THE IMPACT OF CALIFORNIA DREAM ACT ON UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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by

Hong Thanh Dao

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

THE IMPACT OF CALIFORNIA DREAM ACT ON UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT EXPERIENCES

by

Hong Thanh Dao

Brief Literature Review

Undocumented students make up one of the most underserved minority groups in higher education. Some federal legislation hinders undocumented students from pursuing higher education due to their immigration status. However, many states are creating their own policies to make postsecondary education more accessible and affordable for undocumented students. The California DREAM Act has positively changed the lives of many undocumented students, as it provided financial resources to students in the pursuit of higher education. As more and more undocumented students attend college, it is imperative that educational leaders understand the challenges and barriers impacting students in higher education so they can properly meet the needs of this population.

Statement of the Problem

Although undocumented students qualified for state and institutional financial aid, due to the recent implementation of the California Dream Act, very little is known of their educational journey as they work toward their college degree. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540
undocumented college students after the implementation of the California DREAM Act as they work toward a college degree. This study will contribute to the awareness around this student population so their educational needs are better understood.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative method to further understand the participants’ educational journeys. The researcher conducted all face-to-face interviews at a location that was most comfortable and convenient for the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Four Latina AB 540 undocumented college students participated in this study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings from this study showed that all the participants continue to struggle with financial, academic, and legal challenges even after the implementation of the California DREAM Act. However, the California DREAM Act has significantly impacted all four participants and made pursuing higher education possible. Without the California DREAM Act, the majority of the participants would not attend college because they are unable to afford it. Thus, it is critical that higher education leaders develop specialized services and resources to meet the needs of undocumented students with regard to being successful in college.

_____________________________, Committee Chair
Virginia L. Dixon, Ed.D.

_____________________________
Date
DEDICATION

As the first person in my family to graduate with a Master’s degree, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family. Dream big because the sky's the limit.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This degree would not have been possible without the unconditional love, support, and words of encouragement from my family, friends, professors, and advisors. I am extremely grateful to have such an awesome support system.

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

The American dream paints the image of a white picket fence lifestyle in America. Many people in third world countries believe America is the land of opportunity and freedom. Immigrating to America gives them the opportunity to escape their poverty-stricken lifestyle and freedom from the extreme violence in their native country (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragón, 2010). Unforeseeable circumstances such as government corruption and drastic economic downfall force some people to immigrate to the United States without having legal documentation (Contreras, 2009; Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Many immigrants and their families chase after the American dream, as it symbolizes upward social and economic mobility.

Many immigrants believe the American Dream is achieved through the pursuit of higher education. Many aspire to become teachers, engineers, and doctors (Gonzales, 2007). A high school diploma no longer guarantees upward social and economic mobility. Obtaining a college degree creates more opportunities for an individual to enter the labor market and allows them to earn double the amount than a high school graduate (Frum, 2007). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2006 (as cited in Immigration Policy Center, 2007), a worker with a “bachelor’s degree earned $962 per week and had an unemployment rate of 2.3%,” whereas a worker “who lacked a high
school diploma earned only $419 per week and had an unemployment rate of 6.8%” (para. 6). Those who had a “doctorate degree earned $1,441 and had unemployment rate of 1.4%” (Immigration Policy Center, 2007, para. 6). In addition, a report by Public Policy Institute of California indicated that 41% of state jobs will require a college education by 2025 (as cited in Gonzales, 2009). The numbers demonstrate that a college degree opens the door to social and economic mobility. Unfortunately, higher education is not easily accessible for everyone, especially undocumented immigrants. Due to not possessing a legal status, the chances for undocumented high school graduates to pursue higher education is very low. Approximately 65,000 of undocumented children who live in the United States for at least five years graduate from high school each year. Only about 5-10% of undocumented high school graduates go on to college (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2007; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.).

The first piece of legislation that allowed undocumented immigrants to gain access to education in the United States was *Plyler v. Doe*. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled *Plyler v. Doe* with a 5-4 decision that all states must allow undocumented children to access public education K-12 regardless of immigration status (Frum, 2007). *Plyler v. Doe* was critical for providing undocumented children with equal protection under the 14th amendment of the U.S. constitution (Contreras, 2009). Although *Plyler v. Doe* allowed undocumented children access to K-12 public education, the law does not extend access to postsecondary education (Biswas, 2005). Thus, undocumented children
who wish to pursue higher education face numerous legal and financial challenges when applying to college.

Currently, there are many federal policies that prevent undocumented students from pursuing a postsecondary education. Some federal policies include Title IV Higher Education Act 1965, Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility (IIRIRA), and Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (Cisneros, 2013; Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Perez, 2014). These federal policies are presented further in Chapter 2. Meanwhile, there are numerous ongoing debates and policies surrounding the topic of providing resources and access to undocumented students to pursue higher education. There is no federal legislation that prevents undocumented immigrants from applying to and attending college, but each state has different laws and policies pertaining to admission, tuition fees, and financial aid. This is due to the absence of federal policy on providing access and resources for undocumented students to pursue postsecondary education (Gildersleeve et al., 2010, Gonzales, 2009). As a growing number of undocumented students graduate from high school each year, many states are creating their own policy to make postsecondary education more accessible and affordable for undocumented students (Biswas, 2005).

As a means to provide access to postsecondary education, the state of California allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates if they meet specific requirements through the enactment of Assembly Bill (AB) 540 that became effective in 2002 (Abrego, 2008; Enriquez, 2011). Those who qualify for in-state tuition through AB
540 no longer have to pay three to seven times more, as is the out-of-state tuition rate (Abrego, 2008). Although many undocumented students who reside in California qualify for in-state tuition through AB 540, relevant literature shows they are still experiencing financial barriers. The cost of in-state tuition is still considered unaffordable, as undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid to help finance their education. This literature is presented further in Chapter 2. To provide greater resolution to this issue, the State of California enacted the California Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act over a decade after the enactment of AB 540. The California DREAM Act provides state financial resources for undocumented students to pursue higher education after they graduate from high school in California. The California DREAM Act is made up of the Assembly Bill 130 (AB 130) and Assembly Bill 131 (AB 131). AB 130 and AB 131 were signed into law in 2011, but they did not become effective until January 1, 2012 and January 1, 2013, respectively. These two bills allowed eligible AB 540 undocumented students to apply for and receive private scholarships through the AB 130 and receive state and institutional financial aid through AB 131 (California Student Aid Commission, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Although undocumented students qualify for state and institutional financial aid, very little is known of their educational journey as they work toward their college degree. The recent implementation of the California Dream Act has not allowed researchers
enough time to collect relevant data. As more and more undocumented students graduate from high school each year in the United States, it is imperative that undocumented students have access to financial resources in order to succeed in college. The California DREAM Act has positively changed the lives of many undocumented students as it provides state financial resources for a postsecondary education. California—along with Minnesota, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington—currently allows undocumented students to receive state financial aid if they meet certain requirements. A qualitative study is needed to examine the experiences and challenges of undocumented students in California after the California DREAM Act was implemented.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540 undocumented college students after the implementation of the California DREAM Act as they work toward a college degree. This narrative research study will contribute to the growing body of literature and will provide additional information on one of the most underserved minority groups in higher education. By focusing on the experiences and challenges of AB 540 undocumented students, this study will increase awareness of this student population and help present their needs to ultimately help them succeed in college. The narrative of the AB 540 undocumented students in this study may also contribute to the movement for other state DREAM Acts and ultimately the federal DREAM Act.
Specifically this research study sought to address the following questions:

1. What impact has the California DREAM Act had on the educational experience of undocumented college students?
2. What challenges do undocumented students encounter while attending a 4-year university?

**Significance of the Study**

There is limited research on how the California DREAM Act (AB 130 and AB 131) has impacted undocumented students' experiences while pursuing a college degree. This is a new area of study, as AB 130 and AB 131 came into effect in 2012 and 2013. The knowledge obtained from this study will allow those working in the field of higher education to become more aware of this student population and develop solutions to ensure the success of the undocumented students. The research from this study will contribute to the professional practice of higher education leadership by developing strategies and implementing them within campus programs to increase retention rates and academic success for undocumented students. Undocumented students are as important as any other student population in higher education; they should not be overlooked, especially by leaders in higher education. With this information, educational leaders will be able to understand the challenges and barriers impacting undocumented students in higher education so they may properly meet the needs of these students and their educational goals.
Limitations of the Study

The researcher identified certain limitations that affected the study. First, the researcher was only able to interview and collect data from four Latina AB 540 undocumented college students at Purple Blossom University. This small sample does not represent the large and diverse AB 540 undocumented student population because all those who participated in the study were from a Latina background. The researcher was unable to interview and collect data from male AB 540 undocumented students and also those from other ethnic backgrounds. Another limitation is that even though the researcher had the Director of College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Dreamer Resource Center send an email invitation and post a flyer at both the CAMP and the Dreamer Resource Center to recruit participants, many undocumented students did not contact the researcher to participate in the study. This can be due to the stigma and vulnerability of the undocumented student population. However, the purpose of the study was to capture the experiences and challenges of AB 540 undocumented students and how the California Dream Act impacted their educational goals. While only four AB 540 undocumented students participated in the study, the in-depth interviews provided a valuable and comprehensive understanding of their experiences and challenges.
**Definition of Terms**

**AB 540**

Assembly Bill 540 is a California state law that allows non-resident students who meet certain requirements to pay in-state tuition fees at any UC, CSU, or California community college and allows them to apply for financial aid through the California DREAM Act (California Student Aid Commission, n.d.)

To qualify, a student must meet ALL of the following requirements:

1. Attended a California high school for three or more years;
2. Graduated from a California high school or received the equivalent, such as a GED;
3. Enrolled in an accredited and quality California public college or university;
4. Submitted an affidavit to the California public college or university that he or she will be attending, stating that he or she will file an application to legalize immigration status as soon as he or she becomes eligible.

**Financial Aid**

Grants, loans, scholarships, work study, and tuition waivers provided to students to help them meet college educational expenses (Federal Student Aid, 2015)

**Higher Education/Postsecondary Education**

Both terms are used interchangeably and refer to education beyond high school that is provided by a college or university (Higher education, 2015; Postsecondary, 2015).
Immigrant

A person who comes into a country to take up permanent residence (Immigrant, 2015)

Undocumented immigrants

Department of Homeland Security defines undocumented immigrants as immigrants who have entered the United States without legal documentation (Lad & Braganza, 2013).

Undocumented students

Defined as 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 (Oliverez, Chavez, Soriano, & Tierney, 2006; An Overview of Undocumented Students, 2014).

These students are currently attending school (K-12) or higher education.

Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 reviews related literature regarding the federal and state policies and how they impact undocumented immigrants’ ability to pursue higher education. It also provides an analysis of challenges and barriers that undocumented students face once they are enrolled in college. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, setting of study, population and sample, data collection,
instrumentation, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the analyzed data and findings collected from the study and discusses the common themes. Chapter 5 encompasses a summary of the study and findings along with conclusions drawn from the findings, recommendations, and implications for future research among the undocumented students.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction
The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540 undocumented college students after the implementation of the California DREAM Act as they pursued a college education. The literature review begins with demographics and background information on undocumented students. It is imperative to first learn about the federal policies and California’s educational policy in order to fully understand how these policies impact undocumented students’ ability to pursue a postsecondary education. Lastly, this chapter provides an analysis of some primary challenges and barriers faced by undocumented students once they are enrolled in college. These challenges and barriers relate to financial, legal, and social networks/relationship issues.

Theoretical Frameworks
The theoretical frameworks the researcher used for this study were Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Capital Theory. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) is defined as “the inequitable distribution of power and privilege as well as racism and racial disadvantages within organizations” (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 146). This theory highlights how undocumented students’ immigration status marginalizes them in
pursuing higher education. The Social Capital Theory is defined as “the value of one's network of connections which allow an individual to build relationships, maneuver through social systems or gain access to needed or desired resources” (Lad & Braganza, 2013, p. 4). This theory refers to social network/relationships in which an individual gets information and access to resources that would enable him or her to succeed in college. In this study, social relationships include family members, friends, teachers, faculty, staff, and or anyone who has helped students reach their educational goals.

**Background on Undocumented Immigrants**

The term “undocumented” refers to individuals who do not have the legal documentation to stay in the United States (Lad & Braganza, 2013). Since 1990, there has been a significant demographic shift in the immigration trends in the United States. In 2007, there were 38 million foreign born individuals compared to less than 20 million in 1990. Approximately 3.5 million individuals were undocumented in 1990, and 12.2 million in 2007, reaching the highest peak in the immigration trend (Anderson, 2015). The immigration trends have decreased since 2007 and have been steady with approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants during the past five years (Krogstad & Passel, 2015). In 2014, Krogstad and Passel (2015) reported with the Pew Research Center that there were 11.3 million undocumented immigrants of all ages living in the United States, representing 3.5% of the nation’s total population. Out of the 11.3 million
undocumented immigrants, 1.9 million are youth and 1.6 million are between the ages of 19 and 24 (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2014; Krogstad & Passel, 2015).

Most of the undocumented immigrants and families are from Mexico and represent 56% of the population. Central and South America are represented by 22%, Asians comprise 13%, 6% represent Europe and Canada, and Africa and other regions are represented by 3% of the undocumented population in the United States (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Perez Huber, Malagon, & Solorzano, 2009). A majority of the undocumented immigrants are Latino descendants (Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans), which account for 80% of the undocumented population (Abrego, 2006). In addition, 60% of the undocumented immigrants in the United States live in six states—California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois; however, the numbers of undocumented immigrants living in different states are changing. The populations of undocumented students in several East Coast states are increasing as the populations of undocumented students in several West Coast states are decreasing (Drachman, 2006; Krogstad & Passel, 2015).

Many undocumented children were brought into the United States at a young age by their parents and have lived in the United States most of their lives (W. Perez, 2010). English is their first language, and they attended and received their primary and secondary education in the United States (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2014; Gonzales, 2007). For most undocumented children, the United States is the only country they know. They consider the U.S. their home of origin (Cisneros, 2013; W. Perez,
They had little to no role in their parents’ decision to leave their parents’ native home to come to the U.S. Unfortunately, their legal status erects numerous social, financial, and legal barriers when they decide to apply to college (Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.b). Parents of undocumented children come to the United States in part because they are attracted to the social benefits such as health, education, and welfare (Frum, 2007). Most parents of undocumented children made tremendous sacrifices to provide a better life through economic and educational opportunities in the United States; however, their children’s ability to access and pursue postsecondary education is prohibited by many immigration and federal policies in the United States (Contreras, 2009; Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Durante, & Meiners, 2011).

**Undocumented Students in California**

California is home to 2.6 million undocumented individuals, representing a quarter of all the undocumented immigrant population in the US and 6.8% of the total California population (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2014; Gonzales, 2011; Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2012).

California offers four higher education systems: 112 community colleges, 23 California State Universities (CSU), 10 University of California (UC) campuses, and over 70 private colleges (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The majority of undocumented students who attend college enroll in community college due to the high cost of tuition and lack of financial resources at 4-year institutions. Approximately 18,000
undocumented students enrolled in California community colleges alone during 2005-2006 (Perez, 2014). In addition, 38,000 undocumented students attended California colleges from 2007 to 2010, representing only about 1-2% of the total population at all of the UCs, CSUs, and community colleges. There were 400 undocumented students at UCs, 3,600 undocumented students at CSUs, and 34,000 undocumented students at community colleges (Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.b). The numbers of undocumented students attending college in California has increased due to the implementation of the California DREAM Act.

Currently, there are no concrete numbers regarding how many undocumented students are attending college in California. Sanchez and So (2015) reported that there were over 380 undocumented students who attended the University of California, Berkeley at the end of the fall 2014 term. The fact that in fall 2014 there were over 380 undocumented students attending one UC, compared to the similar number of undocumented students attending all the UCs during 2007-2010, demonstrates that as federal and state legislatures implement new policies to provide access to undocumented students, more undocumented students are pursuing a postsecondary education.

Federal Policies

Many federal policies impact undocumented students’ ability to pursue a postsecondary education. These federal policies include: *Plyler v. Doe*, Title IV Higher Education Act 1965, Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
(IIRIRA), Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), and the Federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) Act (Perez, 2014).

**Plyler v. Doe**

*Plyler v. Doe* (as cited in Frum, 2007) was the first federal legislation that allowed undocumented immigrant children to gain public education access from K-12 in the United States. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled a 5-4 decision in *Plyler v. Doe* that the State of Texas cannot deny K-12 public education to undocumented children due to immigration status (Blume, 2011; Frum, 2007; Neinhusser, 2013). *Plyler v. Doe* was critical in providing equal protection for undocumented children under the 14th amendment of the U.S. constitution (Contreras, 2009). The court found that the State of Texas failed to provide any compelling reasons for limiting education access for any particular population. In this case, there was no significant financial burden imposed by immigrants to the state (Frum, 2007). Furthermore, denying free public education to undocumented students does not restrain them from further illegal immigration. In summary, the court ruling indicates that states cannot discriminate against any students or prevent them from enrolling in K-12 public education based on their immigration status.

Former Justice Brennan noted in the court’s decision that undocumented children should not be punished for their parents’ decision to come to the United States without proper documentation, as the undocumented children had no role in that decision (Neinhusser, 2013). The court ruling indicates that “denying K-12 education to
undocumented children amounted to creating a lifetime of hardship and a permanent underclass of individuals” (Gonzales, 2009, p. 11). It also indicates that providing education to all children, regardless of their immigration status, is extremely important for individuals to contribute to the US society (Perez, 2009). The Supreme Court’s decision makes it clear that undocumented students deserve access to education and social mobility. Although the *Plyler v. Doe* allows undocumented students to access K-12 education, this ruling does not address postsecondary education, which is essential in today’s society, as a college degree is the ticket to social and economic mobility.

