, just to have you know, that build that rapport with others. And that's also something that feeds a lot in my connection to students and with students, utilizing a lot of counseling therapeutic techniques, in my day to day conversations with them to know how they're doing, not only in their well-being not only well, not only under classes, but also well-being in their mental health.

As she saw it,

> They were having so many challenges with, and so many issues with food security, having a roof over their heads, and even thinking, decreasing the number

> of enrollment because they couldn't, it was either you pay your tuition and fees, or you pay your rent for the next few months.

Here, Patrice adds more depth to the need for building a rapport with undocumented students. She is aware of the complicated barriers undocumented students face in their pursuit of higher education and feels it is vital to understand those barriers if she is to make a meaningful impact on their lives.

*Theme Two: Forming and Using Partnerships*

In addition to building a rapport with students, the participants talked about forming connections with partners and how they used those partnerships to assist undocumented students. The interviews revealed that six of the seven student affairs professionals reported that they collaborated with both campus and outside organizations in their work to assist these students. Participants expressed an understanding that this work is best done with others who are committed to seeing undocumented students persist and thrive. When asked about the networks she has been able to pull from, Shemeka detailed how she used personal connections in her work with undocumented students. She made the following statement regarding her experiences working with partners:

> Um, yeah, one of the close people that I, you know, I wanted to say like, they focus on it, or, you know, they do a lot, but at least they're aware, and they, you know, anytime I need something that they at least understand it to where I was, I understand that, but at least they are like, Yeah, you know, I'm willing to, you know, do something, what do we need to do? It's just kind of like more so like,

just my personal relationships that I've built with them. And just colleagues that I know I can trust and like can send my students to and they're like, all over. They're really not like specific offices and stuff like that.

Shemeka's assertion describes her being able to draw on relationships she has sought out on her own and not necessarily those connected to her institution. She does not solely rely on institutional partners to lean on when she is seeking advice or guidance. These are connections and bonds with individuals she trust to help her in her quest to provide effective assistance to undocumented students. Due to her own venting of her partners, she knows she can trust that her students will be safe.

Continuing to share about the use of her personal relationships in her work with undocumented students, Shemeka provided some rich data in her interview. She provided a more in-depth view into how her personal connections were able to continue providing needed service even through the pandemic.

Specifically, Shemeka stated,

> I have really close ties with the community system, the Community and Technical College System [in my area]. I have collaborated with them, we actually came up and created … together towards college kind of thing. We created this over the pandemic, because we were all like, Okay, first of all, we're all friends. Like, we have a friendship outside of our professional roles, but then two we were like, okay, yeah, what are we gonna do for our community?
>
> We got together and then we hosted a four part series, online, over zoom over Facebook, live, and we did it in four different sections. The second one was,

you know, and we collaborated with … a local nonprofit that does a lot of community work. And just you know, they host like different workshops… and so we collaborated with them and getting the word out and helping us, you know, be able to get the community to let know that we were doing this. So, we like called up on our networks, we like collab, we, you know, invited all these other different universities to come to a virtual college fair.

I rely a lot on my colleagues, like professional colleagues and other institutions, like, seeing what they're doing, you know, seeing how they provide services. And so, I tap into my network a lot just to, you know, be in the know about what's going on.

This excerpt shows that Shemeka is committed to ensuring that undocumented students are getting needed information. She and her partners did not allow the pandemic to curtail their desire to assist undocumented students. Instead, they created an outlet that was more far reaching than their respective institutions. This showed the importance of collaborating with others to reach a larger audience of undocumented students.

Consistent with Shemeka's response, Patrice described her own reasoning for forming and using partnerships in her work with undocumented students.

Yes. So, we have several things happening in the area. So, we get together because we are [proximity]. And so, I was like, Well, what are you doing? What's working? What's not working? What are some of the challenges that you're having? These are some of the challenges that I'm having, like, how did you navigate this particular situation? Have you even navigate this particular

> situation? So, it helps out to have partners … and we need to know what's working and what's not working.

Here, Patrice is sharing how she used her partnerships. She has others to lean on and ask questions and gathering valuable tools to assist the undocumented students on her campus. She is able to share what is going on within her institution with the intent of getting ideas of how to handle similar situations her partners might have also faced in assisting undocumented students. No one has all the answers, but working together can help fill in some of the blanks.

Patrice went on to compliment her institutional work environment and partnerships from which she has been able to pull.

> I have the privilege of working with an institution that I've found so many allies within faculty and staff and other offices, but I always have it on the back of my head. There might be the time that I might find someone that their personal beliefs might be more of a segue to prevent them from collaborating with me.

Although Patrice reports she feels she is surrounded by allies at her institution, her last statement hints that she is aware that not everyone will be "on the same page" as her and is unlikely to be a source of help. Nevertheless, she seeks support and is able to find those on her campus willing to help and serve alongside her in her efforts to assist undocumented students on campus.

Other participants communicated parallel responses about forming and using connections to assist undocumented students. Nicole shared, "Yeah, absolutely. From the admissions representative all the way to their counselor, so whoever was guiding them

through the actual registration process, financial, the university as a whole will take on the responsibility of assisting the student." Nicole and her colleagues seemed to take a shared approach when assisting undocumented students. Although she made no mention of any specialized processes for undocumented students, her statement suggests there to be an understanding and shared goal in ensuring undocumented students do not fall through the cracks.

Similarly, Jacinta disclosed,

> I think with campus partners' assistance really looks like me going to them when I need it. And asking for specific things. I think that's usually what it looks like. I think specific assistance I get it, maybe it's more along the lines of like support, and like encouragement and advocacy like having my back. And that's like my boss who's the Director of our center, our assistant sorry, she's the Assistant Vice President for our center. Having colleagues like, like my, my colleague who runs the first [generation] program, I think just knowing that I have advocates in my corner that are going to fight for me in the program, I think is super helpful.

Here, Jacinta reveals how she goes to campus partners for specific assistance. She is aware of her colleagues who will be available to support her in her work with undocumented students.

Not only has Jacinta relied on her on campus partners, she also disclosed working with outside partners. She stated, "So what I've been doing lately is working with some California schools to understand how they've set up internship programs for these students to hire, you know, bring them on, lawfully." Jacinta is saying cooperating with

other institutions has helped her to understand facets of assisting undocumented students of which she was unsure. Although they are not in the same state, she has found value in teaming up to gather useful information for her undocumented students.

Additionally, Monique added,

> I feel like there's usually like a small group of people that eventually find each other on campus, that are the ones that, you know, are really the agents of social change, whether we make social change happen is a, you know, up for questioning, yes. But we find each other on campus somehow, because we're like, oh, that person's doing something. And like, we speak the same language and, like, we, you know, we're interested in like, actually getting down to the roots of what's going on here and actually wanting to have conversations, and make a difference.

Here, Monique informs us of how like minds will often gravitate to each other when desiring to meet a common goal. There is work needed to be accomplished and they bond together to effect change. She went onto to add that her partnerships are not just campus based. Monique has been able to collaborate with others outside of her institution to create tutorials related to her work with assisting undocumented students.

She added,

> I developed like collaborations with other advisors, nationally, that work at other institutions, to create resources in general for all advisors to access… We have an e-tutorial I developed, I co-developed on e-tutorial that advisors can and student affairs professionals can sign up for that's offered like I think twice a year.

Similar to Jacinta, Laverne shared her sentiments when engaging with campus partners. When asked if she receives support from other individuals on her campus, Laverne remarked,

> Not in a formal way. There's not like a, let's all get together and talk about how we're going to support these undocumented students, at least if there is I'm not aware. But if I were to call another office or campus partner and say, I'm looking for a resource for student X, I don't have concerns that I would not be supported.

Here, Laverne reports that while she's not aware of any "formal" support system in place, she is confident she will be able to find someone to help on campus to help her and the undocumented students. She believes her work will be supported by her campus partners when the time arises for her to seek assistance. For instance, Laverne mentions being able to lean on her colleagues in the International Student Support Services.

> Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of times, I do think our International Student Support Services Office, even though they're dealing with international students who are usually coming here on VISA, because they have to understand the various pieces and immigration rules so intimately, they are often a huge resource to me. When I have a question about where might I go for this? Or what does this mean? And so, I actually do rely on them.
>
> So, we don't necessarily serve the same students as them, because again, [undocumented students] are not international students in a traditional sense, but I find them to be a helpful resource in sometimes you don't know what you don't know. And they often can help me figure that part out. So again, I don't know

that. I think that's a long answer. I think the short answer is I don't have a lot of resources. Okay, other than what I seem to try to Google.

*Theme Three: Using Skills to Advocate for Undocumented Students*

The third theme revealed how participants used their skills to advocate for undocumented students. Over four of the seven student affairs professionals reported advocating for undocumented students. Not only were participants assisting undocumented students directly, they were also involved in ensuring undocumented student issues were being discussed among the staff and in spaces that would continue to shine a light on their plight. Participants shared how they used skills including, but not limited to, self-awareness, empathy, communication, and networking to not only stand in support of and to assist undocumented students on their campuses, but to advocate for them as well.

Shemeka, for example, shared her passion for advocating for undocumented.

> I eventually got involved with like immigrant youth rights, and like the dreamer act, and like immigration policy and reform and everything. I got really involved with community organizing, and just, you know, being an advocate for education access, and, you know, equity, and, you know, immigrant rights and all that stuff. Because I do understand, you know, I'm always the one that's bringing up undocumented students to table, I'm always, you know, bringing out concerns about okay, well, you know, this isn't a one size fits all type of thing. You know, advocating and pushing, you know, for, you know, those changes institutionally, you know, just being an advocate

Here, Shemeka expresses her awareness of the importance of ensuring undocumented students are talked about at her institution. Her involvement with other organizations and community efforts allows her to bring that knowledge to her institution. Shemeka's statement that "this isn't a one size fits all type of thing" provides insight into understanding there is no standard form of advocating for undocumented students. What works for one may not work for all.

Other participants provided similar perceptions about advocating for undocumented students. Explaining how she used her networking skills to be an advocate, Patrice stated,

> Like what, what is my privilege at this moment that I am able to advocate for whichever needs they have at this point. So that being said, it's connecting with other offices, advocating for opportunities of experiential learning opportunities that might have a stipend included into the advocating with the food banks that we might have. But my hope is that when we advocate and when we bring it into the awareness, more people will continue to share more of these resources so we can support our students one way or another, through their academic journey.

