BEST PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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ABSTRACT

Undocumented and DACAmented community college students have been largely left out of research on student success despite decades of research showing that undocumented students face significantly more barriers than their peers, impacting their persistence and completion rates. The purpose of this study is to identify best practices in how Midwest community colleges support their undocumented student population.

The qualitative research utilized a case study methodology, including semistructured interviews with five administrators from five Midwestern community colleges. Critical race theory, intersectionality theory, and Valenzuela et al's institutional undocu-competence were used as conceptual frameworks for analyzing data on the supports provided for undocumented students. The perceptions of administrators about their institution's supports for undocumented students, along with analysis of electronic data, were compared against the Valenzuela et al.'s seven conditions to achieve undocu-competence.

The findings revealed that certain supports helped increase administrators' perception of how adequate their institution's support systems were for their undocumented students. Five common conditions were identified that determined whether a college administrator perceived the support as substantial: administrative advocate, comprehensive professional development, advocacy during resistance, departmental collaboration, and building trust. This study's findings can be used by administrators, faculty, and staff to strengthen their policies, programs, and support structures for undocumented students.

KEY WORDS: undocumented, DACA, student support, community college

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Rose, my mini-me, my baby girl since day one. I know this process took some of my time away from you, and I hope you know I did it all to give us a better future. I hope you see that you can achieve your biggest goals and are as proud of me as I am of you every day.

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores the range of initiatives, policies, and procedures that five Midwest community colleges have implemented to support undocumented and students that have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), along with students from mixed-status families. The information gathered from this research will inform community college administrators on best practices for supporting this population and shape the development of targeted support for this unique student population.

FOCUS ON UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

From the early 1990s until 2007, the United States experienced a rapid uptick in the number of unauthorized immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center, 2016). Unauthorized, or undocumented, immigrants are defined by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) as those who are foreign born "without permission to be in the United States" (Martin, 2010). These individuals typically entered the U.S. legally through the visa system and stayed beyond their authorized time period or entered the U.S. without authorization (Neinhusser, 2017). For this dissertation, undocumented students will also include students who have received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA). In 2012, then-President Obama issued an executive order granting a segment of undocumented individuals who met age and educational requirements deferred or delayed deportation and work authorization for two years (Department of Homeland Security, 2017).

As of 2021, approximately 427,345 undocumented students are enrolled in postsecondary education, representing 2% of the 19,646,000 total postsecondary student population (Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2021). 181,000 of these undocumented students possess or are eligible to apply for DACA. The majority of undocumented students, 81%, enroll in public institutions and according to research may be overrepresented in community colleges, which provide the most accessible and affordable option for most students (Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2021; Valenzuela et al., 2015). Of the 12 Midwest states, only Illinois shares specific statistics about its undocumented students, disaggregating by DACA-eligible and non-DACA eligible (Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2021).

Table 1: 2021 Illinois Undocumented Student Data

STATE	TOTAL UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS	DACA-ELIGIBLE	NON-DACA ELIGIBLE	UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS GRADUATING HS
Illinois	17,757	8,784	8,973	4,000

As of the writing of this dissertation, three states (Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana) prohibit undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition, and two states (Alabama and South Carolina) prohibit undocumented students from enrolling in a public postsecondary institution (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2022). Seventeen states and the District of Columbia currently have comprehensive access for undocumented students, and only two of those are Midwest states, Illinois and Minnesota (Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2021).

The increase in the number of undocumented students starting in 2012 can also be partially attributed to the issuance of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA). A 2018 nationwide study of DACA recipients revealed a 20% increase in college enrollment as a direct correlation with receiving DACA (Kuka et al., 2018). The term “Dreamers” is used to describe younger, typically 16- to 24-year-old undocumented or DACAmented individuals. DACA was

fully rescinded by President Trump through executive order in September 2017, and later partially upheld by the courts to allow only renewal applications (Department of Homeland Security, 2017). Trump's decision was reversed in February 2021 via executive order, opening up DACA to new applicants (Shear & Kanno-Youngs, 2021).

The Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, first introduced by the U.S. Senate in 2001, has several versions in the House and Senate, but has yet to come up to the floor for a vote. Some of the versions, including the DREAM Act reintroduced in 2021 by Senators Durbin and Graham, would alter the futures of many of these students, as they provide a path towards permanent residency and the benefits that come along with it, including Title IV funding eligibility. All DACA recipients would be automatically eligible under the 2021 DREAM Act, along with other students who meet the same eligibility requirements but have not applied for or received DACA (Semotiuk, 2021). President Biden's comprehensive immigration reform plan, the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, mirrors several of the core features of the DREAM Act (The White House, 2021). Under the Act, 11 million undocumented immigrants and their spouses and children would be immediately eligible for Lawful Prospective Immigrant Status and several million more would receive permanent residency based on their entry to United States as children (Center for Migration Studies, 2021).

HIGHER EDUCATION'S RESPONSE

Considering that undocumented students have lower retention and completion rates than their peers, research into how best to support these students will provide tangible tools for administrators to identify service gaps, develop initiatives, and align staffing and other supports for undocumented students. Increases in the success rates of undocumented students will

contribute to the increase the overall college's student success rates and build trust in the immigrant community that may translate to increased future enrollment.

Supporting Undocumented Students

As the undocumented student population at community colleges swell, institutions struggle to support the unique needs of these students (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). There have been decades of substantial research into best practices for providing academic and support services for other historically marginalized groups, such as low-income, African American, and Latinx students. Yet, there is scant research on how community colleges can best support undocumented students, as they face significant barriers to entrance, retention, and completion of higher education. Research has shown that these barriers include a lack of financial resources, increased mental health issues, and the juggling of greater family and employment responsibilities (Salinas et al., 2019). An undocumented population that does not meet its potential educationally and economically affects not only their families that they support, but also the communities in which they live and the welfare of society as a whole (Borjian, 2018). As described earlier, an estimated 2%, or 427,345 of the higher education student population, is undocumented, which is small in relation to the overall enrollment of higher education students of 19,646,000, but not an insignificant number of undocumented students, particularly at larger urban community colleges where undocumented residents are more concentrated. As a frame of reference, in 2015, 4% of all undergraduates were military-connected. Many community colleges offer staff and centers dedicated to military-connected students, while few offer designated staff or physical space for undocumented students (American Council on Education, 2015).

The 20% of estimated 98,000 undocumented high school graduates who enroll in higher education face barriers associated with their immigration status, including psychological distress

(depression and anxiety), isolation, alienation, and poor academic performance (Zong & Batalova, 2019; Alif et al., 2020). The few studies conducted on institutional support for undocumented college students have revealed that institutional agents can significantly improve the campus climate and increase feelings of comfortability with disclosing challenges they face due to their status (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). Greater support on campus decreases feelings of alienation and emotional distress for undocumented students.

Understanding the Effects of Undocumented Students

The lack of data and research on undocumented students should be a concern to community college administrators, as research has shown that community colleges make up the majority of higher education entry for undocumented students (Valenzuela et al, 2015). More research on this population can help shape programming and policies to improve outcomes and thus improve enrollment and completion numbers for colleges with significant undocumented student populations. Aside from the impact on college success data, having a more educated and highly skilled undocumented population could increase the numbers of workers in the U.S. who can fill skill gaps. For example, a report by Zong et al (2017) found that 39,000 individuals with DACA are employed in professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services. The future growth of the American economy is reliant on a skilled and educated workforce, otherwise there will be a deficit in educated and skilled workers compared to demand. (New American Economy Research, 2021). A 2021 report by the New American Economy Research Fund found that the U.S. does not have enough highly skilled workers in the computer-technology field and are filling the gaps with immigrant workers.

Undocumented students who do not attend higher education will face a future job market with shrinking opportunities and wages that will not sustain a family, forcing millions of these

individuals into precarious financial straits. The Georgetown University (2013) *Report on Job Growth and Education Requirements* found that the highest growth areas are in those requiring substantial postsecondary education. Therefore, not only do undocumented students need the support of institutions and American society, but America needs undocumented students to keep up with future economic changes (Vasilogambros, 2016). With approximately one in four jobs in the U.S. requiring a license, the ten states that have passed laws allowing certain undocumented Americans to apply for professional licenses have increased the number of undocumented individuals in high-needs field such as nursing (Vasilogambros, 2018).

Recent news reports have shown that there are many successful undocumented students who have contributed to and changed their communities for the good. For example, Loyola University in Chicago has a large undocumented medical student population, and undocumented lawyers are graduating from other institutions as well each year across the country (Conway & Hernandez, 2018; Medina, 2017). More research is needed not just to support the top-performing undocumented students at elite universities, but also the part-time, adult students completing a career technical certificate at their local community college.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As the research has revealed, undocumented students make up a small portion of all higher education students but face significant barriers due to their immigration status. Much of the research on this segment of the higher education population is on students at baccalaureate institutions, with little written about undocumented students at community colleges. The U.S. economy is reliant on a skilled workforce, and having undocumented community college students that complete certifications and degree can help contribute to filling some of these skill gaps. Understanding the unique needs of this population and how to best support them at

community colleges, is important for administrators to have a framework for implementing change processes at their institutions.

Overview to the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify best practices in how five Midwest community colleges support their undocumented student population. This research provides community college leaders with the knowledge to understand undocumented students' unique strengths and barriers and to equip them with the tools necessary to be successful, and thus revise and implement institutional support programs and policies for this population. To achieve this purpose, the following driving questions were used to drive this study:

1. What do college administrators see as the most important factors in retention and completion of undocumented students at their institution?
2. What services/programs have institutions implemented that support undocumented students, and what was the process for implementation?
3. How have institutions used policy and governance structures to support undocumented students?
4. What are college administrators' perception of the adequacy (comprehensiveness) of services, programs, and policies to support undocumented students at their institution?

Delimitation and Limitations

Limitations of this study include the researcher's operating assumption that the participants respond honestly and openly to all questions. Since the sample size of the study is small, the findings could limit the applicability and transferability of the research findings to other community colleges. Personal biases due to my employment as a community college counselor also may have affected interpretations of interviews and data analysis. Lastly, participant's responses may have been influenced by their personal bias on this topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Delimitations of this study include the population interviewed and geographic specificity. Other studies have interviewed undocumented students to understand their experiences in higher education. Because of the vulnerable nature of this population and difficulty in identifying undocumented community college students, this study focused on the experiences of community college administrators who shape policies, programs, and services that affect these students. The perceptions of the administrators on their college efforts may not align with those of the students. Despite other states such as California being at the forefront of responding to the needs of undocumented students, this study's geographical scope is limited to Midwest community colleges, which has not been previously researched.

Research Assumptions

The assumptions made in this study included:

1. Participants had a genuine interest in participating in this research and were not motivated by other factors.
2. Participants answered questions in an honest manner and were not forced to participate in the study. Participants were aware that their confidentiality and anonymity would be preserved, and that they could leave the study at any time.
3. The sample criteria were appropriate based on the participants' similar experiences. This was achieved through questions on their roles as it relates to undocumented students.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions are offered for terms used in this dissertation that may have either contradictory uses and definitions or may be unfamiliar to the reader.

Blue-Collar: Workers who do physical work and typically do not work in an office (Oxford Reference, 2022)

Dreamer: This term is typically used to describe younger, undocumented individuals (between the ages of 16-24), who were brought to the United States as children. This term originated with the introduction of the immigration bill named the Dream Act in the early 2000s (American Immigration Council, 2021).

DACA: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. An executive order signed by then-President Obama in 2013 that granted certain undocumented individuals a three-year, renewable stay from deportation and work authorization (Zong et al, 2017).

Executive Order: A presidential order directing federal agencies to use their resources in a set way. These orders are subject to review by the judiciary and can be overturned if it is found to be unconstitutional or not supported by statute (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2022).

Foundation Office: An independent 501(c)3 charitable organization within a college, whose purpose is fundraising and grant writing for college scholarships and programming (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2022).