**Title IV Higher Education Act 1965**

Although *Plyler v. Doe* provided public education access to all children, the first federal legislation that affected undocumented students to access and pursue postsecondary education is the Title IV Higher Education Act 1965. The Title IV Higher Education Act 1965 denied undocumented students access to federal and most state financial aid because it required students to have citizenship or permanent residency status to qualify (Blume, 2011; Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Perez, 2014). Due to undocumented students’ immigration status, they are ineligible to participate in government student financial aid programs such as grants (Pell Grants and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants), federal student loans (Stafford and Perkins loans), and work-study under the Title IV Higher Education Act of 1965 (Chin & Juhn, 2010; Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The Title IV Higher Education Act of 1965 restricts the undocumented students from receiving federal financial aid to help finance their
education (Cisneros, 2013). Without financial aid, it is very difficult for undocumented students to attend and stay enrolled in college due to the cost barriers.

**IIRIRA and PRWORA**

The Title IV Higher Education Act 1965 is not the only federal law preventing undocumented students access to a postsecondary education. There are two federal statutes—Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)—that incite controversial debates about undocumented students having access to college (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Both of these federal statutes were enacted during 1996 and have a significant impact on the undocumented students’ admission, tuition, and eligibility for financial aid.

Section 505 of the IIRIRA states:

An alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a state . . . for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such a benefit (in no less amount, duration, and scope) without regard to whether the citizen or national is such resident. (Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d., p. 81)

Section 1621 of the PRWORA states:

An alien . . . is not eligible for any State or local public benefit.

The term state or local public benefit means . . . any retirement, welfare, health, disability, public or assisted housing, education aid, or food assistance,
unemployment benefits, or any other similar benefit for which payments or
assistance are provided to an individual, household, or family . . . by an agency or
state or local government. (Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.,
p. 81)

The intention of the two statutes is to exclude undocumented students from
receiving state, federal, or local benefits for postsecondary education (Cisneros, 2013).
The IIRIRA prohibits states from allowing undocumented students to be eligible for any
postsecondary education benefits unless all citizens and legal residents of other states
would also be eligible for that benefit (Biswas, 2005; Perez, 2014). The PRWORA
prohibits undocumented students from receiving any federal public benefits that entail
monetary assistance such as federal financial aid programs like federal student loans and
federal work-study (Frum, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The vagueness of the two
statutes results in conflicting interpretations of the laws. However, the statutes do not
prohibit public colleges from admitting undocumented students or states from granting
undocumented students in-state tuition rates as long as out-of-state U.S. citizens and legal
residents are given the same opportunity (Frum, 2007; Undocumented Students and
Higher Education, n.d.). In addition, the statutes do not allow undocumented students to
receive federal financial aid (Frum, 2007). Because the statutes are unclear and vague,
each state understands the law differently and implements policies depending on their
interpretations of the law (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Thus, currently at least 18 states,
including California, have implemented policies to grant in-state tuition rates to
undocumented students based on their high school attendance and graduation from a state high school versus their residency. The in-state tuition enactment does not violate IIRIRA and PROWRA, as U.S. citizens and other legal residents would be entitled to this in-state tuition rate based on the criteria that each state set in place (Frum, 2007; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011).

Two cases that demonstrate the vagueness and controversial language found in both of the two federal statutory laws are Day v. Sebelius and Martinez v. Regents of the University of California (Frum, 2007; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.). In Day v. Sebelius, a group of out-of-state students from Kansas institutions and their parents, represented by the Federal for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), filed a lawsuit against the governor of Kansas and the president of the Kansas Board of Regents. The lawsuit claims the Kansas in-state tuition law, which permits undocumented students in-state tuition if undocumented students meet certain requirements, violates Section 505 of IIRIRA and the Equal Protection Clause. The plaintiffs argued that the Kansas in-state tuition law unlawfully discriminates against U.S. citizens who would be eligible for in-state tuition under the Kansas law. Unfortunately, the court dismissed the case, as the plaintiff failed to prove any injury or damages as a result of in-state tuition law. The court found that the Kansas in-state tuition law does not create a private right of action; it is the state’s right to address what they believe fit (Frum 2007; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.).
Similarly, in *Martinez v. Regents of the University of California*, a group of out-of-state U.S. citizens who were attending or had attended public institutions in California filed a lawsuit claiming that California’s law, which grants in-state tuition to undocumented students, violates both federal statutory laws (IIRIRA and PROWRA) and the state laws (Frum, 2007; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.). The plaintiffs sued for reimbursement for the nonresident tuition fees and other financial damages. They lost this case, as the California Supreme Court found several reasons ruling against the plaintiffs: “(1) California’s in state tuition statute did not violate the plaintiff’s rights; (2) PRWORA does not prohibit undocumented students from in-state tuition eligibility; and (3) in state tuition policies are not unconstitutional” (Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d., p. 89).

**The Federal DREAM Act**

To provide a pathway to legalization, Congress introduced the Federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) Act in August 2001, which has since been reintroduced several times but has yet to pass (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Durate, & Meiners, 2011; Frum, 2007). The latest version of the DREAM Act was introduced on May 11, 2011 by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-III), which would have provided a pathway to citizenship, in-state tuition regardless of status, and eligibility to receive federal loans and federal work-study, but not federal grants such as the Pell Grant or scholarships (Patler & Appelbaum, 2011; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.). The DREAM
The DREAM Act had two steps to help undocumented students legalize their immigration status. In the first part, an undocumented student would have been able to change their status to conditional residency for a period of six years if they met the following criteria:

1. Entered the United States before age 16
2. Had been continuously present in the United States for at least five years prior to the legislation’s enactment
3. Had obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent (i.e., a General Education Development diploma, or GED)
4. Had good moral character
5. Were younger than 35 years of age
6. Registered for selective service if male (Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.b; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.).

In the second part of the DREAM Act, undocumented students could remove their conditional status by applying for lawful permanent residency if they met the following criteria after the six-year period:

1. Acquired a degree from an institution of higher education
2. Completed at least two years in a program for a bachelor’s degree or higher or honorably served at least two years in the U.S. military
3. Had maintained good moral character while in conditional resident status
   (Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.b; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.).
As of today, this legislation did not pass. If this version of the DREAM Act passes, then it will repeal Section 505 of Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and receive other higher education benefits regardless of their immigration status. Many undocumented students will benefit from this DREAM Act, as it will remove numerous legal and economic barriers they have encountered thus far. Based on the article “Undocumented Students and Higher Education” (n.d.), approximately 2.1 million undocumented students would qualify for the conditional residency status with 825,000 achieving legal permanent residency if the DREAM Act gets implemented. Since the Federal DREAM Act is pending, each individual state is making its own decisions and policies on how to handle the issue of providing undocumented students access to a postsecondary education. Currently, 20 states offer in-state tuition to undocumented students if they meet specific requirements. Out of the 20 states, 16 offer in-state tuition policy through state legislative action and four states by the state university system. The 16 state legislatures includes California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Washington. The four state university systems include the University of Hawaii Board of Regents, University of Michigan Board of Regents, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and Rhode Island’s Board of Governors for Higher Education (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015). On the other hand, six
states—Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, and South Carolina—prohibit undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition benefits.

Californian’s Educational Policies

Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540)

Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) is the first stepping stone to making college more accessible and affordable for undocumented students in California. California’s AB 540 was signed into law on October 12, 2001 by Governor Gray Davis and was effective as of January 1, 2002. This law allows undocumented students to be exempt from paying out-of-state tuition at any California public college or university (Abrego, 2008; Perez Huber et al., 2009). To qualify for the AB 540’s out-of-state tuition exemption, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. Attended a California high school for three or more years
2. Graduated from a California high school or received the equivalent, such as a GED
3. Enrolled in an accredited and quality California public college or university
4. Submitted an affidavit to the California public college or university that he or she will be attending, stating he or she will file an application to legalize immigration status as soon as he or she becomes eligible (California Student Aid Commission, n.d.).
The enactment of AB 540 had a huge impact on undocumented students regarding attending college because it relieved a major financial burden on undocumented students and their families. They no longer had to pay three to seven times more for tuition than the documented students (Abrego, 2008). Prior to AB 540, many undocumented students did not apply to college because they could not afford the cost of nonresident tuition (Abrego, 2008). In 2001, it was reported that between 5,000 and 8,000 students in California were eligible for the nonresident tuition exemption under AB 540 (Perez Huber et al., 2009). Although resident tuition reduced the total financial cost, it provided no financial help to the undocumented students, as they were still unable to receive state or federal financial aid to finance their postsecondary education.

**California DREAM Act**

To further provide financial solutions and access to postsecondary education for undocumented students, the state of California enacted the California Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act over a decade after the enactment of AB 540. The California DREAM Act provides financial resources to undocumented students once they graduate from a California high school. The California DREAM Act consists of Assembly Bill 130 (AB 130) and Assembly Bill 131 (AB 131), which were first introduced on January 11, 2011 by Assemblyman Gil Cedillo (Patler & Appelbaum, 2011). AB 130 and AB 131 were signed into law in 2011, but it did not become effective until January 1, 2012 and January 1, 2013, respectively. For undocumented students to qualify and apply for the California DREAM Act, they must meet the criteria of AB 540
and cannot be eligible to file the Free Application Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The California DREAM Act Application is a FAFSA-like application, which is used to determine the financial need of students who are not citizens, legal permanent residents, or eligible non-citizens. AB 130 allows eligible AB 540 students to apply for and receive non-state-funded scholarships for public colleges and universities. These non-state funds can be scholarships funded through private donors, alumni contributions, and individual departmental efforts. AB 131 allows eligible AB 540 students to apply for and receive state-funded financial aid such as institutional grants and scholarships, community college waivers, the Cal Grant, and the Chafee Grant (California Student Aid Commission, 2015; Patler & Appelbaum, 2011). In 2014, it was estimated that 553,000 undocumented students would be eligible for the California Dream Act (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2014).

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**

Over a year after the California DREAM Act was signed into law, another legislation was implemented to provide additional access and resources to undocumented students. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive order by President Barack Obama, was enacted on June 15, 2012. DACA allows eligible undocumented immigrants to receive a renewable two-year work permit and a social security number while also being exempt from deportation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). However, DACA does not provide a pathway to citizenship or continuous deferment (Anderson, 2015; Perez, 2014). According to the Migration
Policy Institute (as cited in Perez, 2014), approximately 1.2 million undocumented immigrants from ages 15 to 30 were immediately eligible for DACA when the executive order became effective in August 2012. As of July 2014, it was reported that 587,366 undocumented immigrants had received a work permit and relief from deportation (Perez, 2014).

To qualify for DACA, an individual must meet the following criteria:

1. Passed a background check
2. Born on or after June 16, 1981
3. Arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday
4. Do not have lawful immigration status and be at least 15 years old
5. Continuously lived in the United States since June 15, 2007
6. Been present in the country on June 15, 2012, and on every day since August 15, 2012
7. Graduated high school or obtained a GED certificate. Otherwise, he or she must be an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or armed forces or currently attend school on the date he or she submits the application for deferred action.
8. Not been convicted of a felony offense
9. Not been convicted of a significant misdemeanor offense or three or more misdemeanor offenses
10. Not posed or does not pose a threat to national security or public safety.
The criteria listed above were the initial requirements to qualify for DACA. On November 20, 2014, President Obama expanded the program to allow more individuals to qualify for DACA. Some changes made to the program included allowing individuals born prior to June 15, 1981 to apply for DACA, the continuous residence requirement is now January 1, 2010 rather than June 15, 2007, and DACA will now last three years versus two years. With the updated criteria to the program, it is estimated that 300,000 more individuals are able to apply for DACA (Anderson, 2015; Perez, 2014).

The California DREAM Loan

Undocumented students are only eligible to receive state and university aid through the California DREAM Act. Thus, there is usually a financial gap in their aid package because undocumented students are not eligible to receive federal financial aid and most private loans. According to Koseff (2014), it was reported that there is an estimated of $5,000 to $6,000 financial gap for undocumented students attending UC and a $3,000 gap for undocumented students attending California State University. To help fill in the gap, Senate Bill No. 1210: California DREAM Act Loan Program was signed into legislation by Governor Jerry Brown in 2014 and came into effect in 2015 (Perez, 2014; Weise, 2014).

Driver's Licenses

Governor Jerry Brown signed California Assembly Bill 60 (AB 60) into law in 2013, which came into effect in 2015. This bill allows undocumented residents to apply for a California driver's license with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) if they
can provide proof of identity and California residency (California Department of Motor Vehicles [DMV], n.d.). According to the law, undocumented immigrants should not be discriminated against and their citizenship or immigration status should not be questioned because they hold an AB 60 Driver's License. Approximately 830,000 AB 60 applicants have applied for a driver license as of December 31, 2015. In addition, the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) has issued 605,000 driver licenses under the AB 60 since this bill was implemented (DMV, 2016). This bill has significantly impacted undocumented students, as a majority of them no longer have to rely on public transportation to get to and from school.

**Professions and Vocations**

The latest bill signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in 2014, which came into effect in 2016, is Senate Bill No. 1159: Professions and Vocations. This bill allows individual applicants to apply for a professional or occupational license under the California Department of Consumer Affairs by using either a social security number (SSN) or Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) regardless of immigration status (Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.a). Thus, undocumented students cannot be denied licensure based on their immigration status. There are about 40 licensing boards, which include medicine, accounting, law, and nursing. This new legislation allows undocumented students to continue to pursue their dreams of being a doctor or a lawyer or follow any other career options requiring licensing (Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.a).
Financial Challenges

Poverty

Many undocumented students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and many fall below the poverty line. Most undocumented immigrants come to the United States to find better paying jobs in hopes for upward socioeconomic mobility (Drachman, 2006). The majority of undocumented immigrants do labor intensive type work that consists of farm work, building, grounds-keeping, maintenance work, construction work, and food preparation and service work. Undocumented immigrants in the workforce represented approximately 5.2% to 5.4% of the labor force in 2008 (Gusmano, 2012; Passel & Cohn, 2009). It is estimated that 39% of undocumented students live below the federal poverty line (Blume, 2011; Frum 2007; Undocumented Students and Higher Education, n.d.). In 2003, the family income of undocumented immigrants was $27,400 which is about half of nonimmigrant families at $47,700. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of undocumented children under 18 lived in low-income households and earned below the 200% poverty line between the years of 2006 to 2008 (Patler & Appelbaum, 2011). Sanchez and So (2015) noted that the majority of undocumented students are first-generation college students and their family income is less than $25,000 per year. This is evident from qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires used to collect demographic data. For example, in a qualitative study, P. Perez (2010) found that all 14 participants were first-generation students and came from a low socioeconomic household.
The median household income of undocumented immigrants is much lower than that for non-immigrants. According to Gusmano (2012) and Passel and Cohn (2009), the median annual household income in 2007 was $36,000 for undocumented immigrants compared to $50,000 for U.S.-born residents. It was also noted that the median household income for undocumented immigrants did not change much at all even after living in the United States for years. Undocumented students rely heavily on financial aid to achieve a postsecondary education, as their parents need to use their income to pay for rent, food, and other basic necessities. Undocumented students want to obtain a college degree to provide themselves a better life than their parents had and avoid hard-labor jobs such as mowing lawns, cleaning houses/housekeeping, working in restaurants, and being dishwashers (Abrego, 2006; Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Gonzales, 2011). Living in poverty is one of the many hardships undocumented students face while pursuing higher education because there is minimal to no financial support from the family.

**Cost**

As the cost of higher education continues to soar, financial aid has become instrumental in determining whether a student pursues higher education or not. It is even more difficult for the undocumented students to pursue and finance their college education because (in some states) they are considered international students and are assessed tuition and fees three to seven times higher than students who are legal residents (Abrego, 2006). However, the state of California, along with 19 other states, has granted...
in-state tuition if students meet specific requirements set by that particular state. With the implementation of AB 540, undocumented students who qualify for in-state tuition rate no longer need to pay the out-of-state tuition rate. During the 2003-2004 academic year in California, the estimated average for the resident tuition fee was $540 versus $5,010 for non-residents (Biswas, 2005). According to the Trends in College Pricing 2014 (College Board, n.d.), the average tuition and fees in California during the 2014-2015 academic year at a public two-year institution is $1,429, whereas the average tuition and fee for in-state students at a public 4-year institution is approximately $9,139 and the average tuition and fee for out-of-state students at a public 4-year institution is approximately $25,000. These numbers indicate that in-state tuition significantly reduces the financial burden on the undocumented students and their families. The impact of AB 540 in-state tuition accommodation allows undocumented students to pursue higher education. Abrego (2008) stated, “Assembly Bill 540 granted more than just an exemption from out-of-state tuition—it gave undocumented students an opportunity to claim a legitimate space in institutions of higher education” (p. 728).

The cost of attendance at an institution plays a significant role in which one of the four higher education systems a student pursues. The community college system typically serves as the first point of entry into postsecondary education for the underserved and low-income population (Biswas, 2005). Abrego (2008) noted in her longitudinal study on the effects of AB 540 on undocumented students in California that higher education is now within reach for undocumented students who could not attend
college previously due to cost but who were academically eligible. Many participants affirmed that although AB 540 is instrumental, it has helped them enroll at least in the community college system. After the affirmation of AB 540, more undocumented students were able to attend college, specifically community college, as it is more affordable and accessible than 4-year institutions. Tuition rates at 4-year institutions have increased 40% over the last five years (Frum, 2007). This makes it difficult for undocumented students to attend a 4-year institution since many come from low-income households and the tuition would account for a huge portion of the family’s income (Frum, 2007). As a result, community college is the more realistic and primary option for most undocumented students.

Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) reported in their ethnographic longitudinal study that seven out of eight undocumented students attended a 2-year institution and only one student attended a 4-year institution. It was due to the high cost of tuition at 4-year institutions and not being eligible to receive financial aid to help finance their education. Because community college is more accessible to undocumented students, Diaz-Strong et al. (2011) found that undocumented students attended community colleges and then transferred to a 4-year institution. When their participants were asked how they chose their current institution, some common responses were “it wasn’t like I chose. It was more like I was forced. I actually wanted to go a university, but I couldn’t afford it” (p. 111). This illustrates how community college was not their primary choice but rather their only option to pursue higher education. This is also evident in a qualitative research
study conducted by Laura Enriquez (2011) in which she interviewed 54 undocumented Latina/o students in the greater Los Angeles area located in California. Six students attended community college, 24 students attended UCs, and 24 students attended CSUs. Enriquez reported that more than half the UC and CSU students had attended community college before transferring. Although most undocumented students attended community college before transferring, it was noted that the tuition cost was still a discerning factor when they chose an institution for transfer (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). The high cost of tuition at 4-year institutions prevents undocumented students from being able to afford 4-year institution tuition without access to federal financial aid assistance.

**Financial Aid and Private Scholarships**

Although the cost of tuition is one of the challenges undocumented students encounter while pursuing college, another big hurdle is obtaining financial aid. Approximately 66% of all undergraduates receive some type of financial aid such as grants, loans, and or work study. According to the Trends in College Pricing 2014 (College Board, n.d.), there was more than $134 billion in financial aid in 2006 and when tuition increased, financial aid was available to cover it. However, the 66% does not include undocumented students, as they are not eligible for financial aid based on their immigration status and due to policies that were set in place that prohibit undocumented students from accessing these financial resources (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales; 2007).
Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 prohibits undocumented students from receiving federal aid for postsecondary education. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation (PROWRA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) prohibit undocumented students from receiving state and local benefits for postsecondary education (Drachman, 2006). Only those who are citizens or permanent legal residents of the United States are eligible to receive federal financial aid. Thus, undocumented students are automatically ineligible for federal government financial aid programs such as federal student loans, work-study, or Pell Grants (Cisneros, 2013; Educators for Fair Consideration, n.d.b; Frum, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2009;). The lack of access to financial aid inhibits the majority of undocumented students from pursuing postsecondary education and obtaining a college degree (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

Existing literature shows that financial aid barriers prohibit many undocumented students from pursuing higher education. In a study by Gonzales (2011), one participant applied for school in the California State University system and was accepted. However, he decided not to go to college after finding out he was ineligible for financial aid. One of the primary challenges Garcia and Tierney (2011) focused on in a yearlong qualitative study involving 40 undocumented students and five financial educators was financial obstacles. Garcia and Tierney (2011) found that money was the most important factor in attending college. The constant issue that participants had was paying for college without
having access to federal and state financial aid. One of the community college counselors stated:

Unfortunately, some of them just dropped out because they can’t do it all. They still have to pay out of pocket . . . books, fees, and living expenses. They can’t get any financial aid. We are lucky if we can provide them with a couple of hundred dollars a year in scholarships. They do a good job at fundraising but there are just too many mouths to feed [and] not enough money to go around. (p. 2766)

Another participant from the same study had to drop out of a CSU, a 4-year institution, after finishing his first term because he could not afford it. This student earned a 4.0 that term and was very upset by not being able to continue the following term at that institution. Rather, he enrolled in a local community college and obtained a certificate in carpentry because he could find a better paying job in construction. Diaz-Strong et al. (2011) reported the University of California’s All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity conducted a study that found underrepresented minorities, single mothers, and undocumented students do not complete secondary school or they lack postsecondary educational opportunities because of a lack of resources. This study demonstrates that financial resources impact the retention of undocumented students. For undocumented students to persist toward their degree, financial aid is crucial. The lack of access to financial aid is the main challenge that limits the majority of undocumented students from pursuing or continuing their postsecondary education.
Not only does the immigration status of undocumented students prohibit them from getting state and federal financial aid, but it also prevents them from receiving many scholarships. Most scholarships “piggyback” on the eligibility requirements of federal financial aid for receiving the scholarship, such as Social Security Number, legal citizenship, or legal residency (Cisneros, 2013; Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Hence, undocumented students are disqualified from receiving scholarship funds. According to Contreras (2009), most scholarship organizations require undocumented students provide proof of legal status for eligibility. This requirement is evident in a research study conducted by Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) in which three participants were offered scholarships; however, the participants were denied the scholarships or the participants did not follow through to acquire the scholarships because of their immigration status. Undocumented students need to find private scholarships that do not require them to have a Social Security Number or provide proof of legal status (Cisneros, 2013).

Currently, five states in the U.S. offer state and institutional financial aid for undocumented students. The state of California—along with Minnesota, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington—offers undocumented students state and institutional financial aid. In California, the California DREAM Act has allowed eligible AB 540 students to receive state and institutional financial aid to help with the cost of their education if they submit the California DREAM Act application. AB 540 students can qualify for several financial aid programs if they meet the criteria of financial programs such as Cal Grants,
University Grants, CSU Grant, Board of Governors (BOG) Fee Waiver, Chafee Foster Youth Grant, Private Scholarship, Institutional Scholarships, and Private Loans (California Student Aid Commission, 2015).

The Cal Grant is one financial aid program that is crucial to undocumented students because it is an award that can be used to cover system-wide tuition and fees at public and private colleges. The amount of Cal Grant varies by the type of higher education system. During the 2014-2015 academic year, the Cal Grant could cover up to $5,472 at a California State University, up to $12,240 at a University of California campus, and up to $9,084 at independent colleges, respectively (California Student Aid Commission, n.d.). The amount of university grants and institutional scholarships varies by school. The implementation of the California DREAM Act has tremendously helped undocumented students by providing financial support to continue their education. However, it is unknown how much financial aid they are receiving, if financial aid is enough to cover their educational expenses, and if they are still struggling financially.

Although undocumented students can qualify for state and financial aid under the California DREAM Act, they are still not eligible for federal loans and work study as are documented students. Thus, undocumented students still have financial aid gaps if they are not eligible to access federal loans or work study (Murphy, 2014). The office of State Senator Ricardo Lara (Weise, 2014) stated in the article “California Creates Student Loans for Undocumented Students” that undocumented students have an estimated financial aid gap of $5,000 to $6,000 each year at the University of California level and
$3,000 each year at the California State University level. In addition, they are ineligible for federal grants such as the Pell Grant, which is a major source of funding for low-income students (Biswas, 2005). Again, many undocumented students fall into the low-income category and would benefit greatly from federal grants like the Pell Grant. Due to Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, undocumented students cannot receive this benefit even though the Pell Grant has been shown to have a direct impact on the ability of a student to afford college (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The average Pell Grant for the 2012-2013 academic year was $3,650 with 28% of the recipients receiving the maximum Pell Grant of $5,536. In addition, it was reported that the maximum Pell Grant alone during the 2013-2014 academic year covered 63% of the average tuition and fees at a public 4-year institution (Perez, 2014). This demonstrates that Pell Grant is one of the major financial aid programs that helps millions of students pay for their college education.

To help fill in the financial aid gap that is not being closed by federal grants, federal loans, and federal work-study to undocumented students, the state of California created the California DREAM Loan Program, signed into legislation by Governor Jerry Brown on September 28, 2014 (Perez, 2014; Weise, 2014). The purpose of the California DREAM Loan Program is to help undocumented students access more financial aid to close the gap in their financial aid package. The California DREAM Loan Program allows undocumented students who attend a campus in either the University of California or the California State University system to borrow up to $4,000 per year for a lifetime
maximum of $20,000. This loan program is self-funded according to the Senate Bill No. 1210, and, as a result, many institutions will not offer it due to lack of funding (California Legislative Information, n.d.).

As of January 2016, the loan program finally came into effect due to funding. UC President Janet Napolitano announced that $5 million in loans will be distributed across all nine UC campuses to undocumented students who qualify. With this $5 million loan amount, more than 3,000 undocumented students attending UCs will receive additional financial assistance through the California DREAM Loan Program (Hill, 2016). The California DREAM Act mirrors the federal Direct Subsidized Loans by having the same interest rate and a standard 10-year repayment allotment that does not accrue interest while a student is enrolled at least half time at the institution (Perez, 2014; Weise, 2014). The interest rate for the California DREAM Loan Program for the 2015-2016 academic year is 4.29%, which is the same interest rate as that of the federal subsidized loan, and students are required to start paying the loan back six months after graduation (Hill, 2016). Currently, there is no information about funding at the CSU levels.

Institutions play a critical role in retaining students, including undocumented students. The University of California, Berkeley is one institution that has implemented financial resources for undocumented students. According to Sanchez and So (2015), UC Berkeley has created an institutional work-study program for eligible undocumented students called Director’s Work Study. This new financial resource has allowed hundreds of undocumented students to support themselves by finding a work-study
position on campus, whereas many undocumented students were previously unable to do so. Getting a work-study position on campus or near campus benefits many undocumented students, as on-campus employers are more flexible with work hours because they know the student is also going to school. UC Berkeley has also implemented the Berkeley Loan. The Berkeley Loan mirrors the federal subsidized loan with a fixed interest rate of 5% and 10-year standard repayment period (University of California, Berkeley, n.d.). Other institutions should adopt UC Berkeley as a model school to help undocumented students get additional resources and fill in the financial gap not covered by federal, state, and institutional grants/scholarships (University of California, Berkeley, n.d.).

Working

Existing literature shows that many undocumented students, without financial aid and a minimal opportunity for private scholarships, have to work to finance their postsecondary education and pay for tuition, books, housing, and other college-related expenses. However, undocumented students do not have many employment opportunities because most jobs require a social security number. Thus, most jobs undocumented students work pay under the table or do not pay well (Cisneros, 2013). Garcia and Tierney (2011) found that many participants held jobs in local communities, which was not an easy task. These participants had to find employers who would hire them and also find a job near the school they attended. One participant stated, “I can’t work on campus. I work for a Korean woman who pays cash . . . I work where the
tourists go . . . No one notices my accent” (Garcia & Tierney, 2011, p. 2767). Due to not having a legal status, many students are unable to find campus jobs or get paid internships funded through state monies (Perez Huber et al., 2009). This demonstrates that undocumented students are required to find employment that pays under the table and get paid in cash since they are unable to find jobs where they can be on the payroll.

Work is one of the main options for financing college for many undocumented students (Contreras, 2009). In a qualitative case study on the experiences and challenges of undocumented Latino students in higher education in Washington State, Contreras conducted 20 in-depth interviews with undocumented students in fall 2008 and in January 2009 and collected background characteristics including occupation, income earned in 2008, and number of hours worked. Contreras (2009) found that more than half the participants worked at least 20 hours per week while going to school full-time. Jobs ranged from being a nanny, to cleaning offices and restaurants, being a custodian or waitress, and collecting debts. Five participants did not work because they were receiving scholarships from Gates or Costco to help them with their educational expenses. Seven out of 20 participants had income earned of less than $10,000 in 2008 working 20 to 45 hours per week. With an income of $10,000 or less, this demonstrates that undocumented students work numerous hours to earn little money to help finance their education expenses. One participant worked between 40 and 45 hours per week “which made it difficult for the participant to engage with professors and peers on campus” (Contreras, 2009, p. 620).
Not only does working make it difficult for undocumented students to engage with professor and peers on campus, but working while going to school has other implications that impact the undocumented students’ academics and their ability to continue future enrollment. In a study conducted by Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007), five out of eight participants worked either part-time or full-time while attending college. Three of the participants reported they worked to pay for college but were stressed and concerned about their academics and grades because they did not have time to do homework and study. This is all due to the fact that undocumented students have to work to pay for their college expenses. The long hours and labor-intensive jobs leave many undocumented students tired, having no time to finish homework, and little energy to study after working. One of the participants stated, “Right now I have to work a full time job and I don’t have a lot of time for school, to tell you the truth I’m struggling to keep up my GPA. But I see money coming for my college, that’s my reward . . . I’m still sad because I cannot read chapters that the teachers set” (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007, p. 9). In addition, Perez Huber et al. (2009) indicated that one of the students paid her first quarter at a UC with the money she saved from work. However, the student was uncertain if she would be able to pay for school the following quarters because of money. Thus, many undocumented students take one or two terms off to work in order to save money to pay for future enrollment (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). By taking time away from school, many undocumented students prolong their time to degree (P. Perez, 2010). Gonzales (2009) noted that one student expected to complete her degree in eight years,
which is double the time a typical student will take. The reason is because she frequently took time off from school in order to work to pay for school. Due to a lack of financial resources, undocumented students have low retention rates. In addition, undocumented students' inability to legally work prevents them from gaining work experience in their desired field of study, as most of the jobs they hold are not necessarily related to their major. This barrier significantly impacts their ability to network in the profession they wish to pursue.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has helped many undocumented students finance their college education by providing the means for employment. Perez (2014) found, through a survey, that 70% of the respondents reported getting their first job or starting a new job as a result of DACA. The survey also reported that 45% of the respondents received an increase in job earnings. Although DACA allows undocumented students to legally work, it is important to note that because DACA is an executive order and not an immigration reform, DACA can be repealed by the next President as of November 2016. Wang (2016) stated in the article “As 2016 Elections Loom, So Does a Possible End to DACA” that Republican presidential candidates such as Donald Trump propose to eliminate DACA if he is elected as President. Undocumented students will face a huge financial barrier if the next President vetoes the current executive order. The cancellation of DACA would result in undocumented students not being able to legally work in the United States. In addition, undocumented students would be at a higher risk for deportation.
Legal Challenges

Legal Status Realization

Undocumented students’ immigration status has impeded the opportunity to pursue higher education but it also impacts their day-to-day lives. Undocumented students find out they are undocumented in many different ways, such as when they are applying for college and financial aid, applying for a job, or applying for a driver’s license (Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Gonzales, 2011). Gonzales (2011) conducted a research study to compare the experiences of college-going youth adults, known as college-goers, versus those who left the education system after high school graduation or were high school dropouts, known as early exiters. Gonzales found that over 68% of the early exiters found they were undocumented when applying for jobs and driver’s licenses whereas almost 60% of the college-goers discovered during the college application process. About 30% of the early exiters knew their status during childhood, whereas only 9% of the college-goers knew of their status during childhood. Some participants knew their status as a child because their older siblings found out their legal status. Even for those who found out at childhood, the participants were not aware of the impact of their status until later in life. When undocumented students find out their status, they lose hope and motivation toward pursuing higher education because they are unable to finance their education without financial aid. This was evident when one of the participants was accepted into one of the California State University campuses and decided not to go after
finding out he was not eligible for financial aid. His legal status brought “down his spirit” (Gonzales, 2011, p. 611).

**Everyday Life**

The immigration status of undocumented students limits their ability to apply for financial aid, to attend more expensive colleges, and to choose the institution they would prefer to attend (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). However, their immigration status does not only impact their ability to go to college, it impacts their everyday lives, such as their ability to legally work, vote, and drive (Blume, 2011; Gonzales, 2009). Undocumented students are unable to obtain a driver’s license and, therefore, drive without a license because they do not have legal forms of documentation. Their legal status poses another challenge while pursuing their postsecondary education because they heavily depend on public transportation to get to and from work, school, and home. Gonzales (2009) indicated that one student spent up to six hours on the bus commuting from home to school. She indicated that she did not have any other option. Garcia and Tierney (2011) also noted a participant commuting on the bus and train for three hours. The participant reported she was unable to go to office hours because she had to catch the bus home. Long hours of commuting to and from school and to and from work each day are exhausting and prevent students from using services and resources on campus during the work hours, which could help them further academically. With the implementation of AB 60, undocumented students can apply for a California driver's license if they meet the eligibility requirements. Having a driver's license may be beneficial to undocumented
students, as they may not need to rely on public transportation to get to and from school. They do not need to spend hours on the bus and can use that time to do homework, study, work, or other extra-curricular activities.

**Travel**

One big challenge that undocumented students face due to their legal status is traveling. Many undocumented students are unable to travel abroad, visit relatives back in their country of origin, or attend family events such as weddings and funerals in their country of origin. They are afraid they will be unable to return to the United States if they left the country due to lack of proper documentation (International Human Rights Law Clinic, 2015). This is evident in a qualitative study noted in the article “DREAMers at Cal: The Impact of Immigration Status on Undocumented Students at the University of California at Berkeley” (International Human Rights Law Clinic, 2015), as some students reported fear of traveling by plane due to their status. One participant in this study indicated that her mother and father were deported back to Mexico and that she had not seen her parents in over five years. Due to her legal status, she is unable to travel to Mexico to visit her parents. The inability for undocumented students to travel to their home of origin makes them feel depressed and sad (International Human Rights Law Clinic, 2015).

Although undocumented students are unable to travel back to their country of origin to visit family and attend family events, the DACA program allows eligible undocumented students to travel abroad for educational, humanitarian, or employment
purposes. Undocumented students can travel abroad and return to the United States if they are granted advanced parole, using educational purposes, humanitarian purposes, or employment purposes as the reason for travel. If undocumented students do not obtain advanced parole before they leave the country, then US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will abandon their application and they may not be permitted to return to the United States” (Oliverez et al., 2006). Eligible undocumented students who wish to travel abroad are highly recommended to seek counseling with an immigration expert to go over potential risks of traveling abroad. One of the biggest risks of which undocumented students should be aware is the fact that advanced parole does not guarantee reentry into the United States. In addition, the inspecting immigration official makes the final determination to allow undocumented immigrants back into the country (Taurel, 2013). The process is still risky even though undocumented students are given the opportunity to travel abroad through DACA. This makes undocumented students feel nervous because if they leave the country, they may not be able to come back to the United States and will possibly be separated from their family.

**Sense of Belonging**

Literature shows that legal status poses many psychological and emotional stressors on undocumented students. In a study conducted by Perez Huber et al. (2009), undocumented students reported feelings of fear, criminality, and invisibility. They did not feel a sense of belonging at the institution and could not reveal their true identities. This is evident by one of the participants when explaining that she felt like a “criminal”
because she was unable to engage and participate in daily activities that documented students were able to do.

I can’t travel . . . I can’t drive, I can’t vote, I can’t be involved in many social activities because of it [her undocumented status]. I can’t apply for scholarships, I can’t apply for financial aid, I can’t apply for loans, I can’t buy a home, I can’t do anything . . . I’m just, like I’m non-existent in a way, you know what I mean.