Here, Patrice is expressing being able to network and connect with others in her efforts to advocate for undocumented students. For her, advocating is about bringing awareness to others in order to get them on board with assisting undocumented students.

Additionally, Patrice brought up a very important point about using data to advocate for undocumented students.

I would say you do need to be data driven in the sense of when you're advocating. Again, it all goes back into the money. When you're are advocating for the student before any sort of student change. With the colleges, with our president, with like higher leadership, you have to present them the information on GPAs retention rates, you have to ensure that they understand why what are some of the challenges they are having?

They're specifically looking at retention, graduation rate, retention, recruitment, retention and graduation. That brings a very interesting question as far as like, why do you have students that they are successful, very high GPAs. But they're not graduating? And that's what intrigues them. And they're like, oh, so what is happening here, I say exactly what is happening right here. So, you have to speak that language you have to be you don't have to be an expert in statistics. But you do need to be mindful of learning that language that they are utilizing for numbers speak, because that's how they're going to listen to you. For when you're asking for something when you're writing reports when you are asking or when you're submitting proposals.

Patrice was the only participant to speak about advocating by using data. Using data, she tells a fuller story of the challenges undocumented students face. She shows an awareness of what her institutional leadership will find as effective information when she seeks to ask for additional resources to support undocumented students.

Using interpersonal skills and empathy, Jacinta added,

> To make sure that I'm not only connecting them to resources, but I'm being their advocate. And I have privilege from being a US citizen and not I've ever been undocumented. So, I use utilize that privilege to be able to speak on their behalf and share their voices and their concerns in spaces that I'm privileged to be in. We have to advocate. We have to do what we can do in our roles to help these students. So, for me, I don't accept I don't know, and that's just me.

Here, Jacinta is communicating her self-awareness of her privilege and can speak up for undocumented students in spaces they do not have the opportunity to voice their own concerns. She has no insider knowledge of being undocumented but seems to empathize with them and can share their stories.

For Monique, she was conscious of the fact there was not specific systems in place for undocumented students on her campus. As such, she sought to take lead on changing what that looked like. Wanting to create more structure, Monique stated, “I was pretty intentional about wanting to be the lead role on our campus to make to make sense to make some changes that, you know, some support systems that didn't exist before.”

*Finding Two: Issues Hindering Adequate and Effective Assistance*

Finding two revealed that student affairs professionals faced similar obstacles in their pursuit of assisting undocumented students. Although participants spoke about their desire to assist undocumented students, they often times were met with challenges that hindered their ability to prove adequate and effective assistance. One-hundred percent of student affairs professionals expressed at least one issue they encountered that made

providing adequate and effective assistance to the undocumented students on their campuses. Participants used words and phrases such as “frustrated,” “feeling isolated,” “challenging,” “dishearten,” and “feeling discouraged” when describing the issues they have faced in their work with undocumented students. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore the two themes that emerged from finding two: (a) limited or unclear institutional policies and (b) lacking or limited institutional support, resources, and training.

*Theme One: Limited or Unclear Institutional Policies*

The first theme revealed how limited or unclear institutional policies hindered how effective student affairs professionals were in their work with assisting undocumented students. The seven student affairs professionals interviewed all expressed having limited institutional policy guidance in their work with undocumented students. Additionally, participants shared that limited and unclear institutional policies was one of their biggest challenges in assisting undocumented students. At least one participant felt they lacked the knowledge needed to assist undocumented students when there were vague or absent policies. According to Lee, “it’s hard to help guide [undocumented students] if you don’t have the basic understanding of what like state laws are and like institutional policies.”

As an example, she recounted a time when a policy change occurred but it was not relayed properly to those working first-hand with undocumented students.

> So, I think one of the biggest frustrations is that we the university, probably within the last year, changed its interpretation of like the Board of Governors

rules about who can receive scholarships that come from the foundation, so they're not state funds. These are like donor funds. We used to be able to have, there were donors that gave funds that could be used for undocumented students or DACA students, and those, we can no longer get funds from the foundation.

Like, I was devastated when we learned that and the hard part was, it wasn't communicated very well to the people that worked directly with undocumented students. And so, we were hearing from students like, oh, like, I don't have, there's no scholarships. And we then I had to call them like, what's going on? Like, can this no longer happen? And oh, yeah, by the way, this, this changed. And so that was really, really disheartening.

Here, Lee exposes an issue not singular to her campus, but an issue that hinders her ability to effectively assist undocumented students. Institutions change policies, but do not pass that information down the line, but for it affecting the undocumented students with whom she works, she would have had no knowledge of the change.

For Patrice, she relayed her understanding that things change, but not the knowledge of when those changes could happen. She relayed how this means she has to be more attentive to that fact when thinking about how she can be effective when assisting undocumented students. Patrice keeps connected with others in hopes that they are able to share when these vital changes may occur and pass on information.

So, some of the conversations that I had with others is like, this is just kind of like the, the beginning stages, stages of like, that something could change. We don't know when, like, it's not going to be changing this year, it's not going to be

changing next year. But like, something's happening here. And we have to be mindful, I have to be mindful,

Other participants described similar feelings about policy challenges in their work with undocumented students. When asked her knowledge institutional policies Laverne reported,

> I don't know that. I couldn’t really speak to that in any good way. Yeah, so, yeah, I don't I don't think I've not been in conversations about larger policies and how that might affect what we do or don't do. So, I don't think I can speak to that in an educated way.
>
> When somebody comes in, they're undocumented, we don't have any policy on when they're eligible for this pocket of money or these resources. So, we just have to be creative. And sometimes there isn't. There aren't creative options available. And the answer is there isn't anything we can do to help you which I don't like saying that to a student.

The first part of Laverne’s statement alludes to how little the institution prepares student affairs professionals for assisting undocumented students. There are no policies to guide their work. When asked about what she believes has been the biggest challenge in her efforts to assist undocumented students, Shemeka stated,

> I think just university policies like just like, the way that things are implemented. And, again, it's not a one size fits all mold that I have to find so many loopholes, and I have to communicate with so many other people to get one thing done for them. It's ridiculous, like the amount of like, back and forth that have to do.

Shemeka seems to be sharing her frustration felt by not having clear policies and directives from her institution. It is difficult for her to adequately assist undocumented students when specific guidance is lacking from the institution.

Likewise, Jacinta communicated having campus colleagues who want to help and support, but there is no structured guidance on just how to go about doing so. With no policies in place, staff do not fully understand undocumented statuses.

> And that there are staff on campus that care, the knowledge just isn't there. The knowledge of resources, policies, understanding just what their status means. I constantly have staff coming to me. You know, saying, Well, I don't know the difference between undocumented and DACA. Aren't they all DACA, you know? So, there's just a lot of like misconceptions.

Having a basic understanding of undocumented statuses is important in the work student affairs professionals do in assisting undocumented students. Statuses help to place students within the correct area for specific assistance.

Further, the findings revealed six of seven of student affairs professionals had to do much of the leg work themselves in getting policy guidance. They reported their knowledge stemmed from their own gathering of information mostly through social media outlets, Googling, or from the undocumented students they assist. Additionally, participants reported subscribing to various ally organizational websites or newsletters.

Although Googling, using social media, and ally organizations may not provide policy information specific to their institutions, the participants found these starting points helpful as they sought to build up their knowledge. Even when policies are

institutional policies, students would occasionally be the first to become aware of changes, because they were directly affected by the changes. Undocumented students would then turn to the student affairs professionals with whom they have built a rapport for answers. Oftentimes, the student affairs professionals did not have the answer as they were unaware of the policy change. As mentioned by Lee, she found out about the change from her students as they were no longer able to access those funds.

> You know, I think the students. Just been talking with the students. I think they, they are the experts on their own experience, and are in networks and loops that I don't have access to, that it's their networks. And so just learning from them, and hearing what, what their experience has been, what they've what they've heard, but also, organizations like the President's Alliance. And I follow a lot of like, on social media, like I, I follow a lot of journalists or activists that really are in this, like immigration space, like they write about or post about changes that are happening. So, I try to stay informed through a lot of different ways, but those are probably the two main [ones].

In Lee's efforts to assist undocumented students, she used all the resources at her disposal. Also, she did not make excuses for a lack of institutional guidance. Instead, she did what is needed to have access to the information she needs in order to better assist undocumented students. Her narrative also shows how important it is to build a rapport with students where they are able to come to her to share what they know.

Laverne gathers information on a case by case basis. She generally used the internet to stay current, but got into more specifics when she is working directly with a student in need of information she may not have readily available.

> Um, other than sort of Google? I don't know. I'll be honest, unless I know that I'm talking to an undocumented student, and there's a specific question about their situation. My way of staying relevant is just sort of internet in general. So, I'm not spending a lot of time specifically on that topic, unless it comes up, situationally, and I need to look something up or find out more information.

For Shemeka and Jacinta, social media has been their first review of where to find information about policy related to undocumented students. Social media sites like Twitter and Instagram were seen as useful resources when news breaks of local, state, or national policy changes. When asked how they stay current on policy information,

> Shemeka shared,
>
> Social media, like, you know, obviously, anytime something happens within immigration and stuff, like, you know, I'm always like, looking up to see what's going on. I'm still signing campaigns, still rallying, still, you know, anything that comes on, I made sure to, you know, just be in the know.

While Jacinta stated, “I think social media is huge. So, Twitter and Instagram, is where I can get really speedy up to date information.” In addition to Twitter and Instagram, Jacinta subscribed to numerous ally organizations. She can rely on them to provide accurate and in-depth coverage, because they give real time messaging to the

masses. As their missions are to assist the undocumented population in various ways, they have the resources to be consistent in their work.

> From major immigrant advocacy organizations like Immigrants Rising, Informed Immigrant, United We Dream, Undocu, what is it called, Undocu Professionals Network. It's just there's a lot of organizations out there that have funding and staffing to keep up with everything and concisely, message out what's going on, and what's important and in real time. So that's how I do it.
>
> Then if there's something particular going on, like the recent attack against our bills that allow for in state resident tuition for undocumented students, like the court case, just recently happened with the University of North Texas, or what's going on with the DACA hearing right now, now, but it's in the Fifth Circuit, that hearing just happened recently. So, stuff like that those big organizations are really great. Not only just doing posts and stories, but having live Instagram videos, where they bring on experts and professionals to come in and they do like live interviewing. So, I think all of that really helps me stay in the know.

Again, these may not be institutional policies, but they found these to be worthy starting points in researching how their institutions might be handling things going forward.