Historically Marginalized: I favor this terminology as opposed to "underrepresented" or "minority," because it signifies the power inequities inherent in group dynamics in the U.S. This term will be elaborated on further in Chapter Two (Yosso, 2005, Chen & Rhoads, 2016)

Illegal Alien: A term used by political and immigration officials to describe undocumented individuals and largely considered demeaning by researchers and activists (Hamlin, 2022)

Immigrant: A person who lives in a country that is not the country of their birth (Bolter 2019).

Latinx: A gender-neutral, non-binary term used in place of Latino/a and/or Hispanic. This will be the preferred term unless the aforementioned terms are used in direct quotations or government reports (Steinmetz, 2018).

Microaggressions: Unintentional or intentional verbal and nonverbal insults or snubs that convey negative messages to certain group based on their membership in a marginalized group (Sue, 2010).

Stop-Out: When a college student stops attending for a period of time before returning back to college (Hoyt, 2004).

Undocumented: Individuals living in the United States who have an unauthorized presence or did not go through legal immigration processes. When this term is used, it will include individuals with DACA (Immigrants Rising, 2022).

White-Collar: Workers who perform information-based and nonphysical work, typically in an office (Oxford Reference, 2022).

ORGANIZATION OF THE DOCUMENT

Chapter One introduced an overview of presenting issue, a statement of the problem, the purpose statement, and outlined the research questions this study intended to answer.

Chapter Two reviews the literature related to undocumented students in the U.S. higher education system. The literature review describes the unique barriers faced by undocumented students as they navigate the higher education system. The qualitative paradigms of critical race theory and Valenzuela et al.'s (2015) institutional undocu-competence (IUC) is discussed as a framework for conceptualizing the initiatives and supports outlined by the college administrators, as these frameworks aligns with viewing historically marginalized populations and their interaction with the power structure of college campuses, along with the institutional conditions needed to support undocumented students. Finally, this chapter addresses factors that have impacted colleges' efforts to support this population.

Chapter Three describes the design of the qualitative research case study. The chapter also explains the procedure, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis used in the study. Lastly, this chapter examines my role as a research instrument, along with the importance of the study's trustworthiness, validity, and reliability.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research, which are organized by the research questions and are outlined through participant interviews and researcher observations. The chapter concludes with themes that emerged from the interviews.

Chapter Five provides a discussion and analysis of the data on best practices for aiding community colleges to better support their undocumented students. Data is examined to determine the change processes community colleges undertook to support their undocumented students and the perceptions of community college administrators of the success of these change efforts. The data analysis formed the basis of findings and future best practice implementation for community colleges.

Chapter Six addresses implications of the study, delimitations, and limitations, and offers recommendations for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature on the experiences of undocumented students navigating higher education institutions, with particular focus on community college systems. Critical race theory and Valenzuela et al.'s (2015) IUC is discussed as a qualitative framework for conceptualizing the initiatives and supports outlined by the college administrators, along with the institutional conditions needed to support undocumented students. Finally, this chapter investigates research on internal and external factors that have influenced other colleges' efforts in addressing the needs of these students.

There is a paucity of research on community colleges and undocumented students, as most of the research has focused on programs and policies at baccalaureate institutions, which have different challenges and greater financial and staffing resources to support this population (Negron-Gonzales, 2017). The changes in immigration policies during the Obama, Trump, and now Biden Administrations have spurred research on how these students navigate postsecondary education. More traditional-aged (18-25-year-olds) community college students make up the largest percentage of undocumented students, yet there remains a moderate number of adult students who may have more significant needs and responsibilities.

The literature review begins with the history of community colleges and the role they have played in educating all students, including historically marginalized groups such as undocumented students. Next, an understanding of the terminology and basic characteristics of undocumented students is covered to better understand how undocumented students are diverse

but share similarities. Third, literature pertaining to each research question will be reviewed. The chapter also dives into the theoretical frameworks that help understand the barriers and best practices for supporting the success of undocumented students. Lastly, the research looks at national and local policies that provide environments for these students to thrive in education and the workforce.

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

In response to several national social and economic forces of the early 19th century, Joliet Junior College was opened in 1901, and the junior college movement was born. Junior colleges served the economic needs of the new society, including training workers for the increasingly skilled and semi-skilled industrialized workplace. Further education was also viewed by society as beneficial to the community and as a means towards upward mobility (Cohen et al., 2014). Yet, access to junior/community college was largely restricted to upper income, white males even after 1944 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill. The GI Bill provided financial access to higher education after military service. This did not lead to an immediate increase in historically marginalized communities such as Black Americans, because many institutions were not admitting Black American students. As segregation broke, and historically marginalized populations began to enroll in public institutions, community college provided opportunities for these students.

Community colleges were the first higher education institutions providing an open-door admissions policy, increasing enrollment of nontraditional and marginalized students, with non-white students now making up a larger share of community college enrollment (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). The U.S. economy continues to require a more

college-educated workforce to fill skill gaps, and college graduates also boast significant positive social outcomes including higher voting rates and lower crime rates (Pew Research Center, 2016). Community colleges have played an important role in keeping up with demand for college graduates and skilled workers by offering opportunities to historically marginalized and low-income students.

Community colleges serve multiple functions. First, American community colleges are open admission institutions that award a variety of general education and career-based certifications and degrees for students intending to enter the workforce, along with transfer-oriented associate degrees for students transferring to a baccalaureate institution. Employers have relied on community colleges to meet their training needs. Initially, higher education began as a training ground for clergy, eventually expanding to the bourgeois class to aid in their path to political positions. For hundreds of years, until junior colleges were created in 1901, the higher education system served primarily the elite class of white men (Ledesma et al, 2015). The passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act) expanded access to public education to the general public, yet historically marginalized groups did not benefit from this change until the second Morrill Act of 1890 opened access to land grant institutions to racial minorities (Drury, 2003).

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

There has been considerable variation in the language used to describe undocumented immigrants in America. The debate around this language has been contentious and higher education has not been immune to opinions on terminology (Hiltner, 2017). This study is grounded in a postmodern framework, and postmodern theorists argue vehemently about the power that language and terminology have in maintaining hierarchy and oppressive structures of

nondominant groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As defined legally, undocumented students are those who entered the country through legal channels, such as a tourist visa, and remained in the U.S. beyond their authorized time period (Southern, 2016). The term "illegal alien," or "illegal immigrant" commonly used by political and immigration officials, is considered by researchers and immigrants' rights activists to be a demeaning and offensive term for undocumented individuals (Hiltner, 2017). Undocumented is typically preferred by immigrants and activists, and thus will be the primary terminology used in this research, unless referring to a specific type of undocumented group such as DACA recipients (Hiltner, 2017).

A distinct category of undocumented Americans arose in the early 2000s with the Congressional DREAM Act Bill, which intended to provide a path towards citizenship for minor students who entered the U.S. with parent(s) or other guardians. The undocumented individuals, typically used for high school and post-secondary students, are referred to as "DREAMers." DREAM is an acronym which stands for Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors. This term has been adopted by the media, politicians, and higher education institutions, but has met some resistance and controversy as it has typically been used to describe only "high-performing" 16-24-year old undocumented students attending high school or college. This has effectively dismissed the voice and worth of the vast majority of undocumented individuals who do not fit in this narrow demographic. Another related term that is used synonymously with DREAMers, is "DACAmented," with the DACA signifying "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals." DACA was an executive order signed by then-President Obama in 2012, which intended to provide deportation and work relief for individuals eligible under the failed DREAM Act without the path to citizenship. DACAmented is thus distinguished from "undocumented" in that it is used for individuals who applied for and were approved for DACA.

Most higher education institutions do not have a mechanism in place for tracking enrollment of undocumented students or do not publish such data, therefore there are only estimates available as to undocumented student enrollment (Nienhusser & Espino, 2017). Several states that have in-state resident tuition policies for undocumented students, require eligible students to sign an affidavit prior to enrollment, which makes the estimation far more accurate. Since community colleges charge by district boundaries and do not require an affidavit, the institutions do not have the capability to track how many undocumented students are enrolled. Numerous studies have shown that most undocumented students enroll in community colleges over baccalaureate institutions (Negron-Gonzales, 2017). Some researchers have used "non-resident alien" status to study this population, which is reported annually to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This data, though publicly available, provides an inaccurate measure of undocumented populations because most community college applications do not ask this question or make it optional (Flores & Osegura, 2009; Nienhusser, 2014; Nienhusser & Espino, 2017).

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Undocumented students as a whole are diverse in countries of origin and languages spoken at home. Teranishi et al. (2015), reported that, in a nationwide sample of 909 participants attending postsecondary institutions, 33 languages and 55 countries of origin were represented. Teranishi et al. also noted that, in other ways, undocumented students share similar background and experiences, including:

- 90.3% came from low to middle-income households (under $50,000 annually)
- 72.4% worked while attending college
- 64.1% had a family member that is a citizen or lawful resident (mixed-status family)

- 67.6% were first-generation college students
- Over 75% were concerned about deportation or detention.

RETENTION AND COMPLETION FACTORS

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Understanding the academic challenges and differences between undocumented students and their peers can help community colleges address the barriers they face and support their retention. Terriquez (2015) research indicated that undocumented students overall have stronger secondary and post-secondary academic backgrounds (grade point average and standardized test scores) than their citizen peers at community colleges yet are at greater risk of stopping and dropping out. These findings contradict the high-retention rates experienced by documented students with undocumented parents (Terriquez, 2015). Previous research has found that lower retention and graduation rates can be attributed to the myriad challenges and needs that their immigration status brings, including financial, legal, and health. In a study of undocumented students, Terriquez (2015) controlled for all variables that would affect retention and graduation rates, including household income, first-generation status, and prior academic performance and found that the students' status as undocumented Americans was the primary contributing factor to this phenomenon. Cheng et al. (2017) found that, as most undocumented students speak English as their second or third language, some students may enter college lacking academic readiness in reading and writing. Nietzel's (2018) research indicated that decades of research on community college students requiring developmental remediation upon entry has shown a significantly lower retention and graduation rate.

Financial Ramifications

All undocumented students are ineligible for federal financial aid programs that could provide grants and loans to defray costs of postsecondary education (Southern, 2016). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (202), this is due to the requirement of permanent residency (green card) or citizenship to apply for federal aid. Over half of the states in the U.S. do not have equitable in-state tuition policies, resulting in undocumented students paying out-of-district or out-of-state rates at public colleges and universities, which can be over triple the cost of in-state/in-district tuition. Most colleges, particularly community colleges, have payment plan options that can make tuition payments more affordable, yet this still presents a significant burden for students considering their familial and financial responsibilities.

In a study of 744 community college students in California, Terriquez (2015) found that undocumented students were five times more likely to stop-out, with 81% of these students stating the primary reason was affording college, compared with 41% for native-born peers. Undocumented students are ineligible for federal financial aid and have limited ability to secure private loans due to difficulties verifying their identity (Chen & Rhoads, 2016). Undocumented students are far more likely to work multiple jobs and support their household. “Katerina,” an undocumented student interviewed by Chang et al. (2017), spoke about the financial pressures she faced after her father was deported: “I’ve had to become independent really quickly. I have to pay rent, books, and everything else out of my pocket. So, I’ve been working like 30 hours a week since my freshman year” (p. 199). Another student in the study, “Enrique,” spoke about the financial constraints that undocumented students face without awareness from their peers:

> A lot of undocumented students that I know can’t afford to live on campus or have to work on top of going to school in order to help their families or even themselves because we can’t get financial aid. It’s definitely one of the challenges people don’t realized or even imagine. (Chang et al., 2017, p. 201)

These stories are common for undocumented students who are often forced to piece together multiple low-wage and physically and mentally stressful jobs due to their limited employment options. Since these students are also not eligible for any federal or state public welfare benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and unemployment insurance, they do not have any safety-net to fall back on or cushion to supplement like other low-wage.