(Perez Huber et al., 2009, p. 7)

Discrimination and social pressure against undocumented students caused them not to disclose their status because they were afraid of getting deported back to their native country (Blume, 2011). Many undocumented students kept their immigration status a secret because they did not trust anyone. They fear getting deported and face other legal consequences because they do not have the legal rights to be in United States (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2005; Drachman, 2006; W. Perez, 2010).

Living in Fear

In a study conducted by Contreras (2009), one of the key themes of undocumented students and their families was living in constant fear. Many participants reported feeling pressured and experiencing fear and mistrust. Therefore, they do not reveal their legal status to their peers and school officials. It was noted, “many of the participants continued to live in the shadow of their peers, fearful of revealing their undocumented status or of others discovering it” (p. 619). One participant’s father
discouraged her from working to help finance her clothing and school supplies because she would expose her status. Both undocumented students and parents are afraid of getting separated. Because the participants are vulnerable due to their legal status, many of them are cautious on how they interact with others and how they navigate through college. As a result, many undocumented students isolated themselves from school to protect themselves from having to disclose their status. Because of this, it is very unlikely they will make new friends, mentor, or learn about opportunities on campus.

**Effects of AB 540 and DACA**

Prior to AB 540 and the California DREAM Act, many undocumented students felt inferior, angry, guilty, shameful, embarrassed, and depressed due to their legal status (Contreras, 2009; Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Hernandez et al., 2010). Undocumented students not only struggle with these feelings as young children, but also when they decide to take the risk and pursue higher education because there has yet to be a path to citizenship or reform. Abrego (2008) claimed the implementation of AB 540 had a “transformative effect” on the daily lives of the undocumented students because the AB 540 label served as a disguise. There has always been and still remains a stigma on undocumented students because of their legal status. Many undocumented students do not like being called “illegal” because it had a negative connotation to that word. They preferred to be called an “AB 540 student” because the term “illegal” conflicts with their perception of themselves and to those of society. Many undocumented students noted that AB 540 gave them “greater legitimacy and belonging in society” (Abregao, 2008, p.
AB 540 has helped many undocumented students with their identity and also gave them the confidence to disclose their citizenship because the law provided a welcoming atmosphere in which to do so (Abrego, 2008). Undocumented students feel more empowered and vocal due to AB 540. AB 540 allows many undocumented students to pursue higher education, as they are able to pay in-state tuition rather than the higher out-of-state tuition.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has helped many undocumented students work legally, but it also relieves the fear of deportation. According to the National Immigration Law Center (2013), at least 45 states allow DACA recipients to get a driver’s license if they obtain an employment authorization document (EAD) and a social security number. Owning a driver’s license makes undocumented students’ lives much easier, especially if they no longer have to rely on public transportation to get to school and spend hours on the bus and or train (National Immigration Law Center, 2013).

**Social Network/Relationship**

Pursuing higher education has always been difficult for undocumented students. Due to work and self-isolation, undocumented student engagement and involvement as well as networking and building relationships with peers, professors, staff, and counselors is minimal. It is difficult for undocumented students to engage with professors and peers on campus when working full-time because professors’ office hours and the school office are often closed by the time they are done with work (Contreras, 2009). Also, many
undocumented students isolate themselves from peers and school officials, as they are worried of others discovering their immigration status. For undocumented students, having support whether it is family support, academic support, or financial support is an important factor in higher education. Literature has shown that undocumented students benefited from having supportive relationships with family and friends, as well as from having school engagement (Perez, 2010).

**Family Support and Relationship**

Studies show that family members play an important role in a student’s academic achievement. One of the biggest challenges parents of undocumented students face is the language barrier. Many parents are unable to help their children with the process of transitioning or navigating the college process and application due to lack of language skills and lack of knowledge of the educational system in the United States (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). In addition, many parents do not have the tools or resources to help their children (Perez, 2010). However, parents of undocumented students continue to encourage and provide emotional support to their children to pursue higher education. They stress the importance of education because with a college degree, it can provide them with a better opportunity (Abrego, 2006). With parents’ emotional support of sympathy, encouragement, and motivation, it has helped undocumented students persist toward their college degree because of families’ educational expectations (Enriquez, 2011). An example of such encouragement and motivation is from a participant in a study conducted by Abrego (2008):
My parents always told me, 'if you do well in school, somehow the government is going to know that you’re a good student and a good person and they’re going to grant you residency.' So I always strived for that. Because I thought, if I do well, someday I’ll have the opportunity to become a resident. (p. 772)

In addition, older siblings and immediate family members play an important role for undocumented students, as they can provide emotional and academic support. Older siblings and other family members can serve as mentors to help guide undocumented students through the college process and paperwork since they have gone through the higher education process before (Abrego, 2006; P. Perez, 2010). Family members can offer guidance and suggestions to undocumented students. For example, family members can provide academic advice by taking certain classes or providing resources and support so undocumented students can utilize these to help them academically succeed. This can relieve the stress for undocumented students, as they can focus more of their energy on getting good grades in school.

**School Personnel Support and Relationship**

Counselors and other school professionals can serve as mentors as well as advocates for undocumented students (W. Perez, 2010). Having social support networks with school officials can serve as a “safety zone” in which undocumented students may open up and share issues and challenges without being concerned of getting exposed (Perez Huber et al., 2009). W. Perez (2010) suggested school officials create a task force to help brainstorm ideas to support undocumented students, such as fundraising or
establishing a faculty mentoring program. A mentor can help students navigate higher education, provide support to reduce stress, and provide financial assistance. This is evident in a study conducted by Contreras (2009) in which an undocumented student told a counselor he could not apply for the FAFSA to get financial aid. Thus, the counselor helped the undocumented student find private scholarships. Building relationships and a network can help undocumented students by providing the tools and resources to academically succeed. School officials and staff members can provide undocumented students with information on scholarships, access to community resources, and potential job opportunities. Thus, the relationship that undocumented students build with peers, counselors, faculty, and staff can help them be successful. Undocumented students must trust that school personnel are there to help them, not hurt them.

Although school personnel may strive to help undocumented students, they need to be up-to-date with policy and legislation and provide correct and accurate information to undocumented students. Many participants in Perez Huber et al.’s study (2009) indicated that faculty, staff, and administrators lack the knowledge about AB 540 legislation, resulting school personnel not being able to provide eligible AB 540 students with any type of support. One way to ensure that information is provided accurately is by appointing a staff member in the financial aid and admissions office to work directly with undocumented students and parents. Another effective way is to cross-train school personnel and increase communication across other departments and programs so staff
and faculty can be aware of the knowledge about undocumented students in order to support them (P. Perez, 2010).

Institutions can also develop workshops to educate school personnel about undocumented students and the educational challenges they face as they plan to pursue higher education. The workshop can focus current and pending legislation at both the state and federal levels and provide best practices on how to serve undocumented students (W. Perez, 2010). In addition, both the financial aid office and admissions office along with high school staff need to provide undocumented students multiple options to access all the higher education systems. The information given to undocumented students should not be limited to that of community college just because the cost at community college is less than that at a 4-year institution. Also, high school counselors should not discourage undocumented students from applying to 4-year institutions due to cost (P. Perez, 2010). By providing additional training and having specific point persons to work closely with undocumented students, schools would enhance the educational pursuits of this population, as essential information would be given out accurately.

**Peers**

Peers of undocumented students are a key source for informational resources. Undocumented students share with other undocumented students information about legislation and/or resources. Enriquez (2011) reported that many of the participants learned of AB 540 legislation, scholarships he or she was eligible for, and support networks on campus from other undocumented peers they knew and even undocumented
peers they never knew before. In another study, Contreras (2009) stated that undocumented students relied heavily on peer networks to acquire information about classes, job opportunities, and community activities. Building a peer network provides valuable and crucial information to undocumented students, as they are able to access and share information and resources with one another. Not only that, but undocumented students build friendships and relationships on campus that boost their comfort levels to seek information and advice. Hernandez et al. (2010) reported that undocumented students serve as “institutional agents within their communities, share their experiences, both positive and negative, with other undocumented persons seeking a college education” (p. 82). Undocumented students are eager about giving back to their communities and helping each other. They are aware of the struggles of pursuing higher education and also feel indebted for the chance at pursuing higher education.

**Taking Initiative**

It is critical that undocumented students take initiative to find contacts, information, and resources to help them achieve their educational goals because the resources are unlikely to come directly to them. Undocumented students need to seek out information to create opportunities for themselves (P. Perez, 2010). For example, undocumented students should not use “their situation” as an excuse to hinder their postsecondary plans and to apply for any and all scholarships for which they are eligible (P. Perez, 2010). Thus, it is important for undocumented students to inquire of peers, staff, and faculty about resources and opportunities. Participants in P. Perez’s study
(2010) recommended that financial assistance information should be made available during junior high school or ninth grade so undocumented students are aware of the financial resources available to them early on. High schools and postsecondary institutions need to communicate better regarding financial aid options for undocumented students. This communication can encourage undocumented students to start applying for scholarships in advance.

**Documented Latino Students**

Every student faces challenges while pursuing higher education. This section contrasts undocumented students’ higher education experiences with those of documented students to demonstrate the plight of undocumented students. Since the majority of undocumented students are of Latino/a descent, it is imperative to look at similarities and or differences in the experiences of documented of Latino students in pursuit of higher education. Research has shown that documented Latino students have encountered many challenges to be successful in college. These challenges include financial support, family support, and social support.

Research studies show that many Latino families come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This is evident in a research study conducted by Zarate and Fabienke (2007) who interviewed 1,210 Latino youth (18-24 years) and 1,219 Latino parents (over 18 years). Both groups reported that the median household family income was between $25,000 and $35,000. Due to their family’s low income, Latino students rely heavily on
financial aid to afford higher education. Studies have shown that financial aid has a positive influence on Latino student success and is a key factor to their persistence in higher education. This is evident in a study that reported Latino community college students were less likely to transfer to a 4-year university due to lack of financial resources and work instead (Crisp & Nora, 2009). The grants for which students are eligible are not enough to cover their educational cost. Thus, some students rely heavily on educational loans to finance their higher education (Crisp & Nora, 2009; Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). While some students took out loans, others sought employment to cover the remaining educational cost that is not met by financial aid. The number of work hours students had to work to meet their educational expenses took time away from students’ studying and achieving their educational goals (Crisp & Nora, 2009). The financial challenges documented Latino students face are similar to those faced by undocumented students, as the majority of undocumented students must work since they do not receive enough financial aid to cover their educational costs. Undocumented students encounter a greater hardship since they are not eligible to take out student loans, whereas documented students are qualified for those loans. Therefore, undocumented students are forced to work in order to afford the pursuit of their educational goals. If documented students struggle to finance higher education with a full financial aid package, imagine the difficulty undocumented students experience with limited financial aid.
It has been found that Latino parents have high expectations for their child or children to attend college. Zarate and Pachon (2006) indicated one of the findings in the College Knowledge reported that 96% of Latino parents want their children to pursue higher education. However, Latino parents do not know how the higher education system works. As a result, they do not know how to support and prepare their children for college (Zarate & Pachon, 2006). One of the reasons Latino parents are unable to help their children navigate the higher education system is a language barrier. Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) reported that a language barrier is one of the biggest challenges for the majority of documented Latino parents, as they do not understand or speak English well. In addition, all communication channels and sources are in English. As a result, Latino students would have to translate information for their parents, whether it is material information in the mail or in-person interaction with teachers and counselors. Similarly, undocumented Latino students encounter language barrier challenges. Although documented Latino parents are unable to help their children navigate the higher education system, Latino parents are able to provide family support to their children while they are in college. In a longitudinal survey conducted by Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996), 28% of Latino participants had family support to help them with the transition from high school to college. Participants in the study indicated, “My mother, father, and brother [provided the most support]. They stood behind me in all that I did and helped when they could,” “My family [provided the most support]. My grades were there, but my family knew I was homesick and did everything they could to assure me
that it was a worthwhile sacrifice” (p. 150). The words of encouragement and motivation from family members alleviate one of the many stresses Latino documented students have, which can help them be successful in college. Undocumented Latino students may or may not always receive words of encouragement to pursue higher education, as some parents may prefer the undocumented students work to contribute financially to their families.

Not only are family members a good support system for Latino documented students to achieve academic success and their educational goals, but so are individuals such as faculty and peers. Anaya and Cole (2001) examined the student-faculty interactions on the academic achievement of 836 Latino/a college students. This study demonstrates that there is a positive correlation with the participants’ academic performance and interaction with faculty as grouped into three categories: general, academically related, and primary-personal contact. It is estimated that 98% of the participants had spoken with a professor, and approximately 56% asked faculty about general course information. Participants’ grades showed that approximately 68% of the participants had grades of B or higher and less than 6% had grades of C or lower. However, approximately 12% of the participants reported their relationship with faculty as remote and unsympathetic. A large percentage of the participants did not discuss academic and personal concerns to faculty. This is due to the fact that a majority of college professors are White; thus, “the student-faculty interactions of Latino/a students are most likely to be interracial interactions” (p. 6). Establishing and maintaining
relationships with faculty is crucial to students’ academic success, as faculty can provide academic assistance and motivation for students to do well in their classes. However, undocumented Latino students may not necessarily feel as connected to faculty as documented students. Undocumented students may fear that faculty do not fully comprehend their situation and, as a result, distance themselves from developing student-faculty relationships.

In a research study conducted by Hurtado et al. (1996), Latino participants reported that during their first year in college they received the most support from college peers, administration and faculty from college, and high school friends, teachers, and counselors. However, 22% of the participants had a difficult time establishing and maintaining social relationships with college peers and other individuals. This is due to being homesick and of not feeling a sense of acceptance amongst peers and school personnel on campus. It is critical to note that building social relationships with others can help Latino students gain more college knowledge and resources to accomplish their educational goals. In addition, they can provide academic and social support for one another. One participant in the research study from Hurtado et al. (1996) stated, “the upper class Latino students took [him] under their wing academically and socially,” and another participant stated, “[the most support came from] fellow students and knowing that other students had the same troubles and concerns [he] had. [Students] would talk to each other about school, family, problems, etc., offering each other support and friendship” (p. 149). Unfortunately for undocumented students, finding social support in
higher education may not be as easy, as the number of undocumented students is minimal. Having social support from others is critical to success in higher education, as individuals can be a tool for information and resources on their journey to achieve their educational goals.

Contrasting the experiences of undocumented students to documented students provides greater insight into the hardships of undocumented students as they pursue higher education. In addition, it helps identify specific barriers that prevent students from attaining higher education. If documented Latino students are encountering these challenges, then undocumented students are most likely facing financial, family, and social challenges too.

**Summary**

Based on the findings from the existing literature review, it is very important to find out if undocumented college students are still experiencing these challenges and barriers after the implementation of California DREAM Act. Each undocumented student has struggled in one way or another due to their immigration status; however, the California DREAM Act legislation has made a positive impact on the lives of undocumented students. Thus, it will be interesting to see what challenges undocumented students still face so that higher education professionals can develop strategies and solutions to help undocumented students succeed and increase the retention rate of this population.
Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540 undocumented college students after the implementation of the California DREAM Act as they work toward a college education. This chapter explains the research design, setting of the study, population and sample, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis. The research methodology for this study utilized a qualitative research approach to answer the following research questions:

1. What impact has the California DREAM Act had on the educational experience of undocumented college students?
2. What challenges do undocumented students encounter while attending a 4-year university?

Setting of Study

This study was conducted at Purple Blossom University, a public 4-year institution located in Northern California. The University offers 58 undergraduate majors in seven different colleges. At the start of fall 2014, it was reported that there were a total of 29,353 students attending the University including 3,600 new freshman, 4,000 transfer students, and 900 new graduate students. A majority of the undocumented immigrants
are of Latino descendant. More than 23% of the population attending Purple Blossom University is Hispanic/Latino. Currently, this is the fastest growing group.

More specifically, a report from the Office of Financial Aid at Purple Blossom University (V. Diaz, personal communication, January 21, 2016) indicates the office received 828 California DREAM Act applications and awarded 513 undocumented students with financial aid in 2015. This is a significant increase from 201 California Dream Act applications in 2013 and 81 undocumented students awarded with financial aid. The numbers of undocumented students are not concrete, but it is estimated there are at least 828 undocumented students at CSUS.

**Research Design**

To best understand the experiences and challenges AB 540 undocumented college students encountered while working toward their college degree, the researcher used a qualitative research approach for this study. The qualitative research approach included a face-to-face interview, taking no more than an hour to complete. According to Cowan (2007), a qualitative research approach is characterized by “its focus on the development of information from the subjects in environments that are not under the researcher’s control” (p. 37). The researcher aimed to further understand the participant’s educational journey through his or her lived experience. The information gained from this qualitative approach was used to understand the experiences and challenges undocumented students
encountered in their educational experience so as to help other undocumented students in the future.

**Population and Sample**

The population for this study was undocumented college students attending Purple Blossom University. The participants were required to meet all the following criteria before the researcher interviewed him or her for this study:

1. Be an AB 540 undocumented student
2. Have already applied for the California DREAM Act

Four AB 540 undocumented college students volunteered to participate in the study; all four were female and of Latino background.

**Data Collection**

Prior to any data collection, an approval from the Institutional Review Board at Purple Blossom University was required. Once the study was approved, participants were recruited using a flyer that was posted at College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Dreamer Resource Center (see Appendix A). In addition, a staff member from the Dreamer Resource Center sent a participation email invitation with the flyer attached on behalf of the Director of College Assistance Migrant Program and the Dreamer Resource Center to help recruit participants for this study (see Appendix B). Participation was voluntary. Those who participated in the study contacted the researcher to arrange a time and location to meet that was most comfortable and convenient for the participant. The researcher then confirmed with the participant that she was an AB 540
undocumented student and had applied for the California DREAM Act. Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher read the letter of consent to the participant and asked the participant for an oral consent agreeing to participate in the study. In addition, the participant provided an oral consent to be audiotape recorded. The letter of consent provided information on the research and the purpose of the study, procedures, benefits, risks, confidentiality, and the researcher's contact information (see Appendix C). The participants’ real names were removed during the interview process and also when the researcher coded the data. Each participant was referred to by number as P1, P2, and so forth.