Similarly, Patrice is also a subscriber to various sites and organizational content concerning undocumented students. She has set aside time each week to track what may be happening. She knows there are others whose focus is working with the undocumented population and trust they will provide up to date and accurate information.

Every Wednesday morning, which is my least heavy day, I have the tendency of checking just a couple of areas every morning and every evening. I just check like let me just read what's like on the headlines. On Wednesdays, I receive several newsletters. So, I receive a couple of newsletters from the President's Alliance in higher education. They're always offering a lot of various workshops. I like taking my time and reading those and attending those workshops, because they have people in Washington, DC, they have people, maybe wherever the case may be taking place. And sometimes it's in Texas, and sometimes it's like in some other states, like Nebraska, etc. So, it's good for me to be on the President's Alliance list newsletter.

I will say, so I know, I know that these are individuals that are specifically working for the undocumented population and these are experts like actual legal experts. I am so grateful for them, because the legal jargon; it's so challenging to understand. They break it down into simple English terms. So, say, this is what this means. This is what this mean, I was like, okay, so I don't have to go into any sort of governmental websites and download whatever the keys that might be it's been in percentage. Oh, so they aren't actually explaining what that means.

Monique subscribes to and gathers information from many networks. However, she does not just do so to increase her knowledge base. She complied resources as she came across them and pushed they out to the undocumented students on her campus.

I subscribe to like every major national network that supports undocumented students you know, that are created usually by undocumented individuals or

> support them in some ways. I get my emails and I read through them. What do I need from this that the students would benefit from? And so, in my monthly newsletters to students, I would have, like a link where I had saved kind of all of these things.

Conversely to all the other participants, Nicole does not do any researching on her own. She waits "for the institution to do the necessary research and share with" her. Nicole's declaration leaves the responsibility in the hands of her institution.

### *Theme Two: Lacking or Limited Institutional Support, Resources, and Training*

In addition to lacking or unclear institutional policies, theme two revealed that student affairs professionals also lacked institutional support, resources, and training in their duties to assist undocumented students. The interviews generated rich data as the participants shared in detail their thoughts navigating assisting undocumented students in the absence of institutional support, resources and training. One of the seven participants reported positively when talking about institutional support. Patrice is a part of a campus center that was created in 2018. While still fairly new, she felt she has a solid structure within which to work. Notably, she reported having funding for undocumented student programming and support services. The other six participants reported converse experiences to Patrice's. When asked about available resources to assist undocumented students, Laverne stated, "I think the short answer is I don't have a lot of resources."

Although institutions enrolled undocumented students, findings showed that leadership did not always equip participants with the necessary tools to effectively assist

undocumented students. Lee felt that institutions in general “piece together support informally.”

> I think that [undocumented students] often get the short end of the stick at institutions, in terms of just lack of resources and support. I really feel like that it's very important to be able to help however I can, even if the systems in place at the university don't necessarily lend that type of support. So initially, when I came to my current institution, I think that our undocumented students were kind of being informally supported through like our Multicultural Student Support Office, through different like social programs being around social justice topics and things like that.

Lee was one of five participants who reported assisting undocumented students was not the job she was hired to perform. Nonetheless, she has found what she has learned from working with international students can also be of some benefit to undocumented students.

> Okay. So, supporting [or] working with undocumented students has never been an official part of my job duties. But because of the work that I do with international students and knowledge of immigration, and really kind of being in the loop of that world, as well as just being very involved in like, social injustice, like campus climate things on different campuses, I've always really been informally, a point of contact for undocumented students at two different campuses that I've worked at, because there haven't been dedicated offices that support, specifically provide that type of support. And it's something that I care about a lot and just, you know,

want to be able to help students navigate higher education, even despite any type of immigration status.

Lee reported she has been able to tap into her previous training to facilitate how she engages with and assist undocumented students. In addition to being able to use some transferable skills and training from working with international students in her work with undocumented students, she shows compassion and empathy to do the work.

As her work with undocumented students is not her “real” job, Lee went onto describe how isolating this work can be with limited support.

> But I think it can be very isolating the few of us on such a huge campus that that work together to try to piece together support, I think we all have incredibly demanding jobs. And we want to be able to help students and we help each other help students and try to figure out who we need to contact for a particular issue. And it can be it can feel very isolating, because it feels like not many other people care. Like it just it's that idea of like, you feel like you're constantly banging down the door trying to get support for a student when I thought that we're all here to support students, but that's not necessarily the case.

As another participant whose work with undocumented students is not specifically why she was hired, Shemeka expressed similar grievances about her lack of institutional support, but also, felt her personal connection keeps her doing the work.

> I don't really have resources, because I feel like if I didn't have this personal connection, or like, personal narrative with it, I don't think like, it would be talked about during the admissions process. You know, so, I'm glad that I do have that

personal connection. But again, it's like, what's going to happen? And whenever I leave, you know, like, what's going to happen? If, you know, I'm not saying like, Oh, it's because I'm here, like, it's getting done, like, no, it's just like, it's still so very, like, hush hush and still feel very, like, we're not gonna talk about the big elephant in the room, we're just gonna ignore a kind of thing and just kind of go about it.

So, I don't know, there's really not like an appointed person to work with the student population or anything like that, either. So, again, it's like, I don't know what that could look like, if the next person comes, and they don't have the same experience, or they just don't make it, you know, one of those, you know, priorities within their work like, then I'm not sure what that would look like.

Here, however, due to a lack of institutional arrangements, Shemeka is communicating a fear of the unknown. If the time comes for her to leave the institution, she is unsure what will happen to the undocumented student population if her institution does not create a more structured support system.

Other participants shared that while there are limited institutional resources or support mechanisms specific to their work with undocumented students, they have been able to provide support through various campus resources that are available to all their students. They have also been able to connect undocumented students with community resources when available and the opportunity arises. When asked about resources at her disposal in aiding her work with undocumented students, Monique shared,

Um, well, there's resources for all students, that undocumented students access as well. Um, so for instance, we have an office … that helps students who for instance, if students come from like, don't have winter clothing, or need support for like club fees or other, you know, laptops, those kind of things that are not part of the financial aid package, but still are, you know, cost burdens to students. You know, like, chemistry lab packages or like, how do I pay for my art supplies for this, this one class or whatever? So that's open to all students to go to, and, you know, apply for these extra resources. Um, all students have access to student health insurance. And like I said, our financial aid office will cover it for students, that can't to cover it themselves, or whatever the case may be.

With her institution having yet to provide support specifically focused on undocumented students, Monique and supportive colleagues took the lead to develop some resources they felt would be beneficial to their undocumented student population.

We developed, you know, new kind of programming and resources that were unique to this group. So eventually we had a website that I managed, and it was very, you know, very intentionally showed pictures of like, who does what, like my face was there. I say was because it just changed recently, but you know and what I can help with on that. I'm more expert support on the academic side of things.

So, if undocumented students were approaching a research opportunity on campus, but it was only offered to students being paid as student employees, and the student doesn't have employee authorization document, they're like, how do I

can I do this like? So, I get a lot of those types of questions from students like, do I, am I eligible for this opportunity over here? Or can I do this internship or whatever?

So those are the kinds of questions I would answer a lot on the academic side of things. So, the website also had, I posted a lot of resources that were like local community resources, but also national resources. I, you know, I'd say I stay up to date as much as I could, on, you know, timely, like events or resources that summer opportunities, things like that. And I would do and I would send out a monthly newsletter to we call that the dream indie community.

Monique used her background in academics to tailor the information in a helpful way for undocumented students to access. Further, the resources they created allowed undocumented students to easily identify campus allies. Monique saw a gap and filled it with vital resources and information for the undocumented student population on her campus.

In Nicole's work with undocumented students, she was also able to tap into community resources to meet more specific needs of undocumented students.

There are other resources like community resources. We had a resource person that would help if the person was homeless if the person needed certain access to Medicaid, Medicare, or even just the ability to speak to government officials. So like things Social Security, Office driver's license, things of that nature, we would assist in that manner trying to get them to the resources that they needed.

Here, Nicole reports about other needs undocumented students face outside of their academic lives. Her being able to assist undocumented students in this way is just as important, or more so, as assisting with their academic pursuits. Her lacking institutional resources and support does not stop the barriers undocumented students face and their need for assistance. She has found other ways of meeting those needs.

In addition to lacking general resources and support, participants commented on the lack of financial backing to assist undocumented students. Participants shared about how frustrating it can be to not have access to funds delegated specifically for supporting undocumented students. Laverne shared,

> I will say, I don't know that I always feel 100% equipped to assist students who are undocumented. And mostly, it's because we don't have many financial options. We just have so many limitations. I think specifically, I have a lot of just compassion for students who are undocumented, specifically around the financial challenges of obtaining a degree because they're not eligible, even, you know, they're not eligible for federal financial aid, and so college is not cheap. We've looked at what are creative ways that they could pay for school, and there are a number of schools in states that have higher percentages of immigrant students, and specifically undocumented students that have more funding options for students who are undocumented to pay for school, and [my institution] doesn't have specific funds for that.

These findings show how student affairs professionals understand the financial burden undocumented students face and will try to use any available resources to assist them.

However, there are not always available options for doing so when institutions are not committed to providing other financial backing for undocumented students.

Jacinta was the only other participant besides Patrice whose position was dedicated to assisting undocumented students. Nevertheless, funding was scarce. She explained that her position was a recent addition to the institution in that it was only created about a year ago.

> I think beyond working alone is funding. So, my program just got institutional funding for the first time a year ago. And that was to fund the salary for this position. And that's it. So, this funding … only covers me. I have no program funding, the only funding I work off of is donations. And I'm trying to find these resources, and I'm trying to see how we can fill that gap.
>
> There is no one in their corner. [Undocumented students] are told to go find scholarships, but scholarships take a while. There's application processes; they need to be reviewed, [and] by the time they get awarded, unfortunately, nine times out of 10, when I'm helping my students with financial issues, you know, that rent bill is due, or that housing bill is due. And you can't really move forward unless you get money. And it's tricky.

Jacinta's institution took steps to bring more support for undocumented students, but had not fully equipped her with proper resources to make any real change. She is having to do additional work to garner support and funds to efficiently run her program. Even with what she is lacking, Jacinta shared how she has access to general institutional

resources. She is building up tools that are useful for not only undocumented students but campus faculty and staff as well.