Health Impact

The limbo status that undocumented students are left in due to ongoing debate and lack of action to pass comprehensive immigration reform, coupled with fears of deportation, can wreak havoc on the mental health of these students. Numerous studies have found that undocumented individuals are far more prone to mental health conditions, particularly generalized anxiety disorder. The Teranishi et al. (2015) found that 28.5% and 36.7% of female participants reported clinical anxiety levels, compared with 4% and 9% respectively for the norm population. With the high percentage of students with mixed-status families, this elevated anxiety may be due to personal fears of deportation or that of family members (Gamez et al., 2017). The cause of this anxiety is not as important for colleges to understand as is providing accessible and culturally competent mental health counseling to enhance their ability to cope with multiple stressors. Undocumented students are also not eligible for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act insurance exchanges, or Medicaid unless they are under the age of 18. They often rely on a patchwork of local clinics and alternative medicine to fill the gaps (Chen & Rhoads, 2016).

FAMILIAL

Family can be an immense source of support for undocumented students, as parents express great pride in their children's achievement. Negron-Gonzales' (2017) interviews with multiple students affirmed this notion, as students mentioned that support from the community and family kept them enrolled. For many of these students, they are the first in their family to attend college and may be paving the path for their younger siblings. Chang et al. (2017) heard from one student that "It's more or less that I want to pave a path for my younger cousins and nieces. Like, I want him to know it's not impossible to keep on going, especially when you find something that you're passionate about" (205). Families can also present challenges to the retention and completion of undocumented students who typically have greater familial responsibilities than their peers, ranging from caring for younger siblings to working to supplement parent income.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS' INTERACTION WITH COLLEGE

Social service fields, such as counseling and social work, have been called upon to include immigrant and refugees in their work on serving diverse and underrepresented populations (Nienhusser & Espino 2017). Community colleges have historically been the primary postsecondary educational institution serving the educational needs of immigrant and refugee students. Due to the absence of formal theories on working with undocumented students in higher education, Nienhusser and Espino (2017) recommend following an informal theory or framework based on life experience, personal development of the college employee, and the limited research available pertaining to this population.

The majority of research on undocumented students and their interactions with higher education professionals has revealed that these students face negative attitudes from staff and

faculty. For example, through a survey of undocumented students at multiple institutions, Nienhusser et al. (2016) identified nine microaggressions experience by these students, including "limited college choice information for undocumented students, insensitive behaviors towards undocumented students, unsatisfactory college choice processes that do not take into account undocumented students' immigration status, and unaware institutional agents who overlook the existence of immigration status" (p. 428).

Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (p. 1). Nienhusser et al. (2016) found that the microaggressions were significantly correlated to the student's access to college. Contreras's (2009) study of the Washington state system after the passage of the Washington DREAM Act showed similar results, with some undocumented students experiencing blatant racism and discrimination. On the flip side, several of the 20 students interviewed by Contreras (2009) also encountered staff and faculty who were supportive and helped them navigate institutional barriers.

Despite these challenges, undocumented students bring a wealth of strengths, resources, and identities that shape their experiences in higher education. Several researchers have argued for a strength-based framework in researching this population based on Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth (Chang et al., 2017; Person et al., 2016). This model is underscored by the notion that institutions inherently marginalize underrepresented groups because institutions are based on dominant group norms. From the standpoint of the dominant norms that shape higher education, undocumented students appear to have deficits and conflicts because of

their cultural differences and "otherness" (Person et al., 2016). This may be especially apparent at predominately white and middle- to upper-income institutions where undocumented students often have double or triple minority status based on their race, citizenship status, and other nondominant identities (e.g., sexual orientation, disability, gender).

Similar to Yosso's (2005) model, Gildersleeve and Ranero (2010) stress the importance of social and cultural contexts that undocumented students bring to the institution of higher education. The researchers use sociocultural theory to posit that undocumented students make meaning and develop their educational identities through their culture. Gildersleeve and Ranero (2010) argue the need to view this group's experience in higher education in light of the history and context of their experience with the educational system, which typically has meant outright or subtle exclusion of immigrants: "Different groups participate differently and therefore reap different outcomes. Again, participation in the sociocultural sense is viewed as co-constructed by the social contexts, including one's schooling, as well as more individualized, internal forces" (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010, p. 21). Access to college and college-going literacy is a learned mindset that is not taught or has been neglected by the K-12 system when educating undocumented students:

> Historicizing college-going for undocumented students affords students affairs professionals a lens through which to reimagine what going to college may mean for undocumented students and to reimagine what serving and supporting those students may look like in their professional practice. (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010, p. 21)

Gildersleeve & Ranero (2010) stress the importance of considering the historical context of these students' upbringings when developing support for undocumented students and training for college staff.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION

There is little research on what programs, policies, and conditions are necessary to create a supportive environment for these students. Valenzuela et. al (2015) created a framework known as institutional undocu-competence (IUC), which arose out of a critique of the cultural competence framework that focuses on awareness of other cultures rather than action. The authors argued using a social justice lens to improve equity within institutions. Seven conditions are included as a part of IUC:

1. Professional development for staff and faculty
2. Advocating visibly for students
3. Tailoring outreach and recruitment activities
4. Increasing financial aid opportunities
5. Supporting Undocumented student organizations
6. Providing health and psychological services
7. Creating an overall welcoming environment.

These recommendations for creating IUC are similar to the decades of research on best practices in educating underrepresented groups. Despite this research and knowledge of best-practices, administrators in regions of the country with significant numbers of undocumented students are still grappling with how best to serve this population (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Support for undocumented students at the community college level varies considerably, particularly by state or region of the country. For example, in California, which has the largest unauthorized population of any state, there are numerous community colleges that have programs and centers dedicated to this population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2016), While three states bar undocumented students from receiving in-state educational benefits such as resident tuition, effectively penalizing community colleges and the undocumented students they serve.

Illinois, with the third largest undocumented population in the country, has seen considerable state support for undocumented students, with the 2011 passing of the Illinois Dream Act, opening scholarship and college savings plans for undocumented students graduating from high school and in-state tuition for all residents through Public Act 093-007 (Illinois General Assembly, 2017). Some Midwest universities, including University of Illinois at Chicago and Loyola University, have opened centers and/or established programs to increase retention rates.

UNDOCUMENTED-FRIENDLY POLICIES

At least 20 states and the District of Columbia have adopted an in-state tuition policy for undocumented students, where students that meet certain criteria, typically attending and graduating from a secondary school or equivalent, pay in-state tuition rates (Nunez, 2017). Several states also have a statewide scholarship program for undocumented students (Nunez & Holthaus, 2017). Implementation of policies and procedures to support undocumented students has largely occurred at the institutional level and varies considerably by the institution. After the election of President Trump, some community college boards, such as Harper College in Schaumburg Illinois, passed nonbinding resolutions of support for undocumented students (Harper College, 2017). These resolutions were not intended to implement policy, procedures, or support services for affected students; rather, they attempted to show the undocumented student community that the colleges support them.

In higher education, policymaking can occur on many different levels from systems level of federal and state departments of education/community college boards to employees at individual colleges. Nienhusser (2014) studied 45 community college employees and their role in implementing policies that impact undocumented students. The researcher chose to look at

individual institutional administrators, explaining that these individuals represent a wide range of departments (e. g., financial aid, admissions, and student services), and have considerable responsibility and influence to be policymakers. These individuals may not recognize their role as policymakers or may not associate their everyday decisions with influencing or creating policy. Their role is to "issue rules and directives that will fill in the details of a given policy and make it more applicable to a specific context" (Nienhusser, 2014, p. 427). Policy at the systems level is generally vague, shifting the responsibility on institutions to make meaning and interpret the policies according to the context of their institution.

The equity of an institution's policies is influenced by the larger state and institutional environment. The National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (2012) analyzed admissions and financial aid policies at public and private institutions across multiple states, finding that states that had favorable policies for undocumented students, such as in-state resident tuition, tended to also have institutions with more favorable admissions policies. Interestingly, private and for-profit colleges were more likely to have less restrictive financial aid policies but also have much higher annual tuition costs posing a financial barrier for most undocumented students. This may be a factor in higher costs of attendance compared to public institutions. When state policies are not clear or equitable, policies at the institutional level can vary considerably within the same state (Nienhusser, 2014). For example, in Arizona, there is no state policy governing admissions and financial aid for undocumented students, and at the community college level, policies vary depending on the culture of support present. Maricopa Community College District, for example, has continued to offer in-state tuition benefits to its undocumented students despite a statewide proposition ruling that these students are not eligible for in-state tuition (Goldstein and Gilger, 2018).

SUMMARY

Community colleges as affordable open-access institutions have filled the country's post-secondary educational and career training gaps, particularly for low-income and historically marginalized communities. Undocumented students, with limited access to financial aid and more likely than peers to attend part-time, have retention and success rates that have consistently lagged behind the average. Community colleges have struggled to ameliorate the various barriers their undocumented students face and update their policies and services to meet their unique needs. Valenzuela et al. (2015) have provided a framework outlining seven conditions that institutions should have to achieve "undocu-competence." These conditions are professional development for staff and faculty, advocating visibility for students, tailoring outreach and recruitment activities, increasing financial aid opportunities, supporting Undocumented student organizations, providing health and psychological services, and creating an overall welcoming environment. With a U.S. workforce that has serious gaps in skilled workers, having more undocumented graduates of community colleges not only benefits their lives but also the economy. Reviewing the research on the barriers undocumented student face in navigating their colleges, along with best practices that other institutions have employed, is necessary to identify the gaps and opportunities for community colleges to support their undocumented students. Due to the overall scarcity of research on undocumented students at the community college level, it has been difficult for community colleges and policymakers to make research-based conclusions on how best to support this population.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the qualitative design and procedures used to conduct and to validate the study. The purpose and driving questions are reviewed, followed by a description of the methodology and case study method. Data collection and analysis procedures are outlined, along with the credibility, ethics, and limitations of the research study.

REVIEW OF THE PURPOSE AND DRIVING QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to identify best practices in how five Midwest community colleges support their undocumented populations as voiced by their administrators. This research provides community college administrators, faculty, and staff with insight into the barriers faced by undocumented students and how to best support this student group based on best practices. To achieve this purpose, the following driving questions were addressed:

1. What do college administrators who have direct oversight of departments that undocumented students interact with the most see as the most important factors in retention and completion of undocumented students at their institution?
2. What services/programs have institutions implemented that support undocumented students, and what was the process for implementation?
3. How have institutions used policy and governance structures to support undocumented students?
4. How does the culture of the institution and its relationship to the larger undocumented community impact enrollment, retention, and completion of undocumented students?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research focuses on how community college policies and practices affect the marginalized group of undocumented students. Both Yosso's (2005) and Gildersleeve & Ranero's (2010) theories are grounded in critical race theory, which deconstructs power dynamics between society and races, ethnicities, or cultures. (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Critical race theorists argue that society based on dominant norms is inherently racist and subjugates minority groups. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) and Chen & Rhoads (2016) use critical race theory to evaluate whether higher education employees are transforming institutions or maintaining the status quo. To empower this student group, employees should challenge the policies and practices that create and maintain inequity and the disempowerment of undocumented students. Higher education institutions can mirror the oppressive structure of broader society through policies and practices that reinforces the power dynamic that legal status creates.

Community college education policy and services should take into consideration that undocumented student experiences are not homogenous. The intersection of race, ethnicity, class, disability, gender, and the student's immigration history influence the way the student interacts with the higher education. Kimberle Crenshaw (2020) coined the term "intersectionality" as a way to understand how different aspects of an individual's identity combine to form unique levels of discrimination and oppression. For example, an undocumented, low-income African immigrant would have "triple minority" status due to their citizenship status, class, and race and would face a unique level of discrimination than an undocumented, higher-income European immigrant.