**Instrumentation**

All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The researcher conducted all face-to-face interviews at a location that was most comfortable and convenient for the participant. Most interviews took 30 to 45 minutes to complete. However, one interview took almost an hour due to the amount of information the participant had to share. In the face-to-face interviews, the researcher asked the participants some demographic questions and about challenges they encountered as well as overall college experiences (see Appendix D).

**Data Analysis**

With the permission of the participant, the researcher recorded the whole interview on an audio tape recorder to ensure the accuracy of data analysis. The
researcher transferred the audio file onto a password-protected laptop immediately after the interview and deleted the audio file from the audio tape recorder to protect the participant. After the interview, the researcher transcribed each interview individually. The qualitative research approach allows for an in-depth explanation of the challenges the participants encountered and their overall college experiences. The researcher analyzed the data and categorized the participants’ responses to look for common themes. The researcher used quotes to highlight the common theme based on the participant's response. The researcher looked at existing literature to draw connections with the results to interpret the data.

Summary

The goal of this research study was to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540 undocumented college students after the implementation of the California DREAM Act as they work toward a college education. Conducted at Purple Blossom University, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with individual participants, asking them questions about demographics, challenges they encountered, and overall college experiences. The researcher took these data and analyzed them based on the participants' responses in order to find common themes. The researcher provided an analysis and connections based on the results.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540 undocumented college students in pursuit of higher education after the implementation of the California DREAM Act. To capture the experiences and challenges of AB 540 undocumented college students, a qualitative approach was taken to collect information from undocumented students to answer the following research questions:

1. What impact has the California DREAM Act had on the educational experience of undocumented college students?
2. What challenges do undocumented students encounter while attending a 4-year university?

This chapter reviews data collected from participants and provide results and findings from the interviews. The researcher used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Capital Theory (SCT) to analyze the collected data. To better understand the issues AB 540 undocumented students encounter while working on their college degree, the interview focused on five main subtopics: financial challenges, academic challenges, legal challenges, other challenges, and college experiences. All participants recorded in this thesis are referred to as P1, P2, and so forth to protect participants' identities.
Demographics

This section covers some demographics on undocumented students who participated in this study. Table 1 shows the gender, age, class level, and enrollment status of participants. All participants were female and were enrolled as full-time college students. They were in different age ranges and class levels. Two participants were juniors class in the same age range, one participant was a freshmen, and one participant was a senior.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Class level</th>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

Family Background

This section focuses on the family background of undocumented students by documenting their answers the following questions: (a) describe your family background, (b) what is the country of origin for you and your family, (c) what was the primary reason you or your family relocated to the United States, (d) how old were you when you arrived
in the United States and have you lived in the United States since then, (e) how many
people live in your household, (f) what is your family's socioeconomic status, (g) what
kind of support and relationship do you have with your family, and (h) what keeps you
motivated to continue your education?

**Question: Describe your family background.**

**P1.** P1's family is very family oriented. She comes from a small agricultural
town called Ukiah, California, which has a population of 15,000 people. She stated that
in Ukiah, people there are either Hispanic or White. Thus, it was a cultural shock for P1
when she moved to Sacramento because of the diverse population. Her parents are
currently living in Ukiah and raising her younger brother. Her parents are no longer
together, but they remain best friends. P1 indicated she never had to go through the ugly
part of her parents' divorce.

**P2.** P2's family is Hispanic and from Mexico.

**P3.** P3's parents are Hispanic and from Mexico. Her family came to the United
States when she was about five years old. Her family members have really close
relationships with each other.

**P4.** P4 and her family are 100% Mexican. They lived in Mexico until 2004,
when they moved to the United States. P4 stated her family is really hard working, and
they have strong values regarding education and honesty.
Question: What country of origin are you and your family from?

P1. P1 and her family are from the state of Jalisco, which is located in Guadalajara, Mexico.

P2. P2 and her family are from Mexico City, Mexico.

P3. P3 and her father are from Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico, but her mother is from Michoacán, Mexico.

P4. P4 and her family are from Guadalajara, Mexico.

Question: What was the primary reason you or your family relocated to the United States?

P1. P1 and her family relocated to the United States to seek better opportunities and a better lifestyle. Her father worked for his brother's company in Mexico; however, the company stopped being productive and her father was unable to make money. Thus, her father decided to come to the United States because things were rough back in Mexico.

P2. P2 and her family relocated to the United States for a better financial future. They had planned to earn enough money in the United States to return to their native country to live more comfortably, but that did not happen.

P3. P3 and her family relocated to the United States to reunite with family who were already in the United States. All of the siblings from P3's mother side came to the United States after P3's grandfather passed away. P3's parents migrated to the United States shortly after they got married.
P4. P4 and her family relocated to the United States to have a better life, to be successful, and to be free from danger. She indicated that most of her cousins got married at age 15 or 16. P4 did not want to get tied down and not have a successful life. P4, along with both of her parents, wanted P4 to obtain an education, so they decided to come to the United States. It was not too late for P4 to learn English as a second language before college, but it was stressful and hard because she wanted to be really good at reading, writing, and speaking English. P4 indicated she had it tough because she was the oldest in her family, she wanted to set an example for her younger siblings to show them it is possible to pursue higher education and that their education does not have to stop after high school.

**Question: How old were you when you arrived in the United States. Have you lived in the United States since then?**

P1. P1 was 9 years old when she arrived in the United States and has lived in the United States since.

P2. P2 was 11 years old when she arrived in the United States and has lived in the United States since.

P3. P3 was 4 or 5 years old when she arrived in the United States and has lived in the United States since. She attended preschool, kindergarten, and all of her grade school in the United States.
**P4.** P4 was 12 years old when she arrived in the United States and has lived in the United States since. She moved from different places within the state of California, but has never returned to her native country.

**Question: How many people live in your household?**

**P1.** There are five people in P1's household, which includes her father, mother, her younger brother, her younger sister, and herself. She is the oldest of three children.

**P2.** There are five people in P2's household, which includes her mother, her two younger sisters, her husband, and herself.

**P3.** There are four people in P3’s household, which includes her father, her mother, her brother, and herself.

**P4.** There are eight people in P4's household, which includes her father, her mother, her five siblings, and herself. She is the oldest of six children.

**Question: What is your family socioeconomic status?**

**P1.** P1 considers her family to be below-middle-class status. While she has read that middle class families make between $62,000 and $120,000 a year, she does not think of her family as middle class. Her parents' combined income is about $75,000 or $80,000 a year. She indicated that although her family is not big, sometimes her parents' earnings do not cut it for a middle-sized family. She stated her family is considered middle class for tax purposes, and although it looks like her family makes a lot, they do not.

**P2.** P2 stated her family's socioeconomic status is low, with an income of less than $25,000 a year.
**P3.** P3 stated her parents do not make much, but are comfortable. Her father makes about $30,000 to $36,000 year and her mother is no longer working.

**P4.** P4 stated her family falls under “poor class” and is not considered “medium” class at all. She was unsure of her family income, but knew for sure it is low. She thought it to be below $30,000 a year, possibly $22,000 a year. P4 indicated her family struggles from paycheck to paycheck to provide for six children. Thus, she stated she always feels pressure to finish college as soon as possible because her parents need her help, even though her parents tell her to take her time and are there to support her. P4 expressed that her parents have a lot of stress on their shoulders.

**Question:** What kind of support and relationship do you have with your family?

**P1.** P1 is very attached to her parents, and she sometimes feels she is the parent to her parents because of the language barrier. She grew up always helping her parents due to the language barrier, which created a stronger bond between her and her parents. She stated her family is all she has and considers her parents and siblings as her friends. Because she does not know a lot of people at her school, she gets close to those she knows. Thus, she forms an extra strong bond with her family.

**P2.** P2 mainly gets support from her mother and her husband, but mainly from her mother. Her parents are divorced, so there is no support from her father's side. Her mother understands the circumstance [being undocumented] that she is in, especially in her pursuit of higher education. P2's mother does not work, so she is unable to
financially help her. However, P2's mother constantly reminds P2 to take care of herself and always looks out for her by giving advice to her. She continuously tells P2 to not stress herself out too much due to her legal status. Her mother cooks and does a lot of other things P2 is unable to do while she is working or at school.

P2 is the oldest of her siblings and stated she does not have the best relationship with her siblings. She indicated that her younger siblings acculturated to the American culture and are more "Americanized," whereas P2 retains more of her cultural background from her country of origin. Thus, there is a constant battle between her and her siblings because they hold different cultural perspectives. P2 is working on building a closer relationship with her siblings. In addition, P2 stated she takes on the responsibilities of her role as the second mom in the family. In terms of higher education, her siblings look up to her and see her as their role model. She assists her siblings financially and helps them out all the time; thus, her siblings come to her for help whenever they have a problem.

**P3.** P3 indicated her family is extremely supportive. Her parents always push her to never close any doors of opportunities since her parents are aware of the barriers that come with not being originally from the United States. Her parents motivate her and push her to grow as a person.

**P4.** P4 indicated her family is considerate about the fact that AB 540 students do not get a lot of financial help to complete their education fast enough compared to US citizens because AB 540 student have to work in order to finance their own college
education. Thus, her parents understand it is taking P4 longer to complete her degree. P4 is slowly moving forward with her education, and her parents support her and the example that P4 sets for her younger siblings. Also, her parents respect the type of lifestyle P4 is choosing for herself.

**Question: What keeps you motivated to continue with your education?**

*P1.* The analogy that P1 used to describe her motivation to continue her education is “when your parents tell you that you can't have a lollipop, you want it more.” P1 had good grades, took five AP classes, performed community service, and had many leadership experiences in high school. She thought she would be able to go straight from high school into one of the UC schools, such as UC Berkeley or UC Davis. However, during her junior year in high school, P1 was disappointed to discover she was ineligible to receive financial aid for college. P1 stated that her inability to receive financial aid motivates her to pursue higher education even more. After graduating high school, P1 attended community college because that was her only option. She said it was depressing and she felt defeated. She also indicated she could not work legally because DACA was not in effect at that time, but she did work in a fast food restaurant with a fake social security number and felt “like a criminal.” P1 always felt she was a criminal when “all [she wanted to do was] to work because [she] needed to help her parents out” financially. P1 wants to travel abroad or do missionary trips with her church friends, but her legal status keeps her from doing these activities. When her friends ask her to travel with them, P1 always use the excuses of not having enough money or being unable to take out
loans for the trips. All the restrictions and barriers put on P1 as a result of her legal status continuously motivate her to pursue new opportunities in life.

**P2.** P2 said her motivation for pursuing her education is her desire to become a better person and being able to financially help her family. She wants a better lifestyle than how she grew up. Her greatest motivation is to “be able to contribute to her community and be able to show others in [her] situation that [higher education] is possible, regardless of your legal status here in this country, and it's possible to get ahead in life and basically make a difference.”

**P3.** P3 stated self-motivation and her parents' support motivate her to keep pushing forward with her education. She indicated she has always been an ambitious person, so it is within her personality to continue her education despite any barriers.

**P4.** P4 stated she wants to provide a better lifestyle for her parents and herself. She wants her parents to enjoy the perks of living in the United States because there are so many opportunities in this country. Her parents do not take vacations and never considered buying a house because they have limited money. Thus, P4 is trying to complete her degree and hopefully get legalized through a corporation after she gets hired so she can be legal and help her parents become citizens. She indicated it is easier to become a US citizen by marrying a US citizen, but that is not the way she wants to do it; she mentioned there are also many risks with that method. She also does not want to start a family of her own yet.
Synopsis of family background. All four participants had similar and yet different family backgrounds. All four participants came to the United States from Mexico at a young age, ranging from ages 4 to 12. Three out of the four participants came to the United States to have better lives with better opportunities with an exception of one participant, who came to the United States to be reunited with family already in the United States. In addition, three out of four participants come from a low-income background, $22,000 to $36,000 a year, with the exception of one participant, whose family's socioeconomic status is considered middle class with an income of approximately $75,000 to $80,000 a year. All participants have a close and supportive relationship with their family who encourages the participants to pursue higher education and succeed in life. However, P2 does not have a close relationship with her siblings, but is currently working on building a closer relationship with them. All participants are motivated to pursue higher education because they want to provide a better life for themselves and their family. In addition, P1 is more motivated to continue with her education because of the barriers in her path.

Financial Challenges

This section focuses on the financial challenges encountered by undocumented students with the following questions: (a) what are some financial challenges you face, (b) how have you been paying for tuition throughout your college career, (c) is the amount of financial aid you receive enough to help you cover your educational expenses, and (d) do you work and how many hours a week if yes?
Question: What are some financial challenges you face as an undocumented student?

*P1.* P1 moved to Sacramento to attend community college after the California DREAM Act was implemented since she was able to receive some financial assistance. She felt stuck and depressed attending community college in Ukiah because the community college classes in Ukiah did not challenge her. When she attended community college in Sacramento, she received the Governor's fee waiver to pay for her tuition, but that was not enough. She had to pay $50 each semester in addition to a parking permit, books, and rent. She worked two jobs, as a receptionist at a car dealership and as a tutor for a tutoring company. She worked 56 to 60 hours per week and maintained a good GPA; however, she wished she did not have to work 50 hours so she could have more time to study and improve her GPA. Now that she transferred to Purple Blossom University, she is still facing financial struggles. When the fall 2015 semester was almost over, she still had not received her financial aid because her California DREAM Act application was brought up for verification. She had to make the first payment toward her tuition of $913 on her own. She said it was very stressful because she still had other expenses such as rent, food, books, and gas. She is unable to take out a loan because of her situation. She expressed that it would be the best thing in the world if she could take out a loan and not work, but she cannot.

*P2.* P2 stated that as the oldest child in her family, she has to help out at home. She recently moved from Sacramento to Stockton and moved into her mother's house due
to a tragic situation that occurred. P2 did not provide details of this tragic situation. The commute from Stockton to campus is an hour long now, which is adding to her financial struggles because she is paying more gas expenses. In addition, she is also paying more food expenses because she is purchasing food for more people, whereas before it was only for her and her husband. P2 stated the beginning of each semester is always stressful because there are many school expenses. Although she receives financial assistance for tuition, it does not cover other school expenses for the entire semester such as books and expensive codes for online classes. With the limited money she earns from her part-time employment, she is financially struggling to pay for her school expenses and other expenses in order to meet the needs for her and her family.

P3. P3 stated that the California DREAM Act was implemented at the time she was applying for college. She was informed that she did not qualify to fill out the FAFSA application, but was eligible to fill out the California DREAM Act application. P3 applied for the California DREAM Act, which only pays for tuition. She expressed that if she had been able to apply for FAFSA, she would have received at least $3,000 more in financial aid to help her with her educational expenses. In addition, she had trouble applying for scholarships. She stated she had a difficult time finding and applying for scholarships, especially when she did not qualify for 80% of them. P3 is relieved that her tuition is paid for, and she only has to find a way to pay for rent. She lives off campus because she cannot afford to live on campus. She knew she was not going to get extra money and did not qualify for student loans. Her rent is $250 a month,
which is not much. Her parents help her out, and she also works so she can pay her own rent when her parents are unable to do so. She stated that her financial situation is not too bad right now.

**P4.** P4 stated she always wanted to go to a CSU or UC right after she graduated from high school, but that did not happen because she could not afford it and the California DREAM Act was not in place yet. Thus, she had to pay for tuition for a year or two during her years at community college, which was tough even though tuition was not as expensive as tuition at CSUS or UC Berkeley. When the California DREAM Act got implemented, it gave her hope that she would be able to attend a “bigger and more prestigious school” to obtain her bachelor's degree. However, money was still an issue. Her current financial challenge is that she can only work less than 20 hours per week due to stress from school. She initially planned on working more than 25 hours per week, but was unable to manage both work and school. She indicated she is unable to pay for rent most of the time. She has two roommates and sacrifices much to survive school.

**Question: How have you been paying for tuition throughout your college career?**

**P1.** P1 stated that for the first two semesters at community college, she had to pay for tuition out of pocket, which was expensive. She was paying non-resident tuition even though she lived in the United States since she was nine years old. Her parents were unable to get a loan from the government, but they were able to secure a loan from one of her uncles to help P1 with tuition. She used the Governor's fee waiver for over two years
at community college after the California DREAM Act was implemented. Now at Purple Blossom University, she has yet to receive her financial aid due to a verification process and is currently paying the entire tuition out of pocket from her work earnings.

**P2.** P2 stated that she used her work earnings and scholarships to pay for the first four years of her college education at community college. She knew she always wanted to go to college; she saved up money from working since she was 14 years old. When she transferred to Purple Blossom University, the California DREAM Act came into effect and the financial assistance through the California DREAM Act helped her pay for tuition. However, P2 still had to work to pay for other expenses such as books, parking permit, gas, food, and other necessities.

**P3.** P3 stated that her tuition is paid for through the California DREAM Act. She receives a total of $7,000 in financial aid, which covers the full tuition. Not only is her tuition covered by financial aid, but she also received $100 after tuition expenses are deducted from her aid package.

**P4.** P4 stated that her tuition was paid for by scholarships, work earnings, and financial aid. During her first two years at community college, she paid her tuition through scholarships. She indicated she applied to all the scholarships that did not have the U.S. citizenship requirement. As a result, she received eight scholarships to help her fund two years at community college. In addition, DACA was implemented at one point of her community college years, and she was able to get a job. Due to DACA, she was able to use her extra scholarships for expenses such as books and driving. Prior to the
implementation of DACA, she did not want to work without having a legal status. When she transferred to Purple Blossom University, she received financial aid to cover her fall and spring semester tuition and used her scholarship money to pay for rent and books. She stated financial aid does not pay for summer or winter semester expenses and said she cannot spend more than two years at Purple Blossom University because that is the only help she gets for tuition. P4 said the help is limited and feels she is “stuck in a hole that [she] does not know when she will get out of it.” She expressed she wants to pursue a Master's degree, but does not know what kind of financial assistance is available.