> Resources from the university, I guess, access to Canvas, I built last spring, we launched our new Canvas page, which is our central hub for students to anonymously go get resources. I highly encourage staff and faculty to enroll in the Canvas page too, because I see it as a resource for everybody like campus partners that want to be knowledgeable and want to have access to resources for students in the moment, but also students to have access to those resources. So our Canvas page has resources on housing, travel, legal services, health, health care resources, career pathway resources, all kinds of stuff. And we update that pretty regularly. So yeah, we have that.
>
> Resources, I guess space. I work in a center that has a really big study space that I share with other programming. So, my students have access to that space, so they get access to desktop computers and free printing and study space. So, I guess that's something.

Jacinta does not have space of her own, but appreciates being a part of a center that allows undocumented students to access the resources there for their use.

On top of her frustrations with getting limited institutional support, Lee described being exasperated by not being able to assist undocumented students who come seeking guidance about continuing to finance their education.

> I think, you know, most of the issues that I'm working with, or students have connected with me on is related, often when they're is an issue of like, not being

able to afford to continue their studies and trying to figure out what, what help might be available to them. I think the biggest challenge has just been the complete lack of resources and support, like, there's nothing like nothing. And I think that that's really hard. Because we know, and, you know, when you work with a student, and they're here in your office, you want to do something to help them and you try to call and no one can tell you that information. Like it can be really frustrating. So, I think that's probably the biggest challenge that I faced.

But I think there's a lot of things that are happening informally, that probably you won't find on the website. And I think my experience has been that it the rhetoric doesn't often from universities doesn't often always match the reality. So like I mentioned about, you know, universities really preaching inclusion and equity. But then, when decisions are made to not allow students, undocumented students to even have access to donor funds from the foundation, because of their immigration status, and perhaps that could have been an area where the university took a stance.

Here, Lee reports that she believes her institution could do a better job of being more supportive of undocumented students. She believes the university is not practicing what it preaches about being an inclusive institution. Relatedly, Patrice shared similar sentiments about institutional diversity and inclusion optics.

So that's something else that I will say, someone in this job position also needs to have a very well-rounded thoughts and experience and advocacy for equity and social justice. It's not only about diversity, and inclusion is not only about we

> have the numbers, and we're recording the numbers, and that's why we are diverse campus. It's about are we listening to those marginalized voices? And are we advocating with them, and for them whenever they cannot advocate. So having that background of understanding the difference between diversity and inclusion with equity and justice, of course.

Here, Patrice seems to be pleading for institutions in general to do a better job at engaging its marginalized students in order to better be of service to them.

Another area student affairs professionals felt would be beneficial in their work with assisting undocumented students was needing more training. Participants expressed a desire to have access to more and different forms of training. Lee shared she has the support of her "on paper job" supervisor in her work with undocumented, but felt any additional "type of institutional support would be great" including having professional development opportunities that center assisting and working with undocumented students.

> But, you know, because state school budgets are limited, like the ability to go to conferences like I don't really have necessarily professional development money set aside for this kind of informal part of the work that I'm doing. So, if there was, if there were resources or support for supporting undocumented students and DACA students and other immigrant students that fall through the cracks at the university, I think that would be amazing. I am not holding my breath for that.

Similarly, Laverne stated,

> I think, again, using the phrase, I don't necessarily know what I don't know. So, I think just any sort of training would be beneficial of what does this mean? What are the implications? Yes. So, as I point that out to say, I think yes, me or someone at [my institution] could benefit from some from some training. I don't know how easily we could get that. Unless it was just, maybe there was some other type of training we went to, and that maybe was a session or a segment of it. I don't know, I think if I went to my higher ups and said, I want to go spend money or this training on undocumented, supporting undocumented students. I don't know how that would go. Not because my higher ups wouldn't also find it important. They have to pay attention to the larger ramifications of any decisions that are made.

Laverne reported she did not feel she will be able to get training specifically focused on the demands and needs of assisting undocumented students. Nicole discussed specific types of training she thought would be beneficial in her work with undocumented students.

> Basically, like cultural training, sensitivity training, right, understanding the ins and outs of the undocumented persons experience. What do the different statuses mean, right? What's the difference between rescue and asylum? So just some sensitivity training, empathy, just the ability to kind of put yourself in the shoes of others is helpful.
>
> I think, yeah, I think anyone would benefit from more support or just knowledge, general knowledge on the ways and the reasons and how do people

arrive to the United States and be declared undocumented? Or, you know, what, what the different visas mean or different statuses for those that do not have the F1 visa, but you are pursuing studies?

Nicole was being very clear about what topics would be beneficial. Her interest seemed to stem from being aware of knowledge gaps she has encountered in the dealings with undocumented students. She showed interest in continuing to learn as a way to better serve the undocumented students on her campus.

Three of the participants shared about the types of trainings they have created and facilitated. They acknowledged there was a need and decided to take up the mantle to create some informational presentations for others to use. They recognized there are a lot of misconceptions about undocumented students. Instead of waiting for their institutions to provide training, they decided to help educate their colleagues by sharing what they have learned along the way. Shemeka shared,

> But yeah, as far as, like the university having a training for me to take, no, they don't have that, except for, like, you know, like their bias, or unconscious bias kind of training.
>
> Yeah, so I actually have done trainings within my office about even just using the right terminology, so I compiled a training. I, I mean, we have thought about undocumented students for like, days and days and days, but like, it was just opened up the conversation and open up the, you know, the topic of like, you know, things that they, some of my colleagues had not heard that before, even,

you know, that was probably the first time they're like, What are you talking about?

Now, we have had the turnover, as you know, you know, in higher education, like people are quitting and so we have, you know, new people come in and stuff. So, it's not something that like we're constantly doing? You know, it's not something that's part of their required training, it's not part of like, you know, something that like we do once a month. Like, it's just kind of like, you know, I did it a couple of months back, and then who knows? I'll do it again. It'll be something that, you know, we'll see.

Although she understands the importance of information sharing, Shemeka does not offer trainings on a regular basis. These trainings are not a part of her specific job duties and are not required employee training. She has been functioning on an as needed basis until she gets more support from her institution. Stemming from similar reasoning, Jacinta shared about her experiences with facilitating training sessions.

I form a lot of connections through my undocu-ally trainings, and I get those requests a lot from different advising teams and colleges across campus. So, I train like your general like advising teams. Then, I've also been training career advising teams in each respective college. So, I think like resources wise, I try to make it work.

Jacinta has become a resource for her campus. She is aware there is a disconnect of information and that her institution is not yet at a point of providing necessary training. Some other topics covered in her trainings cover, but are not limited to, basic definitions,

historical context, and specific common barriers and experiences faced by undocumented students on her campus. Monique shared,

> I have I have on any given moment, I have like four or five presentations going on. The general information kind of goes from, you know, the why, why, why are you why are we all here? Why are we talking about this? Why is it important, right, this kind of, like bigger vision of like, honoring, and meeting our students where they are, no matter what the background is, right? Like that there's a bigger idea there, that's about inclusion, and, and that we are all responsible for it. I always tailor it to the audience, like, if it's, if it's advisors, I'm going to talk more about one on one interactions with students and stuff like that, right? If it's tailored towards students themselves, it's going to be, you know, like peer to peer relationships and things like that.

Some other topics covered in her trainings cover, but are not limited to, immigration issues, undocumented students' needs, and financial barriers.

As Patrice was the only participant to have a more formal institutional structure in place, she provided suggestions for types of trainings she felt would be beneficial for someone coming to do work with undocumented students.

> Being trained to have an understanding of the financial aid aspects of students with this particular population in the state of Texas, because you don't need to be an expert, you can always network with the offices that do all of the back and forth of rewarding but you do need to be you do need to know what's out there. Because that's going to be one of the very first questions that students are going to

ask you, you need to know about financial aid opportunities if and when available.

## Ancillary Finding and Consideration

In addition to the two main themes and five corresponding findings, the data revealed the accompanying ancillary findings and considerations that are worth mentioning: (a) intersecting identity with first-generation students and (b) covertly assisting undocumented students.

### *Intersecting Identity with First-generation Students*

Although, the intersecting identity with first-generation students' code was discovered in four of the participants' transcripts, the finding was not included in any of the main themes, because it did not specifically address any of the research questions. Even still, this finding was found to be an important part of the discussion relating to student affairs professionals and their work with undocumented students. Four of the seven participants expressed an awareness and understanding that undocumented students' identities intersect with being first-generation students. This finding suggested that there may be some parallel that can be drawn from first-generation studies and applied to undocumented students.

Jacinta shared her frustrations in not being able to easily identify undocumented students on her campus who may also be first-generation students.

> Like, we just wrapped up orientation season for incoming freshmen. And we were doing tabling and my colleague runs a first gen program, and I run [the program] to support undocumented students. And we're out on campus tabling on

> speedway. And my colleague is like, *who's a first gen student? First-gen students over here!* You know, really like out there, and she's like, why aren't you yelling? Why aren't you, you know, recruiting students. And I was like, bro, I can't just yell who's undocumented? Come talk to me. Like, What? What? And then she kind of had like, [a light bulb] moment. And she was like, wow, like, I never thought about how careful you have to be in regards to keeping the students safe. And I'm like, Yeah, I was like, also, almost, I feel like 90 to 95% of my students are first gen. We just don't acknowledge that identity. We only see them as undocumented students. And it pisses me off.

Here, Jacinta is expressing her frustration in having to explain to colleagues why she cannot openly recruit students for her program as they can. She is also showing how there is a lack of awareness on the part of her colleagues of those intersecting identities of undocumented students. Although, she is aware of the intersection, she believes their first-generation identity is oftentimes overlooked and the focus is only on their undocumented status.

Monique described her experience working with her first group of undocumented students.

> [T]hose first 10 [students] were, we kind of like learn together along the way, because this was their first time in college, they're all first, pretty much all the undocumented students, are for the most part, are first gen US college students.

She went on to share how her campus is attempting to change its culture as it relates to marginalized students.

> I don't know, the data and I can't give you numbers on this, but you know, it's no surprise that the majority of [my institutions'] students, at least historically have come from affluence, you know, privilege, white backgrounds where this is a PWI for sure.
>
> So, there's a sense that you know, we're changing the cultural. I don't know how I want to say this, like the, the context on our campus, the campus climate to be more welcoming to all students that come you know, there's an uptick in students, more recently, very purposely being accepted that are, you know, Pell Grant recipients or, you know, have some sort of background that is, is new for [the institution], right, like, that's our need based, first gen, the undocumented students, you know, all of these different areas that were, it's very noticeable that [the institution] is doing it, you know, very purposely to say we want our campus to, to change, we want it we want to become more inclusive. That all sounds great, okay. But one thing is like, you know, talking and another thing is walking.