RESEARCH DESIGN

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research attempts to interpret and understand the meanings that individuals or groups make of a facet of their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is the epistemological framework of qualitative research because knowledge is constructed by individuals instead of fixed. Therefore, researchers are not seeking out knowledge about a topic that is already present and unchanged as in quantitative studies. Researchers seek insight from the insiders' perspective, or *emic*, as this data can provide in-depth insights and perspectives difficult to gain from solely quantitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study pulls meaning and significance out of community college staff as they explain the situation or phenomenon of undocumented students navigating their campuses.

In this way, the study follows a postmodern philosophy in that it rejects a definitive truth or reality (Mertens, 2015). Postmodern research considers knowledge and meaning to be constructed by the individual and based on power dynamics within the culture or organization. A postmodern framework also strongly supports social justice and societal change, which for this study is important to support efforts to embrace a holistic model of care for undocumented community college students. Newbury (2011) argues that postmodern epistemologies support and reflect the complex realities of modern life and focus less on using research to reveal ultimate truths and instead on how the research can serve a pragmatic purpose for higher education practitioners. Denzin and Giardana (2009) reiterate the importance and power of this research: "We are no longer called to just *interpret* the world...Today, we are called to change the world and to change it in ways that resist injustice while celebrating freedom and full, inclusive, participatory, democracy" (p. 13, emphasis in original). For these reasons, qualitative research is the methodology best suited to meet the purpose of this study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also describe qualitative research as typically sampling smaller groups in a nonrandomized fashion. In qualitative research, sampling is purposeful or intentional based on the research question. Participants are selected based on set criteria; to be exact, in this study, administrators were selected based on their role overseeing student services and/or offices that impact undocumented students. This research is inductive in approach because undocumented students in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon, and this topic has not been adequately explained by prior research or theories.

In this study, administrators and other staff at five Midwest community college were interviewed to obtain their perspective and experience on how their institutions support undocumented students, along with their insight into the needs of these students. All of their data obtained from interview remained anonymous. As the data was extracted primarily from these interviews, with meaning and themes gleaned from words, the study fits the characteristic of a qualitative study as descriptive. Additional data methods to ensure triangulation include review of website information, board documents, and other internal documents. Therefore, this study mirrors the attributes of a qualitative study as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Creswell (2007).

Case Study Method

The study utilizes an interpretive multicase study approach as it attempts to describe and analyze the bound system in its natural state. Merriam (1998) describes an interpretive case study as when a researcher "gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon" (p. 38). The focus of interviews was administrators and other institutional staff who oversee supports for undocumented students. The perceptions, decisions, and institutional history of multiple administrators within the context

of how their institutions support undocumented students, was compared to identify themes and patterns. As opposed to quantitative studies where there is an infinite number of individuals who could serve as participants, case studies evaluate phenomenon affecting a limited group or individual (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies, though limited in sampling, include a variety of data sources (Creswell, 2007).

The benefit of multiple instead of singular case studies, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is that the results are more generalizable and have greater external validity. This study focused on five community colleges that have similarities in their student demographics and were identified as having established supports for undocumented students, yet are different in location type: suburban, rural, and urban. Sampling from a range of institutions allowed for the gathering of multiple perspectives that can be replicated or generalized by other community colleges. Therefore, the interpretative multicase study approach provided the data necessary to answer the research questions and study purpose.

Case studies, as is true of all research methods, have weaknesses that may impact the quality and integrity of the study. Since I am the primary instrument of case studies, the validity of the research can be affected by my bias and ethics (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Several steps were taken to address these concerns. First, I obtained approval to conduct the research from Ferris State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Second, permission was received from each institution where research was conducted. Lastly, all interviews were audio recorded, with participants' permission, and all participants were contacted to verify transcripts of interviews.

Data Collection Methods

After determining sampling methods and criteria, the next step in the research process is preparing for and collecting data. Triangulation of data was achieved by using multiple data sources, including interviews, a questionnaire, field notes, and document analysis. Triangulation of data enhances the validity and reliability (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). An overview of each method, including strengths and weaknesses, is included in this section.

Interviews

This study employed person to-person interviewing to obtain information from participants. As the administrator's thoughts, feelings, and past history with supporting undocumented students are not directly observable, a person-to-person interview method is best suited to a case study of a small number of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the case study included only five sites, the interview methods need to extract as much data as possible. Yin (2009) argues that a case study of this nature is the best method to allow a researcher to intensively target the research topic and driving questions. Interviews were fluid and conversational with semistructured questions, including the following types (Yin, 2009):

1. Experience/Behavior: Looking at prior actions of the administrator or staff at the college.
2. Feeling: Insight into how the college supports undocumented students.
3. Ideal Position: When evaluating how their institutions are supporting undocumented students, and where they wish their college was at in this aspect.

The interview is the primary data collection method that can have biases and unbalanced power dynamics between researcher and participants. Interviews in this study were participatory, with more of a mutual back and forth rather than a one-way dominant dialogue, where the power is tilted towards the interviewer. To shift the power balance towards greater equity, a confronting

form of interview was used, which is characterized by a role shift where the interviewee can also ask questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). The goal of this interview structure is greater transparency and a mutual understanding of the goals of study. In this study, much of the data came from interviews with community college administrators that have a great deal of power and influence in the institution, yet do not necessarily hold the same level of power in the interview. The semistructured interview format provided a fluid means of having a respectful dialogue, while still balancing the need to obtain knowledge about the research topic (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

A few internal and external documents along with information available on the webpages of each college were analyzed to confirm data gathered in interviews. Extensive research was conducted prior to the interviews to gather publicly available materials. The researcher found very little publicly available documents or information specific to undocumented students. The analyzed data, and in instances where there was a lack of information available, revealed insights into the processes to implement programming and supports for students for this population at each campus.

Sampling Type

When a study has intentional sampling to gain insight and discover connections between phenomenon, nonprobability sampling is the ideal type employed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method allows for an in-depth evaluation of a small set of sites (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Since the intent of this study is to gain knowledge about the support of undocumented students by interviewing specific community college representatives, purposeful sampling was used to select sites and individuals that can provide the greatest knowledge to answer the research questions. Critical case sampling was the approached used to yield an ideal sample composition

and focused on participants who can help increase the understanding of how community colleges support undocumented students. Critical case sampling "draw[s] attention to particular features of a process and can thus heighten the impact of the research" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 80).

During interviews with participants, I may be referred to other institutions that meet the selection criteria. Therefore, the snowball method of sampling could also potentially occur as the research is underway, leading to a greater number of participants in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument and thus their background with this topic should be examined. Professionally, I have several years of experience in supporting undocumented students in secondary and postsecondary settings and have a passion for serving this population. My experience in the community college setting is primarily with undocumented adult education students enrolled in high school equivalency and English language acquisition coursework. I also wrote and was awarded an institutional foundation grant to improve services for undocumented students at a community college and led professional development for community college staff and faculty on this issue. Lastly, I was born in the United States and therefore have not experienced the challenges and barriers that undocumented students face daily.

Questionnaires

A pre-interview questionnaire was given to participants asking about their work experience in community colleges, total years in the field, opinions about the barriers facing undocumented students, and views on how best to serve this population based on their experience (Appendix A). The purpose of this questionnaire was to ensure participants were

qualified before interviews and to use interview time to explore deeper questions related to the topic.

Field Notes

Field notes were recorded prior to and after interviews to ensure triangulation of data. Field notes help to maintain the interaction between the researcher and participant, allowing the researcher to describe the interaction in their own perspective (Bogdan and Biklen, 2016). To increase effectiveness of field notes, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that researchers record as many notes as possible immediately after the interview, paying attention to the apparent themes observed.

Site Selection

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that after choosing primary criterion that determine the case(s), secondary criterion will be developed that answer the questions of whom to interview, what to observe, and what documents to analyze. The sites selected for this study had similar student demographics and were a mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings. For all institutions, administrators were interviewed as the purpose of this research is to collect their voices as they oversee areas that greatly impact the supports provided undocumented students. During interviews, other college employees or student leaders may be identified as instrumental to the development or leadership of support for undocumented students. The following is an example of an interview question that may result in additional individuals interviewed: Was a program or policy related to undocumented students discussed and approved by the board of trustees? If so, then the president of board would also be interviewed, and any relevant board documents would be reviewed. The additional individuals interviewed provided further insight

into the external influences around administrative decision making in the context of supporting this population.

A qualitative, comparative case study approach fits this research topic because it allows the collection of direct knowledge, perceptions, and interpretations of community college administrators within the realm of serving a unique population. For the case study, semistructured interviews served as the primary source of data along with secondary sources such as memos and board documents. All colleges and employees interviewed in the study remain anonymous. This study ultimately sheds light on administrative decision-making strategies that aid community college administrators and community groups in making more informed decision regarding undocumented students.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As discussed above, interviews are a data collection method that can have biases and unbalanced power dynamics between researcher and participants. To mitigate this, interviews were participatory, with more of a mutual back and forth rather than a one-way dominant dialogue, and the interviewee was able to ask questions. The goal of this interview structure is greater transparency and a mutual understanding of the goals of study. Qualitative researchers have a commitment to address moral and ethical issues, as this type of research delves more in depth into the intimate world of humans. This study follows a qualitative approach that relies on interviewing as the primary source of data collection. Interviewing has many ethical pitfalls that need to be adequately prepared for and addressed. Since qualitative interviews are intertwined with the psychology of the interviewees, it is critical to not only commit to non-malfeasance, the principle to do no harm, but also to critically evaluate how the interviewer impacts and is impacted by the participant. Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) argues that a traditional set of

ethical guidelines or principles, such as institutional review board approval are necessary but not fully adequate to cover the subtle issues that can arise with qualitative research. This research uses a critical consciousness lens to guide ethical data collection. According to Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012), this lens entails a commitment to:

> Capture voices of participants and represent them and their experiences in as true form as possible, study persons in their natural environment, study persons by directly interacting with them, understand the participant's social world through the participant's voices and lenses, and using participant's words to tell stories. (p. 65)

The potential emotional investment and adverse effects of participating in the interview were fully transparent and outlined through informed consent documents prior to interviews. Informed consent documents were provided to all participants, containing the following components: "purpose and duration of the study, nature of involvement, and how the confidentiality of the participants and of their contributions will be ensured" (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012, p. 69). The research proposal submitted for IRB approval outlined the informed consent protocol (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative [CITI], 2017). All participants agreed to an informed consent outlining the study's purpose, time commitment, benefits, impact, and risks; measures to protect confidentiality, privacy, and data; that their participation is anonymous and voluntarily; and that their information would be kept confidential through data storage methods. It is the role of the researcher to ensure the study is conducted in an ethical manner, maintaining the anonymity of the interviewee, and confidentiality of the data during and after the completion of the study. These ethical research procedures were applied in accordance with the CITI social and behavioral research ethics course (2017). A case study protocol was developed, which specifies the steps in the research process, starting with the approval process and data collection procedures.

RESEARCHER TRUSTWORTHINESS

I employed saturation or investigating all potential evidence where patterns or many similarities emerge, which enhanced the validity of the overall research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Part of this investigation entailed looking for evidence that may dispute the initial conclusions or findings. This involves taking adequate time to explore as much relevant data as time allows, and until I feel that further exploration will not produce significant differing data. Another strategy that was employed to reduce researcher bias is directly addressing it in the research through a process of reflection, within a specific section in the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As described above, I have significant experience working with undocumented students in educational settings. Yet, it is important to note that I was born in the United States, and do not fully relate to or understand the lived experiences of undocumented-Americans.