Question: Is the amount of financial aid you receive enough to help you cover your educational expenses? Why or why not?

P1. P1 stated the amount of financial aid she receives is enough to cover her educational expenses, but she has not received her financial aid due to a verification process. She has to work to pay for rent, books, food, and gas.

P2. P2 stated the amount of financial aid received is not enough to cover her educational expenses because it only covers tuition. She indicated the financial aid has been an enormous help, and she would not be a full-time student if she did not receive financial aid. P2 is still struggling to pay for rent and books and reiterated that books are very expensive. Thus, she has to work in order to be a full-time student. Due to working, P2 is unable to dedicate enough time to her academics and has to balance work and school in order to fund her education. If P2 received full financial aid, then she would not work and would dedicate her undivided attention to her academics.
**P3.** P3 stated the amount of financial aid is enough to cover her tuition, but it is not enough to cover her books, rent, and daily expenses. P3 is grateful that the financial aid through the California DREAM Act paid for tuition because she would not be able to pay $3,000 each semester. P3 did apply for scholarships and if she receives those scholarships, then it would be enough to cover her educational expenses. She currently is not receiving any scholarships.

**P4.** P4 stated the amount of financial aid only covers tuition. She received a check for $55 for the entire semester, but that was not enough to pay for rent and other expenses. She indicated she could not quit her job even though she was stressing over her classes. Thus, she has to keep working to continue living on her own, as she moved out of her parents’ house.

**Question: Do you work? If yes, how many hours do you work a week?**

**P1.** P1 works 20 hours a week and earns a paycheck of $450 every two weeks at the new job she started in August 2015. She is not working much because she wants to focus on getting a good GPA.

**P2.** P2 works at a law firm as a legal assistant, translating for Spanish-speaking clients and assisting with legal paperwork. She works 15 to 20 hours a week, depending on her availability, but usually works full-time during the breaks. She stated the job is a half-day on Monday through Thursday, so the other half of the day she is at school.
**P3.** P3 works at a bakery 11 hours a week. She was working 20 hours a week, but she asked her manager to lower her work hours to weekends only or 11 hours a week. She is trying to find a job on campus because it will be more convenient and closer.

**P4.** P4 works less than 20 hours per week. However, she works beyond 30 hours per week when she is tight on money. She said it is hard to work full-time and attend school full-time.

*Synopsis of financial challenges.* All four participants had similar yet different financial challenges. P1 did not receive her fall 2015 financial aid due to verification process. P2 moved to Stockton to live with her mother, adding more financial burden due to more gas and food expenses. P3 has difficulty in applying for scholarships. P4 has difficulty paying for rent most of the time and working limited hours. All participants mentioned they have used their work earnings, scholarships, fee waiver, and or financial aid to cover their tuition throughout their educational career thus far. Everyone except P1 receives financial aid that covers the tuition for the semester. All participants work part-time to pay for their expenses such as books, rent, food, and gas because the financial aid received is not enough. They worked between 11 and 30 hours per week. In addition, participants work only part-time so they can focus on their schoolwork.

**Academic Challenges**

This section focuses on the academic challenges of undocumented students with the following questions: (a) what are some academic challenges you face as an
undocumented student, (b) what kind of relationship have you established with
staff/faculty/counselors, (c) what kind of student services support and resources do you
utilize on campus and off campus, (d) what kind of support and relationship do you have
with your friends and anyone who has helped you with your educational goals, and (e)
what support or resources do you believe will help you and other undocumented students
going forward?

**Question: What are some academic challenges you face as an undocumented
student?**

*P1.* P1 stated she used to have a language barrier. She picks up math quickly
because math does not require too much language. However, she no longer has that
barrier. Another academic challenge she faces is self-confidence, so she does not ask
many questions in class. She feels the people who ask questions in class are usually the
confident and demanding people. She feels undocumented students have been shut down
and restricted because they grew up with fear, which is the reason she does not ask
questions in class. She stated she would do better in school if she did not feel depressed.
P1 never goes to office hours because she never likes asking for help due to the way she
was raised. However, she is getting better at it and has attended her professors' office
hours.

*P2.* P2 stated she has faced academic challenges ever since she started college
because she is unable to dedicate more time to school due to needing to work. Thus, she
is pursuing a major that does not require too much focus. She knows she has the
potential to do something more than what she does now, but she also knows it would be difficult to do if she works and attends school at the same time. P2 is trying to keep her grades up; she does not feel she puts in enough hours of studying that the courses require. If she is required to put in six hours a week of studying, she is currently putting in about two hours due to work, family, and other personal issues.

P2 also expressed that many undocumented students, including her, have become very anxious and overwhelmed in their pursuit of higher education. They have to work extra hard to do well and excel in their classes due to their situation. Sometimes, P2 is very close to giving up or questions if these barriers are really worth her dream to pursue higher education.

**P3.** P3 stated the academic challenges she faced included the difficulty of learning English and learning to speak two languages. Some teachers and counselors have been helpful and some have not. In addition, several counselors knew of her situation and how she wanted to go college, but they “discouraged her and [told her that they] do not know how [she could] afford college.” P3 expressed it was the lack of information from the faculty and school because there is definitely some help out there for undocumented students. P3 recommended that individuals in her situation go and seek the information themselves because there is much out there. One of the current academic challenges P3 was facing in college at the time of the study was the transition of high school to college classes.
**P4.** P4 is struggling in her math or economics classes as she continues to learn English. She stated math is its own language, and as an economics major, she has to take many intense math classes. She indicated she has to translate every word the instructor is saying while focusing on and processing what the instructor says. Thus, the process of taking in the course material is long for her. She stated if a professor recommends seven hours a week of studying, she has to double or triple the studying hours in order to succeed in the class.

**Question:** What kind of relationship have you established with staff/faculty/counselors? What kind of support do they offer you?

**P1.** P1 stated she was lucky to have such great and helpful professors back in her community college in her small hometown of Ukiah. However, she has not been able to make use of all her resources at Purple Blossom University because she has been busy with her new job she started in August.

**P2.** P2 had much support from faculty and teachers at the beginning of her college career. She did not disclose her status to anyone because she did not know how they would react to it. However, she always thought it was important that faculty and teachers were aware of her difficulties, so they would be able to assist her. She indicated most of them understood her difficulties and were very supportive. They motivated her to do well and provided her with helpful resources. She developed and built a strong relationship with them, and they knew the type of student she was as well as her desire to get a better education. However, P2 has not disclosed her status to any of her professors
or faculty at Purple Blossom University because she does not feel the university has an informed staff that would understand her situation. She wished she could disclose her status and develop strong relationships with staff at Purple Blossom University so they would be able to understand her better.

**P3.** P3 stated she has built relationships with staff and faculty at the Dreamer Resource Center at Purple Blossom University. She indicated they are really helpful and have reached out to her to make sure she is doing well. The faculty and counselors have been a big help to her.

**P4.** P4 stated that when she attended community college, she established relationships with many staff members. She knew staff at her community college due to various employments she had on campus such as a Spanish tutor, a supplemental instruction leader for a math class, and front desk student assistant. However, she has not established relationships with school personnel at Purple Blossom University. Her desire is to grow more connected to and become more involved at Purple Blossom University than she was when she attended community college so she can have the support she needs.

**Question:** What kind of student services support and resources do you utilize on campus and off campus?

**P1.** P1 has friends who work for the State of California, and they provide her with information on legislation that pass in California. Her friends have been a great resource. In addition, P1 utilizes the Internet and has done exclusive research because
she wants to be aware of every opportunity. She has also taken advantage of Leaders Educating for the Advancement of Dreamers (L.E.A.D.) and the Multicultural Center, which help undocumented students. She now knows that the Dreamer Resource Center recently opened, but was not aware of it before. P1 expressed that there was not much advertisement or outreach about resources, and wishes there was more marketing.

**P2.** P2 has utilized L.E.A.D. since about three years ago when she transferred to Purple Blossom University. She stated the organization supports undocumented students and motivates them to keep pursuing their education to become leaders in the community. P2 is aware that the Dreamer Resource Center recently opened, but she has not been able to utilize this resource because she has been busy. However, she knows someone who works there and can reach out to that person if she ever needed any help. P2 has also utilized the Multicultural Center and stated that the center is aware of undocumented students and are very supportive of them. P2 wishes for more awareness so she can inform others about the resources and feel more comfortable about receiving the resources.

**P3.** Other than the Dreamer Resource Center, P3 has utilized the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) center. She stated many people help out with the California DREAM Act. She utilizes their services all the time and goes there on a daily basis when she needs questions answered about her situation.

**P4.** P4 has utilized the tutoring center for academic support in her classes. She has also utilized the ARC, which is the computer lab; College Assistance Migrant
Program (CAMP); library; and the writing center. She stated the writing center has been a great help for all the papers she has to write. In addition, she received support from CAMP. Although she is not allowed to be a full member of CAMP, they still provide her with information and serve as a helpful resource. She stated CAMP is a place where she can hang out and meet new people who are in the same situation as she, where she finds herself most comfortable at Purple Blossom University.

**Question: What kind of support and relationship do you have with your friends and anyone who has helped you with your educational goals?**

**P1.** P1 has a few friends with the same background. She stated her undocumented friends have helped her by motivating her and pushing her to pursue higher education. Her friends are a great resource because sometimes P1 does not know about things and her undocumented students share the information and resources with her. Undocumented students are willing to help out those with the same background.

**P2.** P2 stated she does not have any friends at Purple Blossom University. She knows a few undocumented students, but the relationship is casual with conversations such as: how are you doing, how are your classes, and do not give up. P3 still keeps in contact with faculty at her community college because they completely understand her situation and struggles. Her relationship with the faculty at her community college is great, and she is able to go to them for support and resources if she ever needs anything. She also has support from her elementary school teachers from when she started learning
English. Her elementary teachers know how far she has come, and P2 has developed great relationships with them.

**P3.** P3 stated her parents have helped her with her educational goals. They were the ones who told her to pursue higher education, or at least attempt it. Her brother has also been a great help, both financially and mentally, because he pushes her to do her best. She has a very close relationship with her parents and her brother. P3 also indicated that her boyfriend has been really helpful. He tells P3 to not let people discourage her and reminds her of her potential.

**P4.** P4 has made a few friends during her first semester at Purple Blossom University and is happy with the relationships she has formed. She has built a study group with her friends and indicated the study group has been very helpful in succeeding academically in college. Her friends provide her with hope when she feels down and push her to keep on working and not give up. She said her friends influence her to be a better person.

**Question:** What support or resources do you believe will help you and other undocumented students going forward?

**P1.** P1 mentioned more financial aid for undocumented students will give students like her the opportunity to pursue higher education without too much financial burden. P1 deeply expressed that instead of talking about how to get rid of undocumented students, people should talk about how undocumented students can make
this country better. She stated that America is her country and she does not see herself leaving. She wishes she could vote and have the opportunity to help her country.

**P2.** P2 believes it would be great to have a safe zone at Purple Blossom University. According to P2, a safe zone means providing “awareness mainly for staff and educators to become informed of the subject and be able to provide some type of support to students.” P2 said school personnel need to understand her situation and be able to connect undocumented students to other people who know their situation. P2 feels more awareness will make her feel safer. She also thinks it would be helpful to have a center that provides scholarships or links to scholarships to help students with financial aid. P2 expressed that the financial aid department needs more training on the California DREAM Act process. She stated she struggled much when she started at Purple Blossom University, and no one knew about the process. She had to learn it on her own and even had to educate the staff at Purple Blossom University on what she read online. Another support and resource P2 mentioned was the support from the psychological and counseling center, as many undocumented students do not know they could even get help. She stated it would help for undocumented students to talk about their struggles. P2 suggested creating a center for only undocumented students to come in and talk to someone about their problems. Another recommendation was to provide more resources on applying to graduate school for undocumented students because undocumented students might not feel it is possible because of their situation. P2 indicated it would be helpful to provide information on how to fund graduate school and
what programs would accept or most likely accept them and provide links and connections for undocumented students who want to pursue graduate school.

**P3.** P3 mentioned that the resources Purple Blossom University offers to undocumented students are great. She stated there was a lack of information provided to undocumented students coming into college, but having centers specifically for undocumented students and having people come to her high school to provide students with guidance on how to apply for college and fill out the California DREAM Act application would be a great resource. P3 said by having people outreach to high schools and creating a center for undocumented students, undocumented students could be more aware of these resources so they could utilize the services. In addition, the center would allow undocumented students to build relationship with other students with a similar background.

**P4.** P4 recommended getting involved with different organizations within the university because these extracurricular activities can provide students with connections and the opportunity to network with others that could be a great resource. P4 stated that many AB 540 students from CAMP told her they were pursuing a Master's degree at Purple Blossom University, which gave her hope that she could do it, too.

**Synopsis of academic challenges.** All four participants had similar yet different academic challenges. Three of the four participants stated that one of their academic challenges is a language barrier. In addition, they felt they had to work twice as hard as
other students to do well academically. One participant noted she is struggling to keep up her grades while trying to balance work and school.

Many of the participants had great support from and relationships with faculty and staff during their time at their community college, but they have not established any relationships with faculty and staff at Purple Blossom University. One participant does not have time to connect with school personnel due to work, and another participant had not reached out due to her view that staff lack awareness of the undocumented student population and do not fully understand her circumstances. However, three of the four participants hope to connect and develop relationships with faculty and staff to get the support they need to be academically successful.

Although participants have not established relationships with faculty and staff, they have utilized many student service resources on and off campus for support. Two participants utilized L.E.A.D. and the Multicultural Center. In addition, the same participants had not utilized the Dreamer Resource Center because one was not aware this resource was available and the other has been busy. However, one of the participants expressed that the university should provide more marketing and advertisements of resources in order for undocumented students to maximize the resources available. One participant had utilized the Dreamer Resource Center. Another student service resource two participants utilized was the CAMP center, which provided them information related to undocumented students. One participant utilized tutoring services on campus along with computer lab, library, and writing center. Using student services resources have
helped the participants because they receive information and also share those resources with other undocumented students.

All participants have support from an individual who has helped them with their educational goals. Two participants have friends with similar backgrounds who motivate and encourage each other to do well in school. In addition, one participant noted her friends are a great resource for information as they share information with each other to help each other out. Participants also relied on their parents and siblings along with previous school personnel to help them succeed. These social relationships with the participants have provided great support by motivating them to continue to do well in college.

Legal Challenges

This section focuses on the legal challenges undocumented students face with the following questions: (a) what are some legal challenges you face as an undocumented student, (b) how has your immigration status impacted your educational goals, and (c) have you experienced any psychological feelings because of your status?

Question: What are some legal challenges you face as an undocumented student?

P1. P1 mentioned being in her situation hinders her ability to do many things. She stated it is really easy to fall into a dark hole and feel depressed. In addition, she feels she is excluded from receiving financial aid due to her legal status. She did not have a solution, but knows she is part of a problem. She feels she is treated unfairly due
to her parents’ decision to come to the America. She has been a good citizen as far as paying her taxes, going to work, going to school, and being involved in her community, and she hopes people can be more understanding of her situation.

**P2.** P2 mentioned the numerous legislation and policies set in place to help undocumented students now compared to when she attended community college. One of her greatest legal challenges was obtaining a job because she did not have proper documentation. She applied to “very good jobs,” but was not offered the position due to lack of proper documentation. Another challenge was traveling within the states. P2 indicated it was three years ago that she traveled to Washington, DC for an internship. She only felt comfortable traveling because she had her driver's license, but lost out on previous opportunities because she was afraid to travel. In addition, P2 was always afraid every time she left her house to drive to school because she might get pulled over. P2 described feeling as if she were “a criminal running away from the law” because she did not have proper documentation. Due to the implementation of DACA, P2 does not have high anxiety anymore because she is able to legally work a job and have a driver's license. However, she still worries about studying abroad as it is more difficult to accomplish.

**P3.** P3 mentioned she has always been interested in traveling as a little girl and would love to travel more, but she is unable to do so since she will not be able to come back if she goes out of the country. She emphasized the ability to get out of the country or to another state has been one of her biggest challenges. P3 noted that her brother faced
challenges of being unable to obtain a driver's license and a job legally. Fortunately, for P3, she explained how DACA has allowed her to obtain her driver's license and a job.  

**P4.** P4 has to renew her work permit every two years, which involves much paperwork and a fee of $465. She stated she basically has to come up with $500, which is a struggle. If P4 does not renew her permit, then she cannot work legally. Also, she fears that the program [DACA] can get cancelled any time and result in her inability to legally work; therefore, she would need to drop out of school since she will not be able to afford it. She mentioned if that happens, she will need to apply for scholarships, but that is another struggle because she will have to constantly seek financial help.

**Question:** How has your immigration status impacted your educational goals?

**P1.** P1 mentioned she feels as if she does not belong in the United States. She mentioned that when she discloses her legal status to other people, their face reads as if they view her as a criminal or terrorist in her own country. P1 also noted that her educational goals are influenced by how likely she will be able to find employment upon graduation in order to support her family in the future. She wishes she had the choice to major in English or History because she enjoys those subjects.

**P2.** In addition to the legal challenges that P2 encountered, P2 stated there is a stigma in the way people view or approach her. She indicated many people did not know she was undocumented because she excelled in school. Instead of being offended by ignorant people, P2 tries to educate people about the subject.
**P3.** P3 mentioned scholarships were unavailable to her because she did not qualify for the majority of them. She thought she would not be able to afford college because she did not qualify for FAFSA and was unaware of the California DREAM Act. However, she stated there are not as many challenges since there are more resources and help available for undocumented students now. Initially, P3 wanted to attend college out of state, but she knew that was not an option due to the cost so she had to choose a college within the state.