Even from her first interactions with undocumented students, Monique understood that they are also a part of the first-generation college student community. Additionally, Monique is sharing her awareness that her campus is attempting to pivot towards being a more welcoming institution and wants to become more inclusive when looking to students who come from marginalized backgrounds. Although, her campus welcomed undocumented students before, she believes there is a more concerted effort to provide greater access.

> Shemeka shared being able to lean on the first-generation office on her campus. I'm willing to, you know, do something, what do we need to do? You know, our first gen office, our first-generation student services office, like they know that there's a need for undocumented students, and they know that there's different things that they need, and then you know, it's just different.

Here, Shemeka is sharing how the first-generation office is available to aid her in helping undocumented students and probably, most importantly, there is an understanding that there are some differences in the needs of undocumented students even though they may also identify as first-generation.

As Patrice stated, “We see that a lot of our students that have that [undocumented student] identity, as far as identifying Hispanic and or Latin X, Latino, Latina, Latina. They are from first gen, first gen families in the United States.” She went onto to share her experience connecting with undocumented students through conversation.

> And within those conversations of students from I need one class, however, I have x, y, & z challenges that it's preventing me from enrolling and then of course, from graduating, so that brought a lot of personal circumstances from the students that sometimes it just needed someone to listen to you.
>
> And when you're a student, specifically, first gen student when you are from a marginalized community, when you don't have the financial means to be able to enroll for your classes, and you're sitting with someone that quote unquote, it's a representative of the university and they're giving you 30/40 minutes out of

the day. And you also answer, ask a couple of questions for them. A lot of it a lot of information and a lot of connection can happen.

Here, Patrice is showing her awareness that undocumented students intersecting identities can affect how these students show up on her campus. Furthermore, she is sharing how important it is for institutional agents to be available and understanding of these students lived experiences and identities.

*Covertly Assisting Undocumented Students*

In addition to the intersecting identity with first-generation students' finding, the research presented an additional finding, covertly assisting undocumented students. As this study sought to understand the experiences of student affairs professionals in their work with undocumented students, the findings suggested the possibility of an intersection between "student-facing" professionals and undocumented students. Here "student-facing" specifically relates to those student affairs professionals who work directly with undocumented students.

As the research questions were not developed to address this consideration, there was not enough data to include in any of the reported themes or for develop of its own separate theme. Further the finding indicated that participants' state as a whole were not fully ready to openly support state institutions "publicly" supporting the idea of "undocumented" people. This indication hinted that those institution's support structures and work with undocumented students functions covertly as related to "student-facing" professionals.

Monique shared her experience when she first began to hear about undocumented students enrolling at her campus.

> [L]ike I heard mumblings of you know, we're going to as first year advisors, we're going to have to learn or we were expecting that there's going to be a few students coming in with this different type of immigration status. And I was like, well, well, we can't just open the, the gate and not think through, you know, wraparound services or what does it mean? Like, what are the unique needs or whatever. So, I basically stepped up when no one felt like no one else really did in my unit, at least.
>
> [K]nowing the campus climate at [my institution] and just, I don't know, I just, there's, there was a connection there between my own experiences and seeing that no one else was, like really, like, stepping up to say, to think through and listen to what these students are saying their unique needs are, you know, their unique circumstances are on our campus.

Here, Monique seems to be saying that there was no official announcement, but it was just kind of being passed around campus. Although, there was no official word, she understood there needed to be more resources for these undocumented students. She took it upon herself to gather information she felt would be vital to aiding these students. She seemed to pull from her own experience as a way to try to understand the unique needs these students were coming to campus.

Laverne shared,

> Well, again, I think first off, it's not necessarily obvious, you know, if a student is documented or not, they really do have to self-disclose that. Because there aren't sort of any standard obvious ways that that I would know if they're documented or not. We don't ask students their documentation status.
>
> I don't know, I think if I went to my higher ups and said, I want to go spend money or this training on undocumented, supporting undocumented students. I don't know how that would go. Not because my higher ups wouldn't also find it important. They have to pay attention to the larger ramifications of any decisions that are made.

Here, Laverne is explaining that she is not always aware of who the undocumented students are on her campus as there are no internal, specific ways of identifying them. Further, she believes it would be difficult to get the needed support from those in upper administration, because they are tuned into what that support might look like if it were made public.

Shemeka explained how her work has to be more intentional.

> [A]s long as [a student] graduates from a Kentucky high school or got their GED they are able to qualify for in state tuition and attend college. And so that's mainly just like a policy not necessarily like you know, a policy, you know, open nationwide, kind of like rolling or anything like that. So, pros and cons about it is like, it's one of those things that it's like more known now than it was back then. But still, like, you know, not as in your face, because we obviously, don't want to

create a whole lot of like, you know, attention to it to where it could possibly be, you know, taken away, if that makes sense.

And so a lot of policy and politics and all this stuff have come into play. [I]t's not like we can fully go on and be all like, hey, undocumented students, like, you know, we can make a big show about it, you know what I mean? So, it's got to be really intentional, it's got to be really like, you know, connected to the administrators and the counselors and the teachers within the high schools within the schools that we can educate and inform, so that then they can trickle down that information to their students directly.

Here, Shemeka details the availability of a policy that allows undocumented Kentucky students to qualify for in state tuition. However, her statement explains that the policy is not very widely publicized as to not create negative press and possibly have it challenged. Her work around is to get the information into the hands of those who can pass it down to students within Kentucky high schools in hopes it reaches the students.

Above discussed Jacinta's frustration with not being able to openly recruit undocumented students to her program even though, her job is to aid this particular group of students. She continued to share about her experience in getting staff on board with being a better resource for undocumented students.

I mentioned to like, typically, staff are like, well, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't, I don't know. I don't know, I don't know, right? And what I challenge staff to do, especially when I do trainings, is not to say, I don't know. And I try to put it in there in the perspective of the student, like, think about how many staff

> members are telling these students on a daily basis? No. And I don't know, and the harm we're doing by throwing our hands up, and just saying, Sorry, I don't know how to help you. Or, oh, you know, there's no one here on campus to help us population. We can't just throw our hands up and stop there. So, for me, I don't accept I don't know, and that's just me.

As a "student-facing" professional, Jacinta is explaining how she wants to do more to provide better and effective support to undocumented students. She is adamant about training her colleagues to be more proactive in their support for undocumented students as well.

## Summary of the Findings

The questionnaire was designed by the researcher with the intent of gathering information, opinions, and concerns regarding the experiences of student affairs professionals who assist or have assisted undocumented students. As discussed in Chapter III, the data was analyzed using the thematic analysis design set forth by Braun and Clarke (2012). Using a phenomenological approach, two findings and five themes emerged.

Finding one showed that these student affairs professionals have a strong desire to assist undocumented students. Participants were empathic towards the plight of undocumented students. Finding one revealed student affairs professionals use various strategies in their work to assist undocumented students. Three themes emerged from finding one. Theme one revealed how participants perceived rapport building as a strategy in assisting undocumented students. All of the participants felt that building a

rapport with students was a vital and necessary first step in providing effective assistance to undocumented students. Theme two demonstrated how forming and using connections with partners can be beneficial to assisting undocumented students. A majority of the participants collaborated with various campus and non-campus partners in their work with assisting undocumented students. Theme three described how participants used their skills to advocate for undocumented students. A majority of the participants reported using several skills including self-awareness, empathy, communication, and networking to advocate for undocumented students in various spaces.

Finding two showed that student affairs professionals faced challenges in their pursuit of assisting undocumented students. All of the participants expressed at least one issue they encountered that made providing adequate and effective assistance to the undocumented students on their campuses. Two themes emerged from finding two. Theme one revealed how limited or unclear institutional policies hindered how effective participants were in their work with assisting undocumented students. All participants expressed one of the biggest issues they faced in assisting undocumented students was having limited institutional policy guidance in their work. Theme two detailed how participants perceived institutional support, resources, and training in their duties to assist undocumented students. A majority of the participants reported having limited institutional support, resources, and training.

Additionally, the data revealed the accompanying ancillary findings and considerations that are worth mentioning: (a) intersecting identity with first-generation students and (b) covertly assisting undocumented students.

The researcher believes the findings and corresponding themes revealed how the participants perceived their experiences assisting undocumented students. Additionally, the findings establish the groundwork for understanding the participant experiences for empowering undocumented students to persist. With that in mind, this study sought to answer four specific research questions. Chapter V will continue to analyze the findings to address the four research questions.

# CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using a phenomenological approach and Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis design, this study aimed to investigate how student affairs professionals work to assist undocumented students, and how this assistance empowers undocumented students to persist. The study's two major findings and its five corresponding themes were discussed in Chapter IV. This chapter begins by using the themes to answer the four research questions and discussing the findings. This will be followed by presenting recommended implications for practice and for future research.

## Research Questions and Discussion of Findings

### *Research Question 1: What are the major issues that student affairs professionals face when assisting undocumented students?*

The first research question sought to determine what issues student affairs professionals encountered while assisting undocumented students. The participants reported feeling frustrated and at times, lonely. Literature shines a light on the many growing issues and challenges faced by undocumented students (Bjoklund, 2018; Davidson & Precidao, 2017; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2007), but there are fewer studies that detail the specific issues faced by those student affairs professionals who assist them. However, the findings from this study seem to show a parallel between the issues faced by undocumented students and the student affairs participants. The findings uncovered two main issues encountered by the participants who are student affairs professionals: a lack of formalized or unclear institutional policies and lacking or limited institutional support, resources, and training.

First, even though their institutions enrolled undocumented students and they are tasked with assisting them, the participants reported there were not always policies in place to fully understand and provide the guidance on how to properly assist undocumented students. According to Abrego & Gonzales (2010), undocumented students found postsecondary access challenging due to institutional bureaucracy. For some participants, the findings showed that even where there were policies, those policies were oftentimes vague and did not do much to further their understanding in how undocumented students were situated on their campuses or within the larger picture of the institutional structure. As confirmed by the literature, student affairs professionals are often confused by the mixed messaging when it comes to policy specifics for serving undocumented students on their campuses (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Olivas, 2004). The participants found this to be a frustrating part of their job during those times they are not able to answer concerns, because the lack the proper knowledge.