SUMMARY

This study utilized a qualitative model as this research method best suited to capture the data of community college administrators' perceptions and experiences about supporting their undocumented students. Participant and site selection were selected purposively, as I selected administrators and community colleges that were region-specific (Midwest) and had a significant number of undocumented individuals living in their respective districts. Qualitative research provides multiple ways of collecting data. The primary source of data was from semistructured interviews, which allowed participants to go in greater depth into their perceptions and experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS AND RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to gain insight into best practices and service delivery models that Midwest community colleges employ in supporting undocumented students, as well as administrators' perceptions of adequacy of said support. The information gained from this research will assist community college administrators in developing and refining services, policies, and procedures to better support the completion and retention of their undocumented students. A qualitative paradigm was utilized to gain administrators' perceptions of the comprehensiveness of their college's efforts, along with barriers to improving on these efforts. Too best obtain this information, semistructured interviews were used as they allow for a more open and robust discussion between the researcher and interviewee. A qualitative framework allowed me to capture the complexity of the perceptions and experiences of administrators at the colleges in the research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Newburry, 2011)

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions sought to identify the level of services, policies, and procedures that influenced the completion and retention of undocumented students. Particular attention was devoted to the process in which the colleges' implemented changes, and the level of resistance or support received from the upper administration (President cabinet level). To gain this information, the following questions were addressed:

1. What do college administrators see as the most important factors in retention and completion of undocumented students at their institution?

2. What services/programs have institutions implemented that support undocumented students, and what was the process for implementation?

3. How have institutions used policy and governance structures to support undocumented students?

4. What is college administrators' perception of the adequacy (comprehensiveness) of services, programs, and policies to support undocumented students at their institution?

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL

Interviews were conducted over Zoom with five Midwest community colleges: Suburb College 1 (SC1), Suburb College 2 (SC2), Suburb College 3 (SC3), Rural College (RC), and Urban College 1 (UC), which will all remain anonymous All colleges chosen have mixed or high nontraditional student populations according to the IPEDS 2021 data. The colleges were also chosen based on their district's disproportionate level of undocumented residents when compared with the rest of the state. Semistructured interviews were conducted with a total of five administrators, one at each college. Administrators interviewed held positions in different management levels in student services or student affairs departments, ranging from director to associate vice president. These administrators were chosen because of their direct involvement in planning, implementing, managing and/or advocating for programming, policies, and procedures that impact undocumented students. An interview document (see Appendix A) was utilized to facilitate and guide the conversation with interviewees.

Interviewees were selected using purposive sampling methods based on referrals from other administrators as well as from interactions at various undocumented student conferences. Unique constraints were also placed as this data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s which made participant availability challenging. I purposefully selected a smaller sample size of five institutions, which made finding participants not difficult despite the pandemic. After a pool of potential interviewees was established, I examined more closely their

credentials and experience with undocumented students to determine those that would yield the greatest depth of answers and insight. Interviewees were contacted via email to request participation in the study. Semistructured interviews were conducted via a video conferencing platform, as the COVID-19 pandemic did not permit safe in-person interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to identify and code themes and then sent to interviewees to ensure accuracy. Table 2 shows the interview participant profiles.

Table 2. Interview Participant Profiles

College	Location	Administrative Position
SC1	Suburban	Director
SC2	Suburban	Vice President
SC3	Suburban	Director
RC	Rural	Dean
UC	Urban	Dean

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Interview transcripts were coded to identify these themes. The interview findings that address the research questions are summarized below, and organized by the participants' colleges, Suburban College 1 (SC1), Suburban College 2 (SC2), Suburban College 3 (SC3), Rural College (RC), and Urban College (UC).

Research Question One: Retention and completion

"What do college administrators see as the most important factors in the retention and completion of undocumented students at their institution?" A summary of all findings related to retention and completion factors are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Retention and Completion Factors

College	Summary of Findings
SC1	Fear/Lack of Information Career Challenges Cross-Functional Case Management Software

College	Summary of Findings
SC2	Fear and Anxiety Career Challenges Financial Trust of College Employees
SC3	Community Trust Technology Literacy New Student Onboarding
RC	Trust Financial Student Peer Engagement
UC	Career Challenges Financial Childcare Transportation Advisor Caseloads

As explained in Chapter Two, undocumented students face a myriad of challenges, both personally and through their interactions with institutional actors and procedures, which affect their retention and completion goals. Numerous studies of this population, including Gildersleeve and Vigil (2015) and Alif et al. (2020), have revealed that undocumented students face similar challenges as their low-income and first-generation peers, but experience these challenges at increased frequency, all while navigating the mental health and legal implications of their documentation status. The purpose of this interview question was to identify the extent in which the college's efforts in supporting undocumented students addressed the factors perceived by interviewees to impact student retention and completion.

Qualitative data from this question revealed several themes including: fear and trust, financial challenges, and career challenges all contributing to the concerns for retention and completion of undocumented students at interviewed colleges. The interview process gave insight into the impact of each of the aforementioned themes, which will be explored in further detail below.

Fear and Trust

Years of research on undocumented individuals have highlighted the heightened level of fear and mistrust, and undocumented community college students have been found to face similar fear and mistrust in their everyday experiences in their respective institutions. For example, Alif et al. (2020) emphasized how heightened fear of deportation can have a devastating impact on students' mental health and academic performance. The authors see this fear in students' "chronic heightened sense of danger, forcing them to use caution when interacting with the world and justifying isolation and alienation from peers who could exploit undocumented students for their immigration status" (p. 12). The constant state of fear that undocumented students face exacerbates their anxiety and causes them to reach out less for help from professors, staff, and peers despite needing more support than their documented peers (Atif et al., 2020).

Through sanctuary policies, colleges can limit activities and information sharing to federal immigration enforcement agencies such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Corrall, 2021). As of the writing of this dissertation, none of the colleges interviewed have such policies in place. Colleges are hesitant to pass official sanctuary policies for a myriad of reasons, but one cited by interviewees are the legal challenges that would occur because federal immigration enforcement is protected by federal laws (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022). The fear of deportation was mentioned by several of the interviewees as a constant issue faced by their undocumented students. For example, SC1 has seen how a lack of information or misinformation about the true risk of deportation has paralyzed some of her students, who believe deportation is a likely threat

at all times. They believed if the undocumented students attending SC1 knew that the risk of deportation was slim, their lives would not be affected by fear.

The administrator at SC2 confirmed research findings that trust of institutional agents impacts undocumented students' retention. The interviewee sees the initial process of trust around disclosing status as the biggest first step that can take substantial amount of time to reach, "Trust in knowing who and where you can go to feel comfortable disclosing. I have a student mentee who just disclosed, and we had been meeting for seven months and the Advisor didn't know. Not we're like okay, we need to figure out what it is you need." With the importance on trust in mind, the college created a group of employees that are published externally as "go-to" for students.

The SC3 administrator stressed that community trust was just as important, which the college built through informational workshops at high schools. The RC administrator expressed how feelings of trust has been broken after their undocumented students fell victim to scams by legal offices that charge exorbitant fees and provide little-to-no follow-up. Therefore, it is important for college staff to have trustworthy legal resources they can refer students, which in turn will also help build institutional trust.

Financial Challenges

Chapter Two explored the many financial pressures that undocumented students and their families face, which has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Kocchar & Bennett (2021) detail how immigrants were more affected by employment changes during the pandemic than U.S.-born residents, with immigrant unemployment rates reaching 15.3% compared to 12.4% for nonimmigrants. Chang et al. (2017) and Terriquez (2015) described how common it is for students to work many hours at low-wage jobs and stop-out of college due to not being able

to afford college. Working more is true for documented community college students as well, as a lack of financial aid is a key factor in affordability.

All colleges interviewed confirmed the literature findings, mentioning financial challenges as one of the biggest hurdles that affect their undocumented students' retention and completion. According to the SC2 administrator, undocumented students have seen their financial situation improve considerably since the passage of DACA, as it provided students with work authorization. The interviewee stressed that as long as DACA is not struck down by the courts and/or a presidential administration, it will continue to immensely improve the lives of their undocumented students. Yet, immigration policies remain turbulent, changing frequently due to political and judicial decisions. With congressional elections and a presidential election upcoming in 2024, the future of immigration policy remains unknown.

The UC administrator underscored the importance of how financial challenges, though not unique to undocumented students, are experienced differently by these students because they lack the safety net available to permanent residents and citizens. One example given is that low-income students with children can receive subsidized childcare while attending college, while undocumented students with children cannot receive this benefit. Another example is the lack of access to subsidized healthcare for adult undocumented individuals, as only their children are eligible for state-sponsored, no-cost health insurance. Lastly, undocumented individuals are also not eligible for unemployment insurance. Several interviewees mentioned how one major financial hardship, such as a health care or loss of employment, can seriously impact an undocumented student's ability to remain enrolled or successfully complete college.

Career Challenges

For many students entering college, the decision to do so is based on a desire to develop skills to obtain a career. Through career and technical programs, community colleges have always been an affordable pathway to higher wage skilled work that is less time consuming than completing a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, because of their documentation status, undocumented students cannot pursue many of these fields as they require professional licenses. Administrators from SC1, SC2 and UC all mentioned the lack of career options available to these students, particularly in the health care programs. Because of limited options in the career programs, undocumented students, often attending part time, choose liberal arts degrees that require transfer to university to complete a bachelor's degree. For SC1, these challenges are compounded by the students' general ignorance about the career paths that they are eligible to pursue. For the administrator from UC, this lack of information extends to staff at the college who are not aware of how the legal nuances of a student's status impacts their employment opportunities. The example given by UC is that a student who has DACA has valid work authorization and therefore can pursue a degree that requires a license, despite not having legal permanent residency status.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: SERVICES AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

"What services/programs have institutions implemented that support undocumented students, and what was the process for implementation?" A summary of the findings related to services and programs are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Services and Programs

COLLEGE	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
SC1	Student Resources Webpage Legal Service Referrals Professional Development

College	Summary of Findings
SC2	Emergency Funding/Scholarship Opportunities Employee Working Group Designated resources Webpage HS and College Counselor Financial Aid Training Professional Development Student Club
SC3	Success Coaches Support Group and Student Organization Admissions Funneling Webpage Tracking and Outreach Professional Development Scholarship Opportunities Financial Aid Resources Accessibility Outreach to high school student group
RC	Latinx Resource Center Non-profit Partnerships Emergency Funding Scholarship Opportunities Student Resources Webpage
UC	Scholarship Opportunities College System-Wide Resource Guide

The data obtained from this research question revealed several programs, policies, and resources that colleges have implemented to support their undocumented students including scholarship and other funding opportunities, formation of student organizations, employee professional development and student resources webpages. These programs, policies and resources will be explored in further detail below.

Scholarship/Funding Opportunities

According to Southern (2016), financial resources available to undocumented students are limited. Undocumented students do not qualify for federal student aid, and only undocumented students who meet certain criteria can receive state grant assistance. Therefore, any additional funding, whether it is through foundation scholarships or emergency funds, can have an impact on student retention and completion. Among stop-outs, Terriquez (2015) found

that 81% of undocumented students cited affordability as the primary issue for not attending college at that time.

All but SC1 have consistently maintained an annual scholarship that only undocumented students are eligible to apply for. According to the interviewees, these scholarships, albeit limited in the number of student recipients, show the colleges' support for its undocumented students. Interviews revealed that the funding sources for the scholarships varied considerably. For SC2 and SC3, the Undocumented Student Club fundraised each year, with SC3 having enough funding to endow their scholarship. For UC, unrestricted corporate funding is received annually, and the administrator interviewed can allocate a portion of the funding towards an undocumented student scholarship. Lastly, RC was the only college that has a scholarship funded by and housed in the college's foundation office.

For several of the colleges, SC1, SC3, and RC, the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding (HEERF) as a part of the federal CARES Act, provided large amounts of funding during the COVID-19 pandemic for undocumented students' tuition, fees, and books. The administrators interviewed at RC and SC2 stated how important this funding was during a period when undocumented students and their families faced precarious financial straits during the unprecedented upheaval in the labor market. Yet, this emergency funding was only temporary and, as of the writing of this dissertation, is no longer available for students to access.