**P4.** P4 constantly fears the fact that she will not be able to find a job after obtaining her Bachelor’s or Master’s degree. She questions the money, the time, and the efforts she spent on her education because of the fear of not getting hired by employers due to her legal status. When she thinks about her future, she worries about overcoming these barriers of pursuing higher education and then not being able to find a job. However, P4 maintains an open mind about her future, as she is motivated and passionate to make a change in her community. P4 wants to “prove that [higher education] can be possible [and] that any obstacle [will not affect] all the drive” she carries within her.

**Question:** Have you experienced any psychological feeling(s) because of your status? If yes, what kind of psychological feeling(s)?

**P1.** P1 admitted to having psychological stress because of the weight she carries on her shoulders for her and her family. She is unable to enjoy the college life when she knows of the struggles her parents face at home. She noted her mother is being mistreated at work, yet does not want to leave her job because she is afraid she will not
find another job since she does not qualify for DACA. Another psychological stress P1 faces is the fact that she feels the need to find a good job that pays well because she feels obligated to take care of her parents. Her parents do not have a retirement fund due to their legal status; thus, P1 wants to financially support her parents in the future, which puts much stress on her in addition to her academics.

**P2.** P2 felt prejudice from others because they make her feel like less of a person and that she cannot do better in life because of her immigration status. P2 indicated that when people label her as “undocumented,” it impacts her psychologically because she feels unaccepted and unwanted by people in a country she identifies as her home.

**P3.** P3 has many emotions—discouraged, sad, and angry. She has isolated herself and felt depressed about her situation. She stated people would ask her questions such as whether or not she planned to attend college and how she felt being an undocumented person. Some people told her to attend community college since attending a 4-year university would be difficult for people who are “not from here” and that she will be in debt since there is no help for undocumented students. Comments like these discouraged P3 from attending college. She was sad and angry because she grew up in California, yet her undocumented status impacts her future. Eventually, P3 came to the conclusion that even though people say she is not from here, she does not let her situation bring her down.

**P4.** P4 stated she has not experienced any psychological feelings, but has feelings of “am I good enough, am I actually capable of putting my education together, and am I
smart enough?” Because of all the struggles P4 has dealt with, she feels like she has to work “a billion times harder” and questions why she has to put in so much effort and time to achieve her dream.

**Synopsis of legal challenges.** All four participants had similar yet different legal challenges. Participants mentioned there are many legal challenges they face, such as receiving financial aid and obtaining a good job. One of the legal challenges two participants face is being unable to travel because they are afraid they will not be able to come back if they left the country or went to another state. In addition, one participant is still concerned about participating in study abroad since the process is risky. Another legal challenge one participant faces is the fear that DACA can be eliminated at any time and she will become unable to work legally. She also struggles with the ability to pay for the work permit renewal fee every two years.

Due to their legal status, their education goals have been impacted in so many ways. One participant had difficulty applying for scholarships, as she does not qualify for a majority of them. In addition, the same participant was unable to go to school out of state because she is unable to afford college out of state. All participants dealt with psychological feelings due to their legal status. Two participants indicated their legal status made them feel they do not belong here and are not accepted in the United States. Some participants felt depressed, prejudice, and stigma due to her legal status, which made them feel less worthy. One participant expressed she felt deeply sad, angry, and
discouraged due to their legal status, as her legal status limits her from accessing many resources in the pursuit of higher education.

Other Challenges

**Question: What are other challenges do you face as an undocumented student?**

*P1.* P1 mentioned the ability to travel. Her grandparents from Mexico passed away and she was unable to attend the funeral service. At the time of the study, her grandmother had been really sick and was on the verge of dying. However, she was already preparing herself with the mindset that she would not be able to say good-bye to her. In addition, she had not seen many of her aunts and uncles for about 13 years. P1 stated she is not able to study abroad and gain more culture. She wishes to travel around the world one day and do developmental economics for developing countries and also participate in mission trips.

*P2.* P2 pretty much covered all the challenges she faced, but indicated having to better communicate with others and let them know who she really is. P2 constantly wonders what other struggles she is going to encounter because of her status.

*P3.* P3 mentioned that before the California DREAM Act, she would not attend college and thought of going back to Mexico after high school. P3 and her family encountered many challenges coming to the United States, especially coming over here with nothing and suffering by coming into this country. Her family lived with several different family members and was kicked out of each house. After her father lost his job,
P3’s family lived with a family friend, where all four family members lived in one room. P3 said it breaks her heart when her parents cannot leave the country and that her parents worked so hard for her and her sibling to live a better life.

Another challenge P3 faced was letting those close to her know of her undocumented status. Prior to disclosing her status, she would fake her personality because she did not want people to know that she was not from here. She recently told important people in her life that she is not from America because she felt the need to. Her friends wanted to take a trip out of the country after her high school graduation and she told them she could not go because of her legal status. P3 stated it is hard to tell those close to her because she does not know how people will react. She expressed that she is not facing any other difficult challenges now since there is more help for undocumented students.

**P4.** P4 mentioned that, as the oldest, first-generation AB 540 undocumented student to attend college, her relatives do not have faith and confidence in her ability to pursue higher education. P4 stated that no one in her family has been able to finish college and get a good job. Her cousins, aunts, and uncles do not believe she is going to do something better with her life after college. P4 expressed that some people might think it is a waste of time going to school if they are AB 540, but it is not. P4 loves Purple Blossom University’s logo: “Redefine the possible.” P4 believes she can redefine the possible by fighting for change and making her dreams possible. Thus, there is more help for undocumented students now.
**Question:** What is the biggest challenge you’ve encountered?

**P1.** The biggest challenge P1 encountered was accepting her situation. She was in denial for a while because “[she] is not any different” from other students. However, she learned to embrace who she is and prepare herself to overcome the hardships she will encounter with her situation. P1 now has a positive outlook on life and takes advantage of resources out there. She is also an advocate for students like herself, sharing resources with others. P1 mentioned she grew up very fast and did not really have a childhood because of her status. The other challenge she encountered was getting accepted into Purple Blossom University.

**P2.** P2's biggest challenge as an undocumented student was not having the support from her family. Her parents split up after they brought her to America; thus, she did not have the support from her parents to get higher education. Her parents expected her to work and obtain a regular low-paying job. P2 stated that her parents did not think she was able to accomplish what she has achieved now. The lack of support from her parents really affected her, but it was also her greatest motivator to not only prove her parents wrong, but to prove herself wrong.

P2 has overcome some of the challenges she faced and is still working on a few. She overcame the challenge with her parents by getting an education and getting a job, despite the difficult journey. She stated that her life is better than it was years back. One way she overcame her challenges as an undocumented student was by getting involved in more activist groups to bring awareness to what undocumented students experience. This
helps her overcome the challenge of being afraid of telling people who she is and feeling bad about it. She stated she is able to talk about it more freely than before.

**P3.** P3 mentioned not going to college was not her biggest challenge because she had it easy compared to other undocumented students. She stated her biggest challenge was accepting herself and being able to realize she is not originally from America. She indicated she “can't do much about that anymore and just need to be the best [she] can.” In addition, she mentioned the importance of staying close to family and not letting others break her.

**P4.** P4 mentioned she is not ready for “me time.” She is not ready to settle down and start a family yet. This is a big challenge for P4 because she sees everyone building their lives, and she feels pressure that she is running out of time to do things she wants to do. P4 sometimes has low self-esteem because she does not see herself moving forward as fast as she wants because of all the obstacles she encounters along the way. P4 stated it is kind of depressing to not advance fast enough.

**Question:** Have you overcome any of the challenges you faced? Why or why not?

**P1.** P1 has overcome the challenge of accepting her situation now and learned to embrace it. She also overcame the challenge of pursuing higher education despite all the barriers she encountered. She is now attending Purple Blossom University, which is like her UC Berkeley because that is all she can do. She wishes that this semester at Purple
Blossom University would have been her first semester after high school, but it took her three years to be where she is now.

**P2.** P2 has overcome some of the challenges she faced and is still working on a few. She overcame the challenge with her parents by getting her education, getting a job, and proving to herself that she can do it despite the difficult journey. She stated that her life is better than it was a few years ago. One way she overcame her challenges as an undocumented student was by getting involved in more activist groups to bring awareness of what undocumented students have to go through. This has helped her overcome the challenge of being afraid of telling people who she is and feeling bad about it. She stated she can talk about it more freely than before.

**P3.** P3 has overcome her challenges by accepting herself and setting goals for herself. She wants to set an example for other undocumented students and show them that they can also pursue higher education. Other challenges she overcame were attending college, affording college, and staying enrolled in college.

**P4.** P4 still faces many challenges. She has to take the bus everywhere because she does not have reliable transportation. She has to make sacrifices by being flexible with the bus schedules. She also indicated that when she attended community college, she took the bus for 2.5 hours to get to school and another 2.5 hours to get back home. She struggles to get a good car because she does not have the money. She noted that the money she makes barely pays for rent. P4 expressed that it is hard to save enough money to buy a car that will last her for a long time.
Synopsis of other challenges. The majority of the participants shared all the challenges they encountered from previous interview questions. However, there are some challenges that were not presented. One participant expressed the inability to travel back to Mexico to visit her family that she has not seen for years or even attend a funeral service for her grandparents. She is afraid that if she left the country, then she could not come back. Not only was traveling out of the country a challenge for one participant, but getting to and from school was a challenge. One participant experienced the challenge of using public transportation to go to school, and the commute time is approximately 2.5 hours one way. She has to make the sacrifice and use public transportation due to not having a reliable car. In addition, she has to be flexible with the public transportation schedule.

One common challenge some participants had was the ability to disclose their legal status to others and having the courage to do so. Participants noted they have overcome the fear and have accepted who they are and their situation. Many participants have overcome some challenges they have faced such as pursuing higher education, getting a job, and being able to disclose their legal status without feeling scared.

College Experiences

This section focuses on undocumented students’ college experiences with the following questions: (a) in what ways has the California DREAM Act helped you in achieving your educational goals, (b) if the California Dream Act was not implemented, would you pursue higher education, (c) what recommendations or advice would you give
to other undocumented students who are attending or planning to attend college, (d) what recommendations do you have for staff and faculty to help you and other undocumented students with your educational goals, and (e) is there anything you wish you would have known that you believe would have made your college experience successful?

**Question: In what ways has the California DREAM Act helped you in achieving your educational goals?**

**P1.** P1 indicated the financial aid aspect of California DREAM Act helped her achieve her educational goals. In addition, the financial aid adds a little bit of security to her life. There is no way she would be able to attend college without financial aid because she cannot afford it. P1 is aware that tuition is around $3,000 a semester, but the cost is more when books, rent, car insurance, food, and gas are taken into account.

**P2.** P2 indicated that the California DREAM Act helped her maintain her full time enrollment status. If she did not have the California DREAM Act, she would be a part-time student and would not be at the senior class level because she would not have had the funds to pay for college. In addition, P2 would not have even considered attending college or would have given up. The California DREAM Act has motivated P2 to think about graduate school even though she is aware there might not be a California DREAM Act for graduate school.

**P3.** P3 indicated she would not be in college or holding a job right now if the California DREAM Act was not implemented. P3 stated that the California DREAM Act has helped her gain confidence and allowed her to accept herself for who she is. Also, it
has opened up many doors for her and given her much help, “college wise, money wise, and opportunity wise.”

**P4.** P4 indicated the tuition from the California DREAM Act made her financial situation better because she can use her scholarship toward books, gas, or food. She stated that prior to the California DREAM Act, she had to pay out of her own pocket and with her scholarships, but had no money left for food, gas, and other necessities. Thus, she had to take the bus and “basically ate French fries or a snack for the whole day” because she was really tight on money. The California DREAM Act has helped her with the tuition.

**Question:** If the California DREAM Act had not been not implemented, would you pursue higher education? Why or why not?

**P1.** P1 stated that she would not pursue higher education if the California DREAM Act had not been not implemented. She might pursue higher education due to her own desire, but it would have taken a long time for her to afford it. She is knowledgeable of the fact that an individual needs an educational background to obtain a high paying job. So, “if [she] can't get the educational background then [she] can't get the good job; therefore, [she] won't get paid that well and [she] can't save up to go to school.” P1 concluded that she would not pursue higher education if the California DREAM Act had not been implemented.

**P2.** P2 stated that she would still attempt to pursue higher education. She always knew about her status, so she was aware that she would have to pay for college on her
own because she was not going to receive financial aid. She does not know how far she would have gotten in higher education without the California DREAM Act.

**P3.** P3 stated she would not pursue higher education because of financial issues. She indicated that her parents would offer to help pay for college, but she would not accept it because she does not like depending on her parents especially when she knows they are struggling so much.

**P4.** P4 stated that without the California DREAM Act, she would be discouraged to keep on moving forward in her education. She would still “give it a fight” because she has heard of AB 540 students who received a bachelor's degree. Thus, she knew getting a bachelor's degree was possible, but did not know to what extent it was possible.

**Question: What recommendations or advice would you give to other undocumented students who are attending or planning to attend college?**

**P1.** P1 recommended that all eligible undocumented students apply for the California DREAM Act as soon as the application process opens up. She stressed the importance of doing it as early as possible because she had a friend who waited until the end to apply and did not receive much aid. She reiterated applying for the California DREAM Act if undocumented students qualify for it because it does relieve some stress. Another recommendation P1 has is to work hard and get a good GPA to prove to oneself that he or she can pursue higher education.

**P2.** P2 would like to tell other undocumented students that they are more advantaged than undocumented students prior to the California DREAM Act.
Undocumented students cannot use the fact that they are undocumented as an excuse to not attend college because there are more resources available now. The government has passed numerous types of legislation and students continue to fight for more legislation to be passed so they can hopefully receive full financial aid one day. P2 stated that when she started college there was nothing, but she still attended college. However, the California DREAM Act came into place halfway through her college education and she is at a better place. The help is there for undocumented students even though it is not the same help that documented students receive.

**P3.** P3 recommended undocumented students seek out information because without information, many undocumented students get discouraged and do not pursue higher education. She indicated pursuing higher education is worth it, especially if a family is not middle class or for those who come from a low-income family. P3 stated there is current help available for undocumented students, so they should look for resources, start setting goals, and start choosing what college they want to go because “they have it easy right now.”

**P4.** P4 recommended undocumented students to “just stay in school, do not lose hope, and work hard with much passion and much effort because nothing can be done without effort.”
Question: What recommendations do you have for staff and faculty to help you and other undocumented students with your educational goals?

**P1.** P1 recommended that staff and faculty take the initiative to be more involved because it would be nice to see that faculty cares. When P1 goes to L.E.A.D. or DREAM Resource Center on campus, which are student-run, she hopes to have more faculty involved. This way, undocumented students can voice their concerns to the faculty and staff, and they can bring issues that arise to the faculty meeting. In addition, P1 indicates it would be easier and quicker to implement policy or changes if more faculty and staff are involved.

**P2.** P2 recommended that staff and faculty should be more aware of the undocumented student population or knowledgeable about the subject, so they can understand the struggles undocumented students are going through when interacting with them. Undocumented students would feel more comfortable and be willing to ask for more help if staff and faculty are more aware and talk more openly about undocumented students. Another recommendation is having more training from the financial aid office or admissions office. P2 noted that staff and faculty will be more open about the subject and “provide a safe zone for students where they won't feel like they're being discriminated against or they being seen differently because of their undocumented status.”

**P3.** P3 indicated that college faculty know much more than high school faculty and are doing a good job providing help. However, there are some faculty members who
are not familiar with the AB 540 or the California DREAM Act. P3 recommended that staff and faculty become more informed about the policy to ensure that undocumented students are not misinformed and get discouraged.

P4. P4 recommended it would be helpful for institutions to provide some type of communication about resources on campus for undocumented students. P4 found this resource [migrant place] on campus and no instructor introduced her to it. P4 thinks it would be helpful to have the will to seek help because most people are afraid to. It took P4 a while to find the resources on campus.

Question: Is there anything you wish you would have known that you believe would have made your college experience successful?

P1. P1 wished she knew how to apply for the California DREAM Act and fill out other necessary paperwork and had more guidance on applying or filling out the documents because she feels like she could have received more financial aid. She wishes she had a little bit more knowledge on how to fill out the necessary paperwork to qualify for financial aid and scholarships. Thus, P1 wishes there were more programs and resources available to assist undocumented students with the necessary paperwork or forms.

P2. P2 indicated that nothing could have made her college experience easier. P2 learned along the way of her higher education journey. She had to start from somewhere when she decided to attend college. By learning along the way, it made her college
experience better as she became stronger. She is involved with activism all the time to keep herself informed about the subject [undocumented students].

**P3.** P3 indicated she likes to get involved and seek out opportunities that are available. Thus, she sought out all the resources and organizations on campus as soon as she started college and is happy with all she found. P3 stated she wished she sought more scholarships because there are many more than the ones she saw. She wished she had known other scholarships for which she was eligible since she did not receive any.

**P4.** P4 indicated she should believe in herself a little more and give herself more credit for all the work and accomplishments she achieved because she thought she was not doing much. She realized she was doing big things after reflecting back on her education and how far she has gotten. She felt she needs to appreciate herself more, which would help her with her self-esteem. P4 indicated she put much effort into school and with help and resources, it is possible for students in her situation to obtain a college degree.

**Synopsis of college experience.** All four participants had similar yet different college experiences. The California DREAM Act has significantly impacted all four participants and made pursuing higher education possible. The California DREAM Act made their financial situations better as they received financial resources to help pay for tuition. Three out of four participants would not have pursued higher education if the California DREAM Act had not been implemented. Two of the four participants would still attempt to pursue higher education because of their personal desire and
determination. One of the participants would still pursue higher education even though she knew she would have to pay for college on her own due to her legal status; however, she did not know how long it will take her.