Using knowledge and expertise they acquire from previous roles or experiences, most of the participants reported having some surface level knowledge of policies that might be beneficial when assisting undocumented students. One participant detailed how her understanding of state driver's license requirements might be beneficial; while another described being able to use her expertise in working with international students served as bridge to help facilitate assistance. However, they did not always feel adequately prepared to assist undocumented students, because they lacked the depth of specific policy knowledge needed to assist undocumented students.

Participants also reported that their knowledge stemmed from their own gathering of information mostly through social media outlets or simply "Googling" pertinent information. They also gathered information from the undocumented students they assisted. Often times, it was the undocumented students who would bring awareness to policies as they were the ones directly affected. This aligns with what the literature reported about how undocumented students acquire needed information about their legal status from other undocumented students (Enriquez, 2011). As such, it would not be unheard of for student affairs professionals to also get vital information from undocumented students. Participants felt having better policies would allow them a greater opportunity to provide more effective services to undocumented students (Southern, 2016). Moreso, these findings suggested how this lack of knowledge might hinder undocumented students from seeking help from the participants. Some undocumented students are hesitant of student affairs professionals, because of their lack of efficient knowledge to assist them (Perez & Roderiquez, 2011).

Secondly, lacking or limited institutional support, resources, and training posed additional stress to participants' ability to assist undocumented students. For undocumented students to be successful, it is vital that they have access to a wealth of support (Enriquez, 2011). For participants whose job it was to assist undocumented students, they were not always given proper training, the budget, or other support outside of what was allocated for their salary.

The findings show that only one of the participants reported coming into her job with a support structure in place to assist undocumented students. One participant

reported her position was a recent addition to the institution as she was the first person specifically tasked with overseeing an "office" to specifically address the needs of undocumented students. While the other five participants reported that their work with undocumented students is not their "on paper" job. These duties are add-on responsibilities to the jobs they were initially hired to perform or they feel compassion for undocumented students and want to help. All but one of the participants were tasked with assisting but were not always given the proper tools, resources, and knowledge to do the work. This brings into question whether or not these institutions are truly invested in effectively supporting undocumented students on their campuses if they are not willing to provide participants with needed support.

One type of support participants spoke about needing was training. They described how helpful trainings would be in their work with undocumented students. The findings showed that three of the participants facilitated several trainings concerning undocumented students at various times. Their trainings cover various subjects such as understanding common barriers or experiences face by undocumented students, how to use a holistic approach when working with undocumented students, and models of allyship. They felt necessary to share with others the information they have gathered from their own work with and connection to undocumented students. However, the findings showed those three participants also believed they could use additional support from their institutions in providing necessary and needed training. Some specific topics participants thought would be helpful included trainings about unconscious bias, strategies in supporting undocumented students, or cultural and sensitivity training. As one participant

explained, she didn't know what she didn't know and felt having "any sort of training would be beneficial." The literature supports the participants' desire for training related to being able to efficiently assist undocumented students. As mentioned in Chapter II, it is suggested institutions train student affairs professionals to be sensitive to the social and emotional needs of undocumented students (Perez, 2010b). Additionally, they emphasized the importance of having training focused on policy or laws would be beneficial in their work with undocumented students.

Lacking financial support for undocumented students proved to be more frustrating. Not only do participants have limited programming resources, they lack funding to use to support undocumented students. Although, institutions will openly enroll undocumented students, there aren't always funds available to assist these students with staying enrolled. This finding aligns with a similar finding from both Cisneros (2013) and Garcia and Tierney (2011). One of the main issues faced by undocumented students is not having the financial backing to complete their educational pursuits (Cisneros, 2013; Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Diaz-Strong, et al. (2011) added undocumented students are restricted in their higher educational pursuits when they are denied access to financial aid. Participants reported similar issues with having limited access to funds to support undocumented students. Therefore, it is a challenge to support these students on their campuses. The findings showed there are comparable frustrations and issues faced by undocumented students and the participants.

*Research Question 2: How are student affairs professionals assisting undocumented students?*

The second research question sought to find out how student affairs professionals are assisting the undocumented students on their campuses. The literature suggested student affairs professionals play a vital role in assisting undocumented students in their pursuit of higher education (Storlie & Jach, 2012) and can provide them with valuable forms of assistance (Croninger & Lee, 2001). The study findings showed that participants are there to assist however they can. They expressed empathy and care for undocumented students and a desire to assist even when they are not specifically tasked with doing so. Echoing what has been reported in the literature, the participants felt educating undocumented students would allow for increased participation in society by making them economically stable (Munoz, 2016).

This assistance ranged from "simply" listening to the students' experiences to helping them find ways to pay for school. The literature reported undocumented students want to feel seen and acknowledged (Munoz & Maldonado, 2012). The participants created an opportunity for undocumented students to connect with someone on the campus who saw passed their undocumented status. Some participants also reported helping undocumented students understand the college application process; while other participants helped students with food insecurity. These findings confirm and support what the literature reported. Per Enriquez (2011), undocumented students need access to a plethora of resources if they are going to be successful in furthering their education post high school. Even with their limited policy knowledge and resources to assist

undocumented students, participants voiced a strong concern for ensuring they were there to support the undocumented students on their campuses any way they could.

*Research Question 3: What strategies are student affairs professionals using to assist undocumented students?*

The third research question sought to understand the approach that student affairs professionals took when assisting undocumented students. The research findings concluded that participants used a variety of strategies when assisting undocumented students. These strategies included building a rapport with students, forming and using partnerships, and advocating for undocumented students.

First, participants spoke about the necessity in building a rapport with undocumented students. In agreeance with the literature, the participants felt if they were to truly be supportive of undocumented students they needed to form genuine connections with them (Stanton-Dalazar & Dornbusch, 1995). They spoke about building a rapport with students by using a holistic approach. Participants took the time to get to know the students and what was going on in their lives. They understood that undocumented students come to their campuses with lived experiences that would often times overshadow their academic needs. Further confirming previous findings from the literature, participants recognized the need for holistic thinking when creating institutional support systems for undocumented students (Sanchez & So, 2015).

The findings also showed that participants empathized with undocumented students being hesitant in disclosing their statuses. As mentioned in Chapter II, participants understood what that might mean for undocumented students and their

families (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Participants found that building a rapport with undocumented students created an environment where they could feel comfortable to share as little or as much as they wanted without pressure. Additionally, participants acknowledged an awareness of safety concerns when working with undocumented students and created ways to maintain that safety. The findings suggested participants were careful in how they communicated with and about undocumented students, e.g., not putting including certain information in email communications or not openly publicizing events where undocumented students might be gathering. Building a rapport was an important part of participants' work with undocumented students as it was a way to keep and make them feel there were safe institutional agents and spaces on their campuses (Suarez-Oroco et al., 2015).

A second strategy that came from the findings was forming and using partnerships. The participants spoke about not always having the answers and how that is ok. They went onto explain how they would use their connections to other departments, non- institutional colleagues, or organizations to assist undocumented students find the help they needed. These partnerships were a critical piece of resource sharing with undocumented students. As mentioned earlier, participants reported often times lacking or limited access to institutional resources for assisting undocumented students, but they realized that others are equally committed to assisting undocumented students and are willing to share tools, resources, and information. As such, they used those networks to connect undocumented students with valuable resources. As supported by the literature, these networks provided undocumented students with access to assets that would have

otherwise been unavailable (Portes, 1998). Portes (1998) further explained that undocumented students find benefits beyond their immediate families and communities which requires them to be connected to other forms of social capital. Participants saw themselves as that bridge connecting undocumented students to needed services.

The third strategy employed by participants was advocating for undocumented students. The literature reported a belief that student affairs professionals have a duty to advocate for undocumented students (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Participants spoke about the magnitude of being advocates for undocumented students whether it was specifically advocating for their educational access or simply advocating for whatever it is they needed in that moment. They felt the desire to use their privilege in their respective campus roles and reported being intentional in their movement and work with and concerning undocumented students. This finding confirms what was discussed in Chapter II. Participants believed that their connection with and empathy for undocumented students made they well situated to be their advocates (Huerta & Ocampo, 2017; Kantamneni et al., 2016).

Participants reported using various skills such as being self-aware, empathy, and interpersonal skills when advocating for undocumented students. The literature validates the use of a range of skillsets as a means of advocating for undocumented students (Nienhusser & Espino, 2017; Reason & Broido, 2005). As mentioned earlier, participants took issue with the lack or of limited policy structures in place to guide their work with undocumented students. They commented on how helpful it would to have policy

centered trainings. The literature encourages student affairs professional to use their influence to aid in advocating for educational policies (Ortega, 2011).

*Research Question 4: How do student affairs professionals empower undocumented students to persist?*

Using the social capital framework, the fourth and final research question sought to understand how student affairs professionals empower undocumented students to persist. As explained in Chapter II, empowerment is "the active participatory process of gaining resources, competencies, and key forms of power necessary for gaining control over one's life and accomplishing important life goals" (Maton & Salem, 1995, as cited in Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1090). Additionally, social capital possesses no monetary value, but houses networks with significant power and influence (Portes, 1998). For undocumented students who have limited opportunities and resources due to their immigration statuses, access to social capital can be a way forward. Croninger and Lee (2001) suggested that social capital affords undocumented emotional support, guidance, and assistance. As student affairs professionals are often the individuals on campuses with a direct line to support services and resources, the literature back the premise they are well situated to empower undocumented students (Chen et al., 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

The findings from this study reveal how participants used their skills and connections to not only assist undocumented students, but to empower them to persist. Participants were empathic to the experiences of undocumented students. They shared they desired to assist undocumented students in any way they could. The findings show

how participants built a rapport with undocumented students as a means of getting to know more about them and using that knowledge to be a bridge to needed resources and services. According to Morrow (1999), connections undocumented students make with student affairs professionals can have a positive effect on the students' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Building a rapport created a space for participants to build trust between them and the undocumented students they served. According to the literature, undocumented students' ability to persist is directly related to forming genuine and supportive connections with institutional agents (Enriquez, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Participants spoke about forming and using connections with various partners. Regardless of whether or not they had direct access to resources, participants were able to use their partnerships to provided necessary services to undocumented students. Having access to resources and services is vital to the upward mobility of undocumented students (Coleman, 1988). Social capital allows undocumented students access to those resources and services by way of their association with student affairs professionals at their campuses. Participants are within undocumented students spheres of influence and can link them to what they need to persist and further their goals (Hofferth et al., 1998).