Employee Professional Development

All colleges conducted some form of employee professional development, "UndocuAlly Training," to train employees on the basics of supporting undocumented students. For SC2 and RC, this professional development has been temporarily or sporadically offered, but both interviewees stressed that they aim to offer regular trainings in the future. The SC2 administrator

believes that more targeted training is needed for mid-level management, rather than upper administration. The reasoning behind this is that mid-level management conduct more of the training of front-line staff who interact with students and make the majority of the operational decisions that can impact the undocumented student's experience navigating support offices. SC1 and SC3 both offer multiple training sessions for all faculty, staff, and administrators, and SC1 has converted their training to virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A review of past UndocuAlly training materials at SC1 and SC2 show that both covered a basic understanding of immigration statuses that students may have, along with barriers faced by undocumented students and student with DACA or from mixed-status families. Another large portion of the training discussed the issues that students may face navigating the college, including filling out the admissions application, applying to programs that have internship or clinical requirements, and scholarships/financial aid.

Student Resources Webpages

The availability and accessibility of resources for undocumented students was highlighted as an important factor in retaining undocumented students. All colleges interviewed had specific webpages with resources for undocumented students, but they varied considerably in where the information was located and what information was included on the webpages. For the SC2 administrator, they had to take the initiative to create a resource page with little guidance from the college:

> I wasn't given a directive to create that page, I just went ahead. I said to marketing, can you make this page and then I added all the content. At that time, a lot of schools didn't have any of that information, and I presented it to one of the ICCB [Illinois Community College Board] committees that we were a part of, and they were surprised and said "How'd you get that approved?" I go, "I didn't, I just did it."

The SC3 administrator reported that the resource page is embedded in the admission's webpage's onboarding process. This approach is intended to provide the resources for students early on when they need it most, rather than after a problem arises, and it becomes a more immediate concern, often forcing students to withdraw from courses. For SC3 and RC, resources pages are located within student affairs and/or student support office pages, such as counseling and advising. Having undocumented resources only housed on the counseling department's page can limit its reach because of the stigma attached to counseling. Similarly, having these resources solely in a Latinx center can limit its reach to non-Latinx undocumented students. For all the colleges that had student resource webpages, none had translations in Spanish or other languages, which could limit the accessibility for ESL students and parents of students who have limited English.

Coordination of Services

From a coordination of services standpoint, SC2 stood apart in that it had a permanent working group with employees experienced in working with and specialized knowledge of undocumented students. This group is comprised of staff from admissions, academic advising, financial aid, and a vice president in student affairs. The group held regular meetings and were listed on the college's webpage as point-persons for students to receive assistance. SC1 has a permanent group that is like SC2 in that employees and faculty from similar departments are involved, but this group is not an official committee that is promoted or sponsored by an administrator or specific department. Instead, this group started as an informal working group to provide professional development to campus constituents.

SC3 and RC both had temporary, one-year working groups or taskforces to coordinate services and shape policies. These groups or taskforces were formed around major national political or legal changes, such as a new president or new immigration legislation.

Research Question Three: Policy and Governance

"How have institutions used policy and governance structures to support undocumented students?" A summary of the findings related to policy and governance are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Policy and Governance

College	Summary of Findings
Suburban College 1	No tracking of students Board has little impact
Suburban College 2	No tracking of students President statement of support Scholarship policy changes
Suburban College 2	Administrator has direct reporting to the president Developed official working group
Suburban College 3	Student tracking through data management system Scholarship policy changes Administrator has direct reporting to the president Taskforce in the past
Rural College	No tracking of students Taskforce in the past Scholarship policy changes
Urban College	No tracking of students Admissions application changes

Data collected from the interviews revealed few commonalities between colleges. Where similarities were shared include, all but SC3 did not have a formal process for tracking their undocumented student population. Changes to scholarship policies via the foundation offices was stated by three of the colleges interviewed. A taskforce or working group to coordinate delivery

of services and resources and inform policy was also found to be present in three of the colleges interviewed.

Data Collection and Tracking

SC3 was the only college interviewed to have formal measures in place to track their undocumented student population. Several of the interviewees mentioned informal tracking by academic advisors or other student services staff, where staff would keep records of the undocumented students they met with for outreach purposes. Many expressed reservations about keeping documentation status in an official database, due to the vulnerability of these students and the impact that information landing in immigrations authorities' hands would have on the students. SC3 codes in the college's data management software every undocumented student who is directed to the office that provides support for these students. The SC3 administrator highlighted the hesitation and fear that other interviewees expressed in officially tracking undocumented students. From the standpoint of the SC3 administrator, having the list of students to do outreach to outweighs the risks as limited individuals in the college have access to the information:

> Our Dean of Students put the fear in me, you know that (information) could be taken, but I was just like, I need to know so they become a cohort that I can send out information to, like we're having a Rise Act information session.

Admissions Policies

Community colleges have historically been open-access institutions that accept all students, but administrators interviewed as a part of this research reported barriers in the enrollment process for undocumented students. Administrators reported differences in their policies around admissions; specifically, the application requirements and the enrollment funnel in which students completed enrollment steps from initial contact or application to registering for

courses. Several colleges, including SC2, RC, and UC, explained that their institutions previously required a social security number to apply for admissions via online portal; instead, they now have an alternative method of completing an application such as a paper application. One college, SC3, required students to be processed as international students, and thus charged international student tuition, until that was removed after they advocated for it to upper leadership.

The SC3 administrator described a current project in progress that would funnel undocumented students on the admissions application directly to the office that is equipped to support these students:

> It says, who are you and then, if you're traditional students, you click here; if you are international students, you click here' if you're undocumented, you click here, and it kind of directs students on how to apply.

For the SC3 administrator, enrollment management staff have put up roadblocks to enacting changes to admissions procedures. They said,

> I do think a lot of their motivation for doing things in the best interest of students could be motivated by their personal and political beliefs. (It) has stymied a lot of my efforts.

A review of the college's webpage reveals that SC3 has a guide to help walk students through the application process, which is the only college interviewed to have such information.

Scholarship Policies

With limited access to financial assistance, college affordability is a significant barrier to undocumented student retention and completion. For many of these students, institutional foundation scholarships support their ability to enroll in more classes and/or work less to pay for tuition. SC2, SC3, and RC have all seen significant changes to scholarship policies or operating practices that were previously prohibitive for undocumented students. Prior to the changes, it was not clear what scholarships required a FAFSA, which undocumented students are ineligible

to complete, or if permanent residency was required. For SC3, an alternative means of documenting financial need was created by using the College Board's CSS Profile. The CSS Profile is a financial aid application that typically have been used by private, elite colleges and universities. This change opened the majority of scholarships to all students by providing a uniform way of proving financial need.

These changes were not without struggle and years of pushback from foundation leadership. This will be covered in more detail below in Research Question 4. Foundations within community colleges are 501(c)(3) organizations that operate independently from the rest of the college leadership. For SC2, the lack of transparency or misrepresentation of scholarships that did not require citizenship was the primary struggle to resolve. Now all scholarship requirements are clearly represented, and students can filter by which scholarship require citizenship.

Other interviewees from SC1, RC, and UC were not successful in changing scholarship policies to be more accessible, and instead settled on creating alternative scholarship or funding opportunities that undocumented students can access. Some of these scholarships were limited to undocumented students, while others were local grant funding that was earmarked to fund scholarships.

Taskforce/Working Group

SC2 was the only college with a still active taskforce or working group. In fact, SC2 dedicated a subpage on their undocumented resource page to show the profiles and contact information of their working group. The other two colleges, SC3 and RC, had formed taskforces in the past that were temporary and were formed in response to changes in national political leadership. The SC3 administrator explained that this taskforce was formed in 2009 after the

passage of DACA impacted many undocumented traditional-aged students. The primary goal of the taskforce was to address application or admissions policies that required undocumented students to go through extras steps and visit multiple offices. The taskforce surveyed other local community colleges' admission process but was dissolved after only one year and little progress according to the administrator.

For RC, the taskforce was formed in response to the 2016 election of President Donald Trump and the subsequent immigration changes implemented by his administration. The purpose of the taskforce was to assess the implications of DACA, particularly on the application requirements of a social security number to complete online. Students also voiced concerns of confidentiality of their status when completing the admissions application:

> Students had some specific concerns. So, we ended up responding more to like, within a year, we had developed some better things. One concern students had was their confidentiality, like they felt that somehow I think that we would release names of people if they disclose that they were not documented, you know? And in reality, it's not a question we ask, we do ask in our application, like, you know, I guess like as a secondary ID thing. We ask social security number, and they were afraid that undocumented students, by default could be identified sort of through that.

For RC and the other colleges with temporary taskforces, these initiatives addressed, but did not necessarily resolve, specific issues or process gaps and then were dissolved soon after. Why the taskforces were dissolved ranged from because the issue has been resolved (SC3) or due to a lack of support by administrative leadership, which will be covered in more detail in Research Question 4.

Administrator/Organizational Structure

Administrators interviewed held different levels in the colleges' organizational structure, with SC2 the only interviewee in an upper-administration position. Other interviewees were at the dean or director level. The administrators from SC2 and SC3 report directly to the president

and/or serve on the president's executive cabinet. The SC2 administrator stressed the importance of having an ally sitting at higher levels of leadership to push changes up the ladder:

> I've seen the biggest change in this last year, but I think it becomes also because of your leadership, the conversations that you're having, some of the institutional agendas you're pushing forward.

This administrator does not view their position as the only piece in the puzzle of supporting undocumented students. They underscored that finding other employees who share the same passion for supporting undocumented students is crucial for the continuation of everything that has been accomplished:

> I can't get hardly anything done without other people… you know I mean I call it Jedi mind tricks, but I get people all the time to do stuff when they get passionate and excited about it.

For the administrators from SC1, RC, and UC, their roles are more isolated from upper leadership, which has made accomplishing change much more difficult. These administrators voiced their frustrations and evaluation of their colleges' adequacy of support for undocumented students, which will be covered in more detail below.

Research Question Four: Perception of Adequacy of Support

"What is college administrators' perception of the adequacy (comprehensiveness) of services, programs, and policies to support undocumented students at their institution?" A summary of all the findings related to adequacy of support are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Adequacy of Support

College	Summary of Findings
SC1	Lack of unified promotion of resources and services Administration resistance to change via committees Resistance to scholarship policies
SC2	Collaborative/team-based approach Supports improved significantly Conservative political district Some resistance to scholarship policy change

College	Summary of Findings
SC3	Resistance to designated staffing Enrollment management gaps Lack of employee knowledge/professional development
RC	Underlying discomfort from leadership Lack of specific workshops and resources on campus Lack of employee knowledge/professional development Lack of centralized "go-to" staff Unsupportive board of trustees
UC	Not a leader in this area Umbrella-based approach to student services

Delivery Structure of Services and Supports

Administrators from RC and UC voiced concerns about a lack of specific resources for undocumented students and a lack of a unified plan that meets the unique needs of these students. The UC administrator expressed frustrations at the college's umbrella approach to serving students, offering financial and nonfinancial resources and supports that can be accessed by all students. From their perspective, this approach did not adequately address the needs of undocumented students:

> I think, overall, the college has tried to address it by addressing every student of color under the same umbrella. Like a diversity initiative to celebrate all students of color but you know what the challenge there is that undocumented students have such a unique experience that other students of color don't.

The UC administrator explained that the upper leadership believed that all students should have access to support systems. They saw this as an issue of equity that UC is failing to meet:

> And so, I think helping people understand that narrative that "what's good for one is good for all" is not equity.

Despite being located in one of the most diverse cities in the country, the UC administrator does not view the college as a higher education leader for supporting undocumented students. They cited the high advisor caseloads, 500 students per advisor, that is

an impediment to providing the higher tough, intensive advising undocumented students need. The RC administrator expressed similar frustrations about the lack of specific resources and services provided to undocumented students, which they believed was a missed opportunity from the taskforce dissolved many years ago. As opposed to the universal approach taken by UC, they pinpoint this gap in services as partly due to a leadership that is not comfortable with supporting undocumented students:

> There was, I think, some discomfort from leadership even though it wasn't stated that way.