Each participant had different recommendations for other undocumented students attending or planning to attend college. P1 recommended students apply for the California DREAM Act once the application becomes available to ensure students receive all the financial aid for which they are eligible. P2 recommended not using the excuse of being undocumented students as a reason to not pursue higher education since there are more resources available now. P3 recommended students seek out information and resources since there was more help available. P4 recommended staying in school and working hard. All the participants proposed a similar recommendation for faculty and staff to help undocumented students achieve their educational goals. Participants recommended faculty and staff be more involved and aware of the undocumented student population and legislation that impacts undocumented students. One participant expressed the need for training faculty and staff. In addition, faculty and staff should provide more information about resources to undocumented students.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

An increased number of undocumented students have been pursuing higher education as new legislations have been implemented. However, undocumented students still face many challenges in college even after modest legislative initiatives, such as AB 130 and AB 131, have made college more affordable and accessible for them. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by AB 540 undocumented college students in pursuit of higher education after the implementation of the California DREAM Act. To capture the experiences and challenges of AB 540 undocumented college students, a qualitative approach was utilized to collect information from undocumented students. The following research questions provided a focus:

1. What impact has the California DREAM Act had on the educational experience of undocumented college students?
2. What challenges do undocumented students encounter while attending a 4-year university?

Four participants shared their experiences and answered questions about the challenges they faced while pursuing higher education as undocumented students. All the participants faced financial, academic, and legal challenges. They were also
interviewed about their college experiences and asked to suggest recommendations that would make their college experiences more successful.

All participants struggled financially to afford higher education. These financial challenges include not receiving financial aid on time, additional financial expenses due to a longer commute, difficulty in applying for scholarships, and difficulty paying for rent due to limited work hours. One thing they have in common is the amount of financial aid (grants only) received through the California DREAM Act, which is only enough to cover their tuition, with the exception of one participant who has not received her financial aid. Thus, all participants used scholarships or earnings from work to pay for their remaining tuition fees that are not covered by financial aid. Because financial aid is not enough to cover other expenses such as rent, books, food, and gas, all participants have to work part-time in order to pay for those expenses.

All the participants work part-time to focus on their academics. However, working impacts undocumented students' ability to do well in school and develop relationships with faculty and staff. Due to working between 11 and 20 hours per week, some of the participants are struggling to balance work and school by trying to keep up their grades. In addition, some participants do not have time to connect with school personnel due to their work schedules, and one participant has not reached out to school personnel because she does not feel that faculty and staff have the knowledge and awareness undocumented students have to fully understand her situation. However, the participants hope to connect and develop relationships with faculty and staff.
Although the majority of participants have not established any relationships with faculty and staff at Purple Blossom University, all participants have utilized student services resources on campus to seek more information and support. Participants have utilized student service resources such as College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), the Dreamer Resource Center, and Multicultural Center. In addition, all participants have a support system, which includes family members, friends, and previous school personnel to help them achieve their educational goals by motivating them to continue to do well in college.

All the participants raised their concern of traveling, whether it was visiting family back in their home country or traveling abroad. They expressed that their legal status impedes their ability to travel out of the country. If they leave the country, they are afraid of being unable to return to the United States due to the lack of proper documentation. All participants dealt with psychological feelings due to their legal status. Some do not feel they belong or feel accepted in the United States. Others felt they were prejudiced, depressed, anxious, stigmatized, sad, and angry. This is all because of their immigration status and how their situation has impacted their pursuit of higher education.

Lastly, the California DREAM Act has significantly impacted all four participants and made pursuing a higher education possible. The California DREAM Act made their financial situations better as they received financial resources to help pay for tuition. The majority of the participants would not have pursued higher education if the California
DREAM Act had not been implemented, as they are unable to afford it. Some participants would still pursue higher education due to their desire, but do not know how long it would have taken them to graduate. The California DREAM Act definitely made a huge difference in the lives of undocumented students as attending college is more affordable now.

**Conclusions**

Based on the results from this study, an understanding of the experiences and challenges undocumented students face is crucial. People from the same population as participants in this study continue to encounter financial, academic, and legal challenges as indicated in existing literature. From this study, people who work in the field of higher education will become more aware of this student population. This awareness will hopefully lead to the development of specialized services and resources for undocumented students in higher education. The findings from this study will contribute to the professional practice of higher education leadership by developing strategies and implementing them within campus programs to increase retention rates and academic success for undocumented students.

It is concluded based on the findings from the study that higher education leaders need to continue to give extra attention to undocumented students with regard to obtaining their college degree. It is critical that leaders take initiative and find ways to contribute and improve on the university's vision and mission, particularly in meeting the
needs of undocumented students. Although leaders are aware of issues relating to undocumented students pursuing higher education, some leaders are not taking action. Leaders need to prioritize issues and take action appropriately (Bateman, 2008). One continuous issue in the field of higher education is the cost of attendance, which makes it difficult for students to stay in college and obtain higher education, especially undocumented students. Higher education is getting more expensive as tuition and fees continue to rise each year due to state debt and other political reasons. One of the priorities that leaders need to take is implementing resources and services for undocumented students in order for them to be successful in college.

One example of great leadership in higher education is UC Berkeley. Leaders at UC Berkeley understand the need to develop solutions to support the educational goals of undocumented students. Thus, they took initiative to secure additional financial resources for undocumented students, such as institutional loans and work-study, to finance their education (Sanchez & So, 2015; University of California, Berkeley, n.d.). Leaders at UC Berkeley did not wait until more issues arose with undocumented students, but took immediate action to help this population. This demonstrates that leaders at UC Berkeley want to support undocumented students to pursue higher education and make college more affordable. In addition, they want to retain as many of their students as possible, including undocumented students. Other higher education leaders should definitely look at UC Berkeley as a model school to help undocumented students meet their educational needs and goals. The additional financial aid resources provided by UC
Berkeley positively impacts the institutions as a whole. As a result, leaders are successfully achieving their mission and goals in supporting all students, including undocumented students (Bateman, 2008).

It is important that leaders are proactive versus reactive and make decisions to meet the needs of undocumented students (Bateman, 2008). Leaders in higher education must recognize that undocumented students are as important as any other student population in higher education. The results of this study will encourage and allow educational leaders to better understand the challenges and barriers impacting undocumented students in higher education so they can meet the needs of undocumented students as they pursue their educational goals. A leader needs to seek opportunities to enact a change and fulfill a mission as well as have a clear vision with regard to creating something positive for the world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, three major recommendations can be made for meeting the needs of these participants and other undocumented students pursuing higher education.

Financial Aid

The first recommendation is to provide additional financial aid to undocumented students through the California DREAM Act. Currently, participants from this study received either state or institutional grants to help cover tuition ($6,872) for the 2015-
2016 academic year. They are ineligible to receive student loans or federal work-study. Thus, the state of California and or institutions of higher education should provide financial aid to mirror the type of financial aid that FAFSA offers. Undocumented students should be offered financial aid including student loans and work-study in addition to the grants to cover the full cost of attendance for every academic year.

California is taking measures to provide additional resources for undocumented students. Currently, Senate Bill 1210: California DREAM Loan Program is now in effect and offers student loans to undocumented students. However, this loan program is not offered to all undocumented students among the four higher education systems in California because the loan program is self-funded. To better implement this loan program, California needs to find direct funding so all institutions can offer undocumented students additional financial aid to help finance their education. The ability to receive student loans through the California DREAM Loan Program would reduce the financial burden and stress that many undocumented students experience. In addition, an increase in financial aid allows undocumented students to focus more of their time on academics rather than having to work numerous hours to pay for rent, gas, food, and other necessities.

Providing additional financial aid is beneficial to undocumented students pursuing higher education. First, more benefits can lead to a higher retention and graduation rate of undocumented students. More undocumented students can enroll in school full-time versus part-time if they had more financial aid to cover their college expenses. As a
result, undocumented students are more likely to complete their degree within the standard 4-year degree timeframe. Secondly, receiving more financial aid increases the accessibility of higher education for undocumented students. Many undocumented students contemplate the idea of pursuing higher education, but end up working instead because they cannot afford it. Therefore, an increase in financial aid would result in an increase in the number of undocumented students pursuing higher education. Undocumented students can choose to attend CSU or UC after high school rather than feeling obligated to attend community college if financial aid were increased for them.

**Outreach and Advertisement of Resources**

The second recommendation is that institutions need to provide additional outreach and advertisement of resources and support available on campus. Many of the participants from the study were unaware of resources and services provided on campus for undocumented students. Because undocumented students may be afraid to seek resources and support, it is crucial the institutions take initiative and inform undocumented students about resources on campus. Institutions can post flyers and banners throughout campus about resources available for undocumented students or send an email to inform all students about the resources on campus, especially when there is a new resource available. Thus, the information can be shared among all students. Documented students can share resources with their undocumented friends. This recommendation will benefit undocumented students, as they can take advantage of the campus resources available to help them succeed academically. In addition, institutions
are able to create a supportive campus environment for undocumented students. They can gain a greater sense of belonging and acceptance on campus as the institution acknowledges their existence on campus.

Specifically, higher education institutions must realize the necessity of creating a safe space for undocumented students, as they are a minority on campuses. Every institution should establish a safe space such as a student center for undocumented students. This center would provide undocumented students the ability to connect with and support one another. For example, Purple Blossom University recently opened the Dreamer Resource Center, which is a good start. However, many undocumented students are unaware of this resource on campus. Institutions need to be more proactive in promoting the safe spaces created for undocumented students so undocumented students know where to go for academic or emotional support as they pursue higher education. When undocumented students feel safe and supported in their higher education journey, they are more likely to academically succeed. As a result, the retention and graduation rates of undocumented students will increase with the establishment of student centers specifically for them.

**School Personnel Awareness and Involvement**

The last recommendation is to ensure that school personnel on campus are aware and informed of current immigration laws and issues that impact undocumented students. It is important for school personnel to stay up to date with all the laws and policies in order to address any concerns or questions undocumented students may have. It is
crucial to make sure school personnel do not misinform undocumented students on policies because providing inaccurate information can impact their ability to attend college. For example, financial aid personnel and other administrators on campus should provide correct financial aid information to undocumented students because failure to do so would impact their financial aid eligibility. As a result, they may not be able to attend college without the much-needed financial aid. One suggestion is that institutions provide school personnel with a monthly newsletter of the most up-to-date legislations so they are aware of any changes. In addition, school personnel should be required to take a class on the policies that impact undocumented students. Another recommendation is to have someone with knowledge and expertise about undocumented students provide an annual training or workshop to school personnel.

Not only should school personnel be aware of policies and issues regarding undocumented students, but they should also be more involved on campus such as engaging in school activities and organizations. As stated by one of the participants in this study, most school activities and organization are student-run. By having school personnel involved in school activities and organizations on campus, undocumented students can develop relationships and build trust with school personnel. If undocumented students are able to connect and develop relationships with school personnel, then they will feel comfortable enough to ask faculty and staff for help to academically succeed in higher education.
School personnel will become more aware and involved with undocumented students on campus once they begin to engage in school activities with them. This interaction is critical to the academic success of undocumented students. School personnel can best serve undocumented students by having knowledge of the most recent policies affecting these students. Furthermore, school personnel can serve as mentors to undocumented students by providing guidance on their journey through higher education. Being aware and knowledgeable about the situation of undocumented students allows school personnel to provide holistic advising to help them succeed academically. School personnel are a critical part in increasing the retention and graduation rates of undocumented students. They have the ability to advocate for undocumented students and can implement policies and changes to help undocumented students achieve their educational goals and obtain their degree.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results of the study, there are a few major recommendations for future research. First, future research should attempt to recruit a more diverse group of participants such as people of all genders. It is critical to gather as much information from participants and obtain their perspectives to better understand the obstacles undocumented face. More specifically, future research may lead to findings that reveal if male participants have similar or different challenges than female participants.
Secondly, a research study is needed to analyze the experiences and challenges of undocumented students who do not have a Latino background. It is critical to conduct a research study of a diverse AB 540 undocumented student population to determine if other ethnic groups are experiencing challenges similar to those of the Latino group. The same interview questions can be used, as the questions are open-ended and give participants the opportunity to provide all the challenges they encounter while they pursue higher education. Additional research will help higher education leaders develop strategies and solutions to better serve undocumented students while they are pursuing their college education.

Lastly, future research can examine undocumented students throughout the four higher education systems in California—California Community College (CCC), California State Universities (CSU), Universities in California (UC), and private colleges. By recruiting undocumented students from each higher education system, additional insights to determine the experiences and challenges undocumented students face can be provided. Comparing and contrasting undocumented students at different higher education systems can allow for a better understanding of the obstacles these students encounter in general and specifically in certain systems.
APPENDIX A

Recruiting Flyer

Participants Needed!

I am looking for AB 540 undocumented individuals under the California DREAM Act and would like to share the experiences and challenges that he/she encountered as they work toward his/her college education.

You are invited to participate in a face-to-face interview that will take 30 to 45 minutes to complete at a location that is most comfortable and convenient to you. Your participation in this study is confidential and anonymous. The interview includes some demographics information, challenges you encountered, and your overall college experiences. There will be no incentives for participating. For more information about this study or to volunteer to participate, please contact:

Hong Dao (Master candidate)
College of Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: XXXXXXX@XXXX.XXX

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Sacramento State.
APPENDIX B

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Greetings,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Hong Dao, who is a candidate for a master of arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and challenges encountered after the implementation of the California DREAM Act by the AB 540 undocumented college students.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed. The interview will be confidential and audio recorded if given permission. Your participation in this study will take 30 to 45 minutes to complete at a location that is most comfortable and convenient to you. The face-to-face interview includes some demographics information, challenges you encountered, and your overall college experiences. All responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Your real name and other information that would identify you will be removed from this study.

There will be no incentives or compensation for participating in this research. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to this research and findings could lead to greater understanding of the undocumented college students population. Your educational experiences will help other researchers and higher education leaders understand the challenges that undocumented students have when pursuing a college degree. Furthermore this study can help on ways to properly meet and understand the needs of these students and their educational goals.

If you are willing to participate please call or email Hong Dao a date, time, and a location that suits you and she will do her best to be available. She will contact you to confirm an appointment time. If you have any additional questions about this research, you may contact Hong Dao at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by e-mail XXXXXXX@XXXX.XXX.

Best regards,
Dreamer Resource Center
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in research study conducted by Hong Dao, who is a candidate for a master of arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at California State University, Sacramento. This purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and challenges encountered by the AB 540 undocumented college students after the implementation of the California DREAM Act as they work towards a college education.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed which will be confidential and audio recorded if given permission by the participant. Your participation in this study will take 30 to 45 minutes to complete at a location that is most comfortable and convenient to you. The face-to-face interview includes some demographics information, challenges you encountered, and your overall college experiences. There will be no incentives or compensation for participating in this research.

Benefits:
There is no direct benefit to you by participating in this study. However, this study can raise awareness of the undocumented college student population. Your educational experiences will help other researchers understand the challenges that undocumented students have when pursuing their college degree so they can properly meet the needs of these students and their educational goals. It can also contribute to the movement for other state DREAM Acts and ultimately the federal DREAM Act.

Risks:
There are minimal to no risks involved with participating in this study. You may skip any questions you don’t want to answer or stop the interview at any time. However, if you experience any psychological risks, you are encouraged to stop the interview and recommended to contact the Purple Blossom University Counseling and Psychological Services at (916) 278-6416 for assistance.

Confidentiality:
Your participation will be kept confidential from instructors and staffs. All responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Your real name and other information that would identify you will be removed from this study. All files and data, including interview recordings and transcript of the interviews will be kept on a password-protected laptop. All data will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.
Contact:
If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Hong Dao at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by e-mail XXXXXXXXX@XXX.XXX or Dr. Jose Chavez, CSUS faculty advisor for this investigation at XXXXXXXX@XXX.XXX. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Do you orally agree to participate in the study and understand the information provided above?
Do you orally agree to be audio tape recorded?
Survey Questions

1. How do you identify your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other: ___________

2. What is your age?
   a. 18 to 20
   b. 21 to 23
   c. 24 to 26
   d. 27+

3. What year are you in school?
   a. Freshman (0 to 30 units)
   b. Sophomore (30.1 to 59.9 units)
   c. Junior (60 to 89.9 units)
   d. Senior (90+ units)

4. Are you a full time or part time student?
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Challenges

1. Describe your family background.
   a. What country of origin are you and your family from?
   b. What was the primary reason you or your family relocated to the United States?
   c. How old were you when you arrived to the United States? Have you lived in the United States since then?
   d. How many people live in your household?
   e. What is your family’s socioeconomic status?
   f. What kind of support and relationship do you have with your family?
   g. What keeps you motivated to continue with your education?

2. What are some financial challenges you face as an undocumented student?
   a. How have you been paying for tuition throughout your college career?
   b. Is the amount of financial aid you receive enough to help you cover your educational expenses? Why or why not?
   c. Do you work? If yes, how many hours do you work a week?

3. What are some academic challenges you face as an undocumented student?
   a. What kind of relationship have established with staff/faculty/counselors? What kind of support do they offer you?
   b. What kind of student services support and resources do you utilize on campus and off campus?
   c. What kind of support and relationship do you have with your friends and anyone that has helped you with your educational goals?
   d. What support or resources do you believe will help you and other undocumented students going forward?

4. What are some legal challenges you face as an undocumented student?
   a. How has your immigration status impact your educational goals?
   b. Have you experience any psychological feeling because of your status? If yes, what kind of psychological feelings?

5. What are other challenges you face as an undocumented student that was previously mentioned?

6. What is the biggest challenge you’ve encountered?
a. Have you overcome any of the challenges you faced? Why or why not?

College Experiences

1. In what ways has the California DREAM Act helped you in achieving your educational goals?

2. If the California DREAM Act was not implemented, would you pursue higher education? Why or why not?

3. What recommendations or advice would you give to other undocumented students that are attending or planning to attend college?

4. What recommendations do you have for staff and faculty to help you and other undocumented students with your educational goals?

5. Is there anything you wish you would have known that you believe would have made your college experience successful?
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