The work participants are trying to accomplishing is not an easy feat when accounting for their limited institutional support. However, participants reported not letting that deter them. As previously reported, support from student affairs professionals cultivates undocumented student growth and development (Barnhardt et al., 2013). Their ability to use their knowledge and outside connections creates opportunities for

empowering undocumented students. Providing undocumented students with valuable forms of assistance, student affairs professionals are essential sources of social capital, because they play a central role in their developmental process (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Participants were creative in getting undocumented students needed information. For instance, one participant using Canvas to create a tool for undocumented students to access to find valuable information. Even with limited training and resources, the literature supports the belief that undocumented students should be made aware of what is available (Munoz, 2016). Student affair professionals are well situated to empower undocumented students to persist. Findings showed that student affairs professionals engaged, supported, encouraged, and advocated for undocumented students in ways that have the possibility of changing their lives in substantial ways.

## Recommendations for Practice

After reviewing the literature and analyzing and reviewing the findings from this study, the most pressing recommendation is for more institutional support for those tasked with assisting undocumented students. It is important to address the recommendations for practice, because it can aid student affairs professionals in their work with undocumented students. As institutions are creating opportunities for undocumented students to enroll at their campuses, it will be vital for them to equip their staff with the necessary tools and resources needed to effectively assist undocumented students.

Institutional leaders should also ensure that student affairs professionals are giving proper training and guidance if they are going to be tasked with such important

work. Guidance should come in the form of creating detailed policies concerning undocumented students. More structured and formal policies will provide student affairs professionals with needed regulations in order to perform essential functions of their jobs.

Participants also reported their desire to have more training focused on topics specific to their work with undocumented students. It would also be beneficial for institutions create some sort of onboarding or training for employees. This training should be mandatory for all institutional employees. Although this study was about student affairs professionals specifically, it is important for all institutional employees understand the needs of undocumented students. As information and policy is constantly changing, it is also recommended that training be conducted on a more scheduled basis and not just a one-time instance. This training could be used as a refresher on pertinent information or keeping up-to-date on any changes that have occurs. Training would also include opportunities for attending conferences and trainings outside of the institution. It is also recommended institutions regular push out vital information to their staff via internal communications.

In addition to creating formal policies and training, another type of support recommended for institutions to focus on is building up its financial support for programming and other functions that serve undocumented students. Financial backing for support is an important marker to ensuring that student affairs professionals will have access to funds to effectively assist undocumented students.

A non-institutional recommendation is to create some sort of clearinghouse or database for student affairs professionals who assist undocumented students. As stated,

this study only interviewed seven participants. It was challenging to get those seven participants signed up mainly due to not being able to connect with more individuals who served in those roles. This would also be beneficial to have a way for student affairs professionals to connect with other student affairs professionals who work with undocumented students as a way to gather and share resources.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This study employed the qualitative method. It would be worthwhile to get a different perspective by using a quantitative or mixed-method approach. The interviews provided rich data from the participants. However, a quantitative or mixed-method approach would create an opportunity to examine some correlation between the different types of institutions or different departments. Private institutions will handle and address issues differently.

As this study only interviewed seven participants, increasing the number of participants will provide greater and more diverse insight. Although seven participants are sufficient according to the literature, a larger sample might provide more understanding as to how student affairs professionals are assisting undocumented students. This study also only focused on three areas: housing, advising, and enrollment management. It would be useful to expand parameters to understand how student affairs professionals across campuses are assisting undocumented students

An additional direction for future research comes from the ancillary findings and consideration. It would be beneficial to study the parallel between first-generation studies and how they might be applied to undocumented students. The findings from this

study provide ample suggestions for the intersecting identities of first-generation college students and undocumented students. It would be a significant addition in understanding how to effectively empower undocumented students. Lastly, information gleamed from the interviews led to some interesting intersecting thoughts concerning the area of what can be considered the covert nature of "student-facing" student affairs work and undocumented students.

## Conclusion

Built upon the theoretical frame of social capital, this qualitative phenomenological study examines the reported experiences of how student affairs professionals assist and support undocumented students, and how their assistance empowers these students to persist. Using a thematic analysis design set forth by Braun and Clarke (2012), the researcher discovered two major research findings and 5 corresponding themes. Often times, student affairs professionals are one of the first points of contact for undocumented students on their campuses. The findings from this research have provide an insider view from some of those who assist undocumented students at institutions of higher learning. The student affairs professionals interviewed reported a strong desire to assist undocumented students. Each reported that they took time and care to build relationships with undocumented students in their efforts to understanding their specific needs. These student affairs professionals also seemed to serve as connections to vital services and resources that are needed for undocumented students to navigate higher education. Advocating for undocumented students was found to be an ever-engaging strategy used by student affairs professionals to garner support. When attempting to assist

undocumented students, the findings revealed that student affairs professionals face issues that are parallel to the issues faced undocumented students themselves. These student affairs professionals reported being frustrated by deficient or unclear institutional policies and limited institutional support, resources, and training. As the findings reveal, these student affairs professionals are committed to assisting undocumented students, but there is not always institutional backing to support the work at hand. Even still, these student affairs professionals seemed to show great resolve in their efforts to assist and ultimately, empower undocumented students to persist.

# APPENDIX A - IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5116 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6756 | WWW.USM.EDU/ORI

**NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION**

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

| | |
|---|---|
| PROTOCOL NUMBER: | 22-222 |
| PROJECT TITLE: | Empowerment Agents: How Student Affairs Professionals can Facilitate the Developmental Growth of Undocumented Students |
| SCHOOL/PROGRAM | School of Education |
| RESEARCHERS: | PI: Tiffany Paige<br>Investigators: Paige, Tiffany R~O'Brien, Thomas~ |
| IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: | Approved |
| CATEGORY: | Expedited Category |
| PERIOD OF APPROVAL: | 23-May-2022 to 22-May-2023 |

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

# APPENDIX B - RECRUITMENT LETTER

**RECRUITMENT LETTER IRB #22-222**

Date:

My name is Tiffany R. Paige, and I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Thomas O'Brien in the School of Education at University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting a research study to assess the knowledge of student affairs professionals who assist undocumented students in their designated institutional roles and how they empower undocumented students to persist. This study will focus on participants working in housing, advising, or enrollment services in a full-time position (37.5+ hours per week) and should spend a minimum of 40% of that working week actively engaged/meeting with students.

You are **eligible** to be in this study if you:

- Are a student affairs professional. A student affairs professional is someone who works or has worked in higher education and is tasked with ensuring that students are safe, cared for, well treated, and (more or less) satisfied with their higher education.
- Work in housing, advising, or enrollment services.
- Work in a full-time position (37.5+ hours per week) and should spend a minimum of 40% of that working week actively engaged/meeting with students.
- Work for an institution located in the United States.
- Located in the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana.
- Work at a four-year, public or private college or university or a two-year community and junior colleges
- Are 18 years or older.
- Are willing to answer questions about your experiences assisting undocumented students
- Are willing to compete a one-on-one interview

You are **not eligible** to be in this study if you:

- Are not a student affairs professional.
- Did not work for an institution of higher education located in the United States.
- Are not 18 years or older.
- Are not willing to answer questions about your experiences assisting undocumented students.
- Are not willing to compete a one-on-one interview.

The activities for this research project will include the following.

- Prescreening Questionnaire – approximately 5 minutes, online from your computer
- Demographic Questionnaire ~ approximately 5 minutes, online from your computer
- One-to-one recorded interviews with researcher lasting approximately 90 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Study codes will be used instead of names and any identifying information for interview data and questionnaire data. Any information connecting study codes with names and demographic information will be kept locked in a secure location only known to the researcher.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at tiffany.paige@usm.edu. Thank you!

1

# APPENDIX C - 1ST EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS EXAMPLE

Good morning/afternoon,

Thank you for reaching out about my study. I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi where my dissertation is entitled "Empowerment Agents: How Student Affairs Professionals Can Facilitate the Developmental Growth of Undocumented Students." I am seeking to interview student affairs professionals who work with or have worked with/assisted undocumented students. I am hoping to get a better understanding of issues these professionals face in hopes of presenting some recommendations in how better to serve the undocumented students on their campuses.

Please see the attached recruitment letter.

Please complete the prescreening information here https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0ooubVEbTVlcJ1A.

> Empowerment Agents Prescreen Questionnaire
>
> Welcome to the Prescreen Questionnaire! This survey will ask 11 questions to see if you qualify to proceed with the interview. I would like to hear about the experience of Student Affairs Professionals 18 years or older in the United States who assist undocumented students. If you would like to participate, please answer some questions below to see if you qualify. You will be asked for your name, email and telephone, to be contacted by the researcher Tiffany Paige to proceed with the interview. The interview is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. Thank you for considering to be part of this interview. Tiffany R. Paige University of Southern Mississippi PhD Student IRB #22-222
>
> qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com

Please feel free to pass this information onto others who might meet the criteria. Additionally, they can contact me at tiffany.paige@usm.edu if interested. For all who meet the criteria, an email with links collecting demographic information and to set up an interview will be sent.

Thanks again for your help,

Tiffany R. Paige, JD

# APPENDIX D - PRESCREEN QUESTIONNAIRE EXAMPLE

A Welcome to the Prescreen Questionnaire! This survey will ask 11 questions to see if you qualify to proceed with the interview. I would like to hear about the experience of Student Affairs Professionals 18 years or older in the United States who assist undocumented students. If you would like to participate, please answer some questions below to see if you qualify. You will be asked for your name, email and telephone, to be contacted by the researcher Tiffany Paige to proceed with the interview. The interview is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. Thank you for considering to be part of this interview. Tiffany R. Paige University of Southern Mississippi PhD Student IRB #22-222

Begin questionnaire

Q1 Are a student affairs professional. A student affairs professional is someone who works or has worked in higher education and is tasked with ensuring that students are safe, cared for, well treated, and (more or less) satisfied with their higher education?

Yes/No

Q2 Do you work in housing, advising, or enrollment services?

Yes/No

Q3 Do you work in a full-time position (37.5+ hours per week) and should spend a minimum of 40% of that working week actively engaged/meeting with students?

Yes/No

Q4 Do you work for an institution located in the United States?

Yes/No

Q5 Are you located in one of the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Indiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, Virginia, or Louisiana?

Yes/No

Q6 What state are you located in?

Alabama/Arkansas/Florida/Georgia/Kentucky/Louisiana/Mississippi/North Carolina/South Carolina/Tennessee/Texas/Virginia/Indiana

Q7 Do you work at a four-year, public or private college or university or a two-year community and/or junior college?