SC2 and SC3 took a targeted approach to meeting the unique needs of undocumented students, rather than the universal approach taken by SC1, RC, and UC that implemented wide-spread initiatives aimed at low-income or Latinx students for example. SC2 and SC3 had specific services such as free immigration legal assistance or designated staff support in student service areas (financial aid, admissions, and advising).

Community and Board Relations

Community colleges are interconnected entities that can be significantly influenced by the communities in which they are located (Bruning et al., 2006). Some areas of the college governance structure are more greatly affected by this influence. Several of the interviewees mentioned the foundation (staff and board) and the board of trustees as areas of the college that are impacted by the political leanings of the community. Foundations depend on funding community and business donors to operate; therefore, funding may be jeopardized by opposing the values and desires of these donors. Positions on the board of trustees are elected or appointed positions, typically made up of influential community members.

The foundation offices were cited as the most frequent source of resistance to policy changes and service enhancement. For the SC1 administrator, efforts to change policies on

foundation scholarships to allow students without a FAFSA to apply fell on deaf ears in multiple meetings with foundation leadership. The administrator attributes this roadblock to fear over the negative response from the large conservative donor community:

> And you may get backlash from certain communities or some people that contribute to the foundation, then so you will say okay, 'we may all be on board with it, but we answer to a bigger community.'

For the SC2 administrator, resistance from the foundation was eventually overcome after several years of meetings and advocacy. They also attributed this resistance to a politically conservative donor base that influenced the foundation to be unsupportive of these changes:

> If you look politically and even the parties in the way our community votes, it's usually very conservative. But that does impact your donors. So you know, the question is, and you have to think bigger scale of do you do something to try to drive funding for a certain population, where a majority of your donors and your community may not support. So those were the conversations I had to have repeatedly, over and over again, because why you don't want to lose a million-dollar donor.

Similar to the experiences of the administrator of SC2's community impacting change efforts, the RC administrator encountered this resistance more at the college's board of trustees level rather than the foundation's board of trustees, which in turn influenced the upper administration's decisions:

> I think that was the line that our president was trying to walk. So, I think we had a lot of conservative members of the board. But recently our board has shifted a little I mean, we had people like, we had people on the board for like 45 years, they were records in the state, those are elected positions.

For the RC administrator, the shift in makeup of the elected board in recent years has been a welcome change and will make it more likely that initiatives and policy changes will be more supported in the future. Interestingly, not all administrators interviewed expressed the same concerns about the influence of the board or foundation on day-to-day operations that impact undocumented students. Because of the organizational structure of UC as one college within an

urban community college system, the UC administrator said the board of trustees has little power because its members are appointed by the city mayor rather than elected.

> We're going to pilot this program and oftentimes, and I don't know that we have to go through the board for that. And if it is, it might just be a formality, because if the mayor said they want it done it's a done deal.

Compared to other interviewees, UC governance structure is more centralized in the community college district office administration and the mayor's office, rather than a shared model where faculty and other campus constituents have influence over policy and procedures. The college's governance structure can vary at community colleges, which in turns impacts the policy-making ability of the board of trustees. Interestingly, the researcher did not find mention of undocumented students in publicly available documents at any of the colleges interviewed, which supports SC1's sentiments that the board of trustees was not aware of or concerned with the day-to-day issues impacting undocumented students. This was not surprising that anything was found at UC, which has a policy governance model led by the president rather than the board of trustees.

For the SC1 administrator, the board's lack of influence on policies and services related to undocumented students is because of a general ignorance of these students and what the college is doing specifically to meet the students' needs. According to this administrator, the blame for the inadequate approach to serving undocumented students falls on the executive cabinet. They explained that the college's leadership cared more about keeping up appearances that they are providing services for diverse students:

> To me it's all talk the talk, but not walk the walk. You know it's like it makes the college look good, but they don't want people on these committees that are going to challenge them.

The Administrator illustrated the point by giving the example of how SC1 has a center that coordinates services for Latinx students on campus. The college does little to promote the

services of the center to the rest of the college, and the center leadership is excluded from committees that impact Latinx students. They said,

> Administration likes the thought of having it, and it looks good, but they don't promote it.

Employees and Professional Development

Critical race theory states that undocumented students navigate institutions that reinforce the dominant, oppressive norms of larger society (Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). These students can face negative interactions from staff and faculty, including "insensitive behaviors" and "unaware institutional agents who overlook the existence of immigration status" (Nienhusser et al., 2016, p. 428). A few of the administrators corroborated these experiences by their undocumented students, primarily with front-line staff in student services offices such as financial aid and advising. For example, the SC3 administrator talked about how staff were afraid to make mistakes when a student mentioned they are undocumented and relied on referring immediately to the support office. The administrator SC3's new training helped to reach some of these staff:

> Invite their frontline. We did one in the morning and in the evening to kind of talk to people through like what are questions you could ask that are not invasive; what is the right way to work with these students and don't panic…because people just they get afraid.

Students at RC have also experienced negative interactions with front-line staff, which the administrator believes is due to the staff's personal values or beliefs:

> I do think some people approach their job more like their lens of fairness is not the same. So that's it's like, equity and equality aren't the same…And so education helps, but it doesn't necessarily change that core.

The SC2 administrator also saw training needs for front-line staff but said the one group that needed the most attention was mid-level management. Currently, at SC2, executive cabinet and much of the upper leadership such as deans have received some form of professional

development on best practices for working with undocumented students. The interviewee argues that the mid-level management can have the most impact on the day-to-day operations of their departments, which undocumented students interact with daily.

One of the pillars of Valenzuela et al.'s (2015) IUC framework is professional development opportunities for all staff, administrators, and faculty. Nearly all interviewees expressed the importance of either the continuation or expansion of their institutions' training opportunities or establishing a professional development program for those colleges that lacked a permanent initiative. For RC, this professional development will be a permanent rather than a temporary initiative, as training has been sporadically offered in the past. UC has also had a training in the past but no consistent training model. The UC administrator said training of staff and faculty is an important issue to address because undocumented students at the college are unnecessarily "passed around" too much to different offices. SC1 and SC3 were the only colleges interviewed that have permanent, annual professional development sessions. For SC1, this was a recent development in 2020 and was created by a group of staff and faculty passionate about working with undocumented students, rather than driven by college leadership. This professional development was adapted to an entirely virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An analysis of each college's webpages dedicated to information about their services and resources for undocumented students revealed that only one college (UC) had internally created guides for faculty and staff to help working with this population. SC1 had to links to an external guide for educators that was created by an external advocacy organization. SC1 and UC were also the only colleges to publicly mention their UndocuAlly training for employees.

EMERGENT THEMES

Thematic analysis and coding were employed to synthesize themes from data obtained during the interview process. Four key elements were identified that contributed to the administrator interviewed perceiving supports for undocumented students as adequate and comprehensive. Table 7 provides examples of how identified themes connected with participants' responses.

Table 7: Emergent Themes

THEMES	EVIDENCE
Administrator advocate on executive council	"I've seen the biggest change in this last year, but I think it becomes also because of your leadership, the conversations that you're having, some of the institutional agendas you're pushing forward." SC2 "I went to being a director, reporting directly to the president." SC3
Comprehensive professional development outside of student services	"We also had some training with our high school counselors so that they were aware of how to be able to help their students navigate with scholarships of ours were open and which ones had restrictions." "Our current Board [of Trustees]; we just completed an equity training. Our entire executive cabinet, we're still finishing up our equity training." SC2 "We modeled something similar to Safe Zone. And then you would have a placard in your office. Frontline people get so afraid of somebody, or the student mentioned the (undocumented) word…we hosted a training, we had all frontline and all the directors. We do try to make that available a couple of times a year." SC3
Continued advocacy in the face of community and board resistance	"And you may get backlash from certain communities or some people that contribute to the foundation, then so you will say okay, 'we may all be on board with it, but we answer to a bigger community.'" SC1
Continued advocacy in the face of community and board resistance	If you look politically and even the parties in the way our community votes. It's usually very conservative. But that does impact your donors, so you know, the question is, and you have to think you know bigger scale of do you do something to try to drive funding for a certain population, where a majority of your donors and your community may not support. So those were the conversations I had to have repeatedly, over and over again, because why you don't want to lose a million-dollar donor."SC2

THEMES	EVIDENCE
Collaborative support across departments	"And I think I shared this with you before it really takes finding who your champions are and building that larger kind of coalition or team." SC2 "So, we had a group create a page, a year ago and it does, it shows, who do you go to for admissions and financial aid, who do you go to for academic advising." SC2
Build student and community trust	"This organization working with eighth-grade girls and this other organization is working with the high school students. We're going to actually start putting together, like a chart that shows the different organizations and how they work with the students and then they progress, all the way through. If we get them early on and we give them that hope they will I feel they tend to excel in high school then because that's around the time that they find out their undocumented." SC1 "If your high school had a Dreamers group we would go and present to them…and provide students who were undocumented. To assist them in their endeavors whether it's the Day of the Immigrant or whether it's for DACA workshops. I think when people see you advocating in the community natural trust is built." SC3

SUMMARY

The aim of this research was to ascertain the best practices and service delivery models that Midwestern community colleges implement in supporting undocumented students, along with administrators' perceptions of the comprehensiveness of this support. Interview participants' responses were recorded and summarized based on the connection of interview questions to research connections. Thematic coding and analysis revealed the following themes:

- administrative advocate on the executive council
- comprehensive professional development
- community and board resistance
- collaborative support across student service departments
- building community and student trust.

These themes reveal that there are several key conditions that separate community colleges that provide comprehensive support for their undocumented students from those that provide piecemeal or little support. In Chapter Five, data findings are examined, and conclusions and implications for future research are provided.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on semistructured interview data along with the methods used in analyzing collected data. This study focused on the perceptions of community college administrators of the adequacy of their colleges' support for undocumented students along with identifying best practices in how community colleges can support this population. This chapter is organized by the five themes identified as best practices and what level community college administrators perceived their colleges' support for undocumented students.

ADMINISTRATOR ADVOCATE ON EXECUTIVE COUNCIL/REPORTING TO THE PRESIDENT

The third research question in the study was intended to gain insight into the governance and policy structures of colleges interviewed and how these structures have been utilized to support undocumented students. Within Valenzuela et al.'s (2015) IUC framework, the authors recommend community colleges have policies that are clear and supportive and have a leader who will support updating these policies.

This study identified best practices in supporting undocumented students, and one best practice that was mentioned is having a strong advocate in the upper levels of leadership. Each administrator reported varying differences in the role the campus allies had in their respective college's governance or reporting structure. SC2 and SC3 had advocates in the highest level of leadership, either as a part of executive council or reporting directly to the president and had experienced the most significant change in policies and procedures that meet the seven

conditions of Institutional Undocu-Competence (IUC). At SC2, the administrator interviewed serves on the executive council and stressed how vital this direct line of communication was to pushing policy change. They reported that at SC2 they were intentional to "have a higher-level administrator who is in that group and knows their role. And their role being the person who rolls it up the ladder."

Since many of the interviewees expressed how their work in supporting undocumented students shifted considerably based on state and national policy and political shift, having a leader who can adapt and push for changes quickly is critical to being responsive to the students' needs. The SC2 administrator talked about how without upper-level leadership, concerns brought by a select staff and/or faculty can be easily dismissed by upper leadership as grumblings or complaints that do not need to be addressed. The SC3 administrator leveraged their direct report to the president and role as a director the multicultural center, to institutionalize significant initiatives in the last decade.