Yes/No

Q8 Are you 18 years or older?

Yes/No

Q9 Are you willing to answer questions about your experiences assisting undocumented students?

Yes/No

Q10 Are you willing to complete a one-on-one interview?

Yes/No

Q11 Thank you for answering the prescreen questionnaire. You will be contacted within 48 hours to schedule a video interview if you meet the protocol criteria. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate

- First Name _____
- Last Name _____
- Email Address _____
- Contact Number (U.S.) _____

Page 1 of 1

# APPENDIX E – EMIAIL TO LISTSERVS AND ORGANIZATIONS EXAMPLE

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is Tiffany Paige and I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi where my dissertation is entitled "Empowerment Agents: How Student Affairs Professionals can Facilitate the Developmental Growth of Undocumented Students." I am seeking to interview student affairs professionals who work with or have worked with/assisted undocumented students. I am hoping to get a better understanding of issues these professionals face in hopes of presenting some recommendations in how better to serve the undocumented students on their campuses. I am emailing hoping to reach professionals who might meet my recruitment criteria and would be willing to share their experience in an interview and you were identified as a potential participant. You were identified as a possible participant. I have attached my IRB approval letter from the University.

I am attaching the prescreening link to qualify participants here https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0ooubVEbTVlcJ1A.

> Empowerment Agents Prescreen Questionnaire
>
> Welcome to the Prescreen Questionnaire! This survey will ask 11 questions to see if you qualify to proceed with the interview. I would like to hear about the experience of Student Affairs Professionals 18 years or older in the United States who assist undocumented students. If you would like to participate, please answer some questions below to see if you qualify. You will be asked for your name, email and telephone, to be contacted by the researcher Tiffany Paige to proceed with the interview. The interview is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. Thank you for considering to be part of this interview. Tiffany R. Paige University of Southern Mississippi PhD Student IRB #22-222
>
> qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com

Please feel free to pass this information onto others on your campus or within your network who you feel might meet the criteria. Additionally, I can be contacted at tiffany.paige@usm.edu if there are any questions. For all who meet the criteria, an email with links collecting demographic information and to set up an interview will be sent.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Tiffany R. Paige, JD

# APPENDIX F - EMAIL INVITE TO PARTICIPANTS EXAMPLE

Good afternoon/evening,

Thank you for filling out the prescreen questionnaire. I'd like to invite you to participate in my study. Please take a moment to complete the following 3 items:

1. Demographics https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5bCIi4igyQX0mpg

> **Online Survey Software | Qualtrics Survey Solutions**
>
> The most powerful, simple and trusted way to gather experience data. Start your journey to experience management and try a free account today.
>
> qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com

2. Schedule your interview time

https://calendly.com/empowermentagents/90min.

> **90 Minute Interview - Tiffany Paige**
>
> Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study entitled "Empowerment Agents: How Student Affairs Professionals Can Facilitate the Developmental Growth of Undocumented Students." The zoom interview will take approximately 90 minutes or less. The zoom itself will be recorded to be transcribed.
>
> calendly.com

3. Please read, sign and date the attached consent form and return to me prior to your scheduled interview time.

I am excited about this research and am looking forward to hearing about your experiences assisting undocumented students.

Thank you,

Tiffany R. Paige, J.D.

APPENDIX G - INFORMED CONSENT

ORI| Office of Research Integrity

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
**STANDARD (SIGNED) INFORMED CONSENT**

| **STANDARD (SIGNED) INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES** |
|---|
| • **Use of this template is <u>optional.</u>** However, by federal regulations (45 CFR 46.116), all consent documentation must address each of the required elements listed below (purpose, procedures, duration, benefits, risks, alternative procedures, confidentiality, whom to contact in case of injury, and a statement that participation is voluntary).<br>• Signed copies of the consent form should be provided to all participants.<br>• Last Edited August 13th, 2021 |

Today's date:
**PROJECT INFORMATION**
Project Title: EMPOWERMENT AGENTS: HOW STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS CAN FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENTAL GROWTH OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS (IRB #22-222)

Principal Investigator: Tiffany R Paige Phone: 601- 573-9249 Email: tiffany.paige@usm.edu College: Education and Human Sciences School and Program: School of Education, Higher Ed Administration

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

1. **Purpose**:
The purpose of this study is to assess the knowledge of student affairs professionals who assist undocumented students in their designated institutional roles and how they empower undocumented students to persist. This qualitative research project will consist of interviewing the professionals about the policies and procedures they follow at both the state and institutional levels. This research seeks to address the gap in the literature by those student affairs professionals who specifically assist undocumented students and identifying the issues they face in their work with undocumented students. This research may result in conference presentations and journal articles.

2. **Description of Study:**
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete an online participant demographic information survey that will take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. You will then be asked to participate in an interview which will take no longer than 90 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Participation in

the participant information survey does not obligate you to participate in the interview. Participation in both the survey and the interview is completely voluntary.
Here are some sample interview questions:
1) Can you generally describe your experiences with undocumented students?
2) What is your attitude toward undocumented students?
3) How does this attitude influence your work with undocumented students enrolled in higher education?
4) Tell me about your own readiness to assist with undocumented students.

3. **Benefits:**
There are no immediate benefits to the participants. However, the results gathered will hopefully provide insight into how student affairs professionals can effectively assist and empower undocumented students. Further, it will provide guidance to other professionals who assist undocumented students.

4. **Risks:**
Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. There are minimal risks in this study, but may involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life. Some other possible risks include saying a student's name. To decrease the impact of these risks, you can: skip any question, know that I will not write the student's name down in my research.

5. **Confidentiality:**
Every effort to maintain the participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be made. Participants will be assured that their identities will not be compromised. Additionally, every effort will be made to keep all shared information completely private and confidential. Any written references to participants will use pseudonyms and not real names. Any forthcoming publications will exclude all real names or personally identifying information and only use pseudonyms.

Recorded interviews and transcribed interviews will be maintained in a locked home office safe in the researcher's home. Only the researcher will have access to the data. Data will be kept secure by a password protected laptop, password protected files, use of codes or pseudonyms in place of names, and storing codes on USB drives that are password protected and stored in a locked home office safe. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years.

The recordings will be destroyed after a period of 18 months. The interview transcripts may be kept up to two years to facilitate data analysis; however no identifying information will be recorded on the transcripts; only pseudonyms will be used to identify research participants.

6. **Alternative Procedures:**
There are no alternative procedures.

7. **Participant's Assurance:**
This project and this consent form have been reviewed by USM's Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-266-5997.

Any questions about this research project should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Participant's Name**:

I hereby consent to participate in this research project. All research procedures and their purpose were explained to me, and I had the opportunity to ask questions about both the procedures and their purpose. I received information about all expected benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts, and I had the opportunity to ask questions about them. I understand my participation in the project is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. I understand the extent to which my personal information will be kept confidential. As the research proceeds, I understand that any new information that emerges and that might be relevant to my willingness to continue my participation will be provided to me.

***( )*** Videotaping/Audio Recording:

I would like to use a recorder to record your responses. You can still participate if you do not wish to be recorded. Please sign here if I can record you: _____

_____ _____
Research Participant Researcher

_____ _____
Date Date

# APPENDIX H – DEMOGRAPHICS

**Demographic Information**

1) Type of Institution (Mark all that apply)
   a) 4-year_____
   b) 2-year_____
   c) Public_____
   d) Private_____
   e) Religious affiliation_____
   f) Historically Black College or University_____
   g) Hispanic Serving Institution_____
   h) Other_____
2) Governed by:
   a) State Board/System_____
   b) Board of Regents_____
   c) Other_____
3) What is your title and role at your institution?
   a) What duties does that entail?
4) How many years have you worked in higher education? _____
5) How long have you worked in the institution you are currently at? _____
6) How long you have worked in the department you are currently in? _____
7) What is your ethnicity? Hispanic/Latino, White, Black, Asian, Native American, European, Other _____

# APPENDIX I –INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I'd like to thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, this interview is being conducted so that I can get a sense of your experiences and opinions regarding how student affairs professionals serve and empower undocumented students. Our interview today will last no more than 90 minutes. During that time, I will be asking you about your experiences working with undocumented students.

**[Review aspects of consent form]**

You have completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission (or not) to record our conversation.

Are you still ok with me recording (or not) our conversation today? ___Yes ___No

**If yes:** Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to stop recording or if there is something you want kept off record.

**If no:** Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions?

1) Can you generally describe your experiences with undocumented students?
2) What is your attitude toward undocumented students?
3) How does this attitude influence your work with undocumented students enrolled in higher education?
4) Tell me about your own readiness to assist with undocumented students.
5) What has been the biggest challenge you have faced in assisting undocumented students?
6) What are some resources that are available to you to assist undocumented students?
7) Are there specific services/programs your institution offers to undocumented students?
8) Have you developed any networks between your institution and student affairs professionals at other institutions with the shared goal of assisting undocumented students? If so, can you describe these networks and their functions?
9) Tell me about the type of training or professional development you need to work with undocumented students.
10) In your opinion, how have policies, be they institutional/state/federal, regarding undocumented students assisted the types of assistance that your institution provides undocumented students?
    a) In your opinion, how have these same policies stalled the type of assistance?
11) Is there a time you were not able to help an undocumented student with a challenge? Can you provide details?
12) Are there any distinct considerations you make in your work with undocumented students?
13) Do you receive support from other individuals at your university in assisting undocumented students?
14) Do you think you would benefit from more support in assisting undocumented students?
    a) More training?
    b) If so, in what areas?
15) Are there any special policies you need to be aware of when working with undocumented students?
16) In what ways do you stay current on policies that are relevant to your work with undocumented students?
17) Can you tell me about any specific skills you think someone in your job needs in order to effectively assist undocumented students?

**Wrap up Interview**

18) Is there anything we didn't talk about today that you think I should know about if I am trying to understand your experience assisting undocumented students?
19) I might email you in the near future so that you can review the preliminary findings from our interview and give me any feedback you may have. This is voluntary on your part, but it will help to add credibility to the research study and would be greatly appreciated. I will reach out to you via email for that.
20) Snowball recruitment request:

I am still looking for more participants for this study. If you know anyone that might fit my participant criteria and might be interested in participating, I would appreciate it if you gave them my contact information so they can get in touch with me, or if you later think of their names, please email those to me and I will reach out to them. Thanks again and enjoy the rest of your day.

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