One advocate in an upper-leadership role is not the panacea to meeting IUC. To carry out the new initiatives and procedures, collaborating with managers and staff who have direct contact with undocumented students is key. The SC2 administrator called this important process as finding "champions" on campus. This best practice will be discussed further in theme four, collaboration across departments. This level of leadership advocacy allows resources, fiscal and personnel, to be allocated to meet the needs of undocumented students. Some, but not all, of the conditions needed to meet IUC, require a fiscal investment where an upper-level leader has greater decision-making influence. For example, Administrators from SC2 and UC reported using existing grant or aid funds and earmarking part of these funds for undocumented student scholarships. SC2, UC, and RC sought out alternative funding sources through the college's

foundation offices or local businesses. The administrators said that without their role as a leader with influence over budget decisions, the funding opportunities may not have materialized.

COMPREHENSIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The second theme gleaned from the study was the need to provide comprehensive professional development. The administrators interviewed from colleges that only had temporary, one-time trainings in response to national political shifts expressed a desire to expand and create a consistent, wide-reaching professional development program on supporting their undocumented students. Since these types of trainings are typically voluntary, SC1 mentioned that a preaching-to-the-choir effect can occur where those with the least knowledge about undocumented students are least likely voluntarily participate.

Several of the interviewees, SC2, SC3, and RC, stressed the importance of training not just student services staff such as advisors or admissions representatives, but also front-line staff because they have significant interaction with students and serve as the first point of contact for many students. The SC3 administrator reported that many of the encounters their undocumented students reported as "un-welcoming" were at the financial aid and registration desks during interactions with these first-contact representatives. Training of staff is important, but the SC2 administrator believes training managers and executive-level administrators is equally important as they develop, approve, and implement policies and procedures that have an enormous impact on the undocumented-student experience. They also are responsible for hiring practices and can influence the hiring of staff from historically marginalized backgrounds that undocumented students may have more trust in and engagement with. One recurring example given by administrators from SC2, SC3 and RC is an understanding of the implications of admissions policies that require a social security number and/or treating undocumented students as

international students for tuition or admissions purposes. The administrators said that these policies that were slowly changed over time and might not have occurred without executives or administrators having knowledge of the undocumented students' experience navigating college processes.

Despite having college employees well trained in supporting undocumented students, resistance from the board of trustees and/or the larger community in which the college is located, can impede changes and fiscal resources being allocated to new initiatives. To overcome such resistance, the study found that continual advocacy at many different levels is needed to make slow progress over time.

ADVOCACY IN THE FACE OF COMMUNITY/BOARD RESISTANCE

As mentioned previously, this study found that an advocate that influences decision-making at the highest level is critical in making substantial change. In this study, administrators reported varying levels of resistance to change from outside of the college's day-to-day governance structure including the board of trustees, foundation offices, and the community constituency. For example, SC1 and SC2 administrators spoke about the battles they have undertaken with the foundation offices to change long-standing scholarship policies that prohibited undocumented students from applying for most scholarships. The study revealed that continuous advocacy over many years took place in colleges that provided more robust financial opportunities for undocumented students. The SC2 and SC3 administrators held countless meetings with foundation staff and managers, along with continuing to bring up the issue of financial aid at the highest levels. The SC1 and RC administrators expressed frustration at the lack of change in their colleges' policies and procedures over time due to resistance, but also did not report having advocates continually pushing for change. The SC1 administrator discussed

having one meeting with the foundation office at their college about the issue, but that no progress was made, and they had not addressed the issue again despite years of time having lapsed.

The foundation was just one area where administrators faced resistance. At RC, the board of trustees had several members who were opposed to supports for undocumented students, and the administrator sensed that the college's president did not want to fight against the board on this issue. In contrast, at SC2 the administrator consistently advocated and did not express pushing back or advocating with the president or board.

Advocacy for students at all levels is a key condition of IUC, and this study found that the constant advocacy over many years at SC2 and SC3 had significant, positive outcomes towards meeting the IUC conditions. This study also revealed the weakness of having only advocate leading efforts. SC2 and SC3, which experienced the most comprehensive changes, had a collaborative network of advocates working across campus.

COLLABORATION ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

The study found that only SC2 had a permanent cross-departmental, cross-functional group to address and engage with the work to support undocumented students. The SC2 administrator said this group was the primary driver behind the operationalizing of changes to policies and procedures and was made up of individuals from primarily student services departments such as advising, admissions, and financial aid. This administrator said that having champions in these various areas working together helps to build the conditions for institutional change and without a permanent team, institutional efforts will inevitably fail. While other colleges had temporary working groups that were formed due to political shifts, this study revealed that these groups produced little substantive changes because the work essentially

stopped after the groups were dissolved, or the work was left to one individual to undertake. This study revealed that having a collaborative group without an advocate in a leadership position failed to make substantial changes, as was the case with SC1. As seen in this study, collaboration across constituents is a key element to not only the success and continuation of services, but it can also help build trust with undocumented students who interact with college constituents in different roles.

As shown by the comprehensiveness of the SC2's website showing the working group and support network created for their undocumented students, these collaborative efforts must be publicly displayed and championed. The benefits of these efforts are two-fold. First, it increases buy-in from every area of the college that an important part of their work is to address the barriers facing these students. Second, this intentional display of all departments working together towards this common goal helps to build confidence and trust in the students and community that the college is actively working towards their betterment.

BUILDING STUDENT AND COMMUNITY TRUST

As discussed in Chapter Two, undocumented students navigate community colleges that perpetuate dominant norms and inherently marginalize and "otherize" them because of their cultural differences (Person et. al, 2017). The majority of the college student populations in the study were predominately white and middle- to upper-income institutions according to IPEDS (2021) data. Therefore, undocumented students, who are statistically more likely lower income and from non-white groups, may experience double or triple minority status (Person et al., 2016). Their marginalized status in the college can cause a deep lack of trust and fear for the students and their families when interacting with college officials. When asked about the most important factors in retention and success of undocumented students at their college, nearly every

interviewee mentioned trust. The administrators who perceived their colleges as meeting more of the IUC best practices, had intentional programs and outreach efforts that reached the undocumented community and families outside of only the student population.

These efforts should lean on existing partnerships with school districts and immigrant-serving community organizations to offer some type of service or information, even if the outreach is not directly enrollment or college admission-related. Allocating employee resources to these types of activities may be a hard sell to administrators since they are not directly admissions related, which is why partnering with an outside organization that provides all or part of the staffing needed would help this be more supported by leadership and build visibility for the college in the immigrant community. Participants expressed their colleges had a range of community outreach efforts including partnering with an outside organization to provides free or low-cost legal services and mentoring program for middle-school girls that brought them on campus for different activities.

Conducting outreach to students should start at an early age, in middle school or early high school ages. Traditionally, admissions outreach or recruitment occurs more in the junior or senior year of high school. At younger ages, typically a college would offer a service that also benefits the parents and family members. For example, at SC2 they offer free immigration legal consultations for current students and very low-cost for community members. When the college began this service, they were bombarded with demand from the community. For SC3, it was meeting with the high school Dreamers student group and providing them information about scholarships and DACA application requirements. When parents and family members of children in the immigrant communities interact more regularly with the college in their own spaces, they

may be more likely to enroll in continuing education or credit courses, as community colleges are often the first point of contact in the educational or career development for immigrant adults.

SUMMARY OF NON-INTERVIEW DATA

Prior to interviews beginning, I was expecting to find multiple documents, presentations, and other information that would provide data to supplement and enrich the data gathered from interviews. From a thorough research of all public documents and website information, little data was found outside of webpages outlining resources for undocumented students. The COVID-19 pandemic made visits to campus not possible, which may have allowed more data to be obtained. A few documents and presentations were shared by administrators interviewed, which will be outlined below.

All colleges in the study had some form of website that had resources for students, staff, and/or faculty. SC1, SC2 and UC had the most comprehensive pages, with SC2 having point of contacts for each department that an undocumented student can reach out to for help. UC was the only college with a posted ally training guide for faculty and staff, which conflicted with the administrator's perception that the college was not "leader in this area." SC1 and, SC3 and RC's webpages were located as subpages within other department's pages such as Latino Outreach Center, Multicultural Center, and Counseling, which could limit the accessibility of these pages by undocumented students.

After the interview with SC1 administrator, the professional development training slides were shared. The presentation was a comprehensive, and introductory review of the terminology, policies, procedures, and case studies to support undocumented students. This professional development appears to be one of the few areas that SC1 had met conditions of Institutional Undocu-Competence. SC2 was the only other college with data obtained outside of resource

webpages. SC2 leadership had made several public statements of support of undocumented students and sharing resources, when shifts in legal or political occurred. For example, when DACA was rescinded in 2020, the college sent out public communication sharing resources and a story on how it impacted one of their employees. SC2 also profiled an undocumented student who was a scholarship recipient. These public statements approved at the highest levels of leadership, confirmed the SC2 administrator's perception that supporting undocumented students was a priority at the college.

It was not surprising that RC and UC had little internal data, statements of support or other documents that show the college's support for this population. This confirms both administrators' perceptions that the college did little to support undocumented students. This is consistent as shown by the lack of information related to undocumented students on RC and UC's webpages and board documents. This is in stark contrast to SC2 that has more expansive website information and press releases, and the administrator perceived SC2 as making a great deal of progress in implementing best practices to serve undocumented students.

As a point of data comparison, the researcher reviewed the websites of all the community and technical colleges in Ohio for any information they provide about services for undocumented students. Upon review, only 2 out of 21, or 9.5% of the colleges, had any information on services or resources specifically for undocumented students. This finding affirms college administrators' perceptions even further, given how few colleges perceive services to undocumented students as a service worth publicizing.

CONCLUSION

The data obtained in this study was used to analyze and compare the best practices of Midwestern community colleges in their implementation of services, policies, and governance

structure that supports undocumented students. The analysis of the collected data revealed that there were several best practices that set apart the administrators who perceived their college as having made significant strides in supporting their undocumented students. The best practices that emerged from the research include having an advocate leader that reports directly to the president or serves on the executive council, a comprehensive professional development program for all employees, continued advocacy in the face of community and board resistance, a cross-departmental collaborative team, and finally, building student and community trust. The administrators who expressed greater frustrations about their institutions' progress in supporting undocumented students lacked many or all the best practices gathered from the research. These research findings mirrored the IUC framework that outlined seven conditions a college should have to adequately support their undocumented students. Chapter Six will discuss research implications, conclusions, delimitations and limitations, potential future research, and recommendations for community colleges.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

After analyzing and reviewing the findings in Chapters Four and Five, this chapter details the implications of the research findings and makes several recommendations for further research investigation.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Research questions were answered using a qualitative methodology, which produced an understanding of the best practices in implementation of supports for undocumented students along with administrators' perceptions of the adequacy of their colleges' support for this student population. Research was conducted at five Midwest community colleges located in regions with relatively large undocumented resident population compared to the rest of their respective states. Five administrators were interviewed, one from each of the colleges represented in the study. The colleges were also located in regions that had a range of income, from a high-poverty urban area to one of the highest median income counties in the state.

Themes emerging from research include administrator advocate on executive council and/or directly report to the president, permanent professional development on best practices for working with undocumented students that is accessible to all employees, advocacy in the face of resistance from community and the board of trustees, a collaborative cross-departmental support team, and building student and community trust through outreach efforts. Each college administrator described how these themes were or were not present, which impacted their

perception of how comprehensive and adequate their college's services and policies were that impacted undocumented students.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

Despite this research investigating similarly sized community colleges, there were clear differences between the colleges and the administrator's perceptions of their college's efforts to support their undocumented students. Examples shared by administrators regarding their personal experiences in advocating for change and going through the struggle of the change process revealed an understanding of the practices that were effective or ineffective in creating meaningful support for their undocumented students. The differences between SC2 and SC3, who had administrators reporting directly to the president, showed just how important having an advocate in upper leadership was in pushing forward substantive change. Collaboration across the college and building of student and community trust were also found to be vital to the success and continuation of programs and policies, despite college and national leadership shifts.

For community college executive-level administrators, this means identifying an administrator who oversees the departments with the most contact with undocumented students who will serve as an advocate in executive council decision-making. This administrator should also help form and serve as a liaison to the committee or support team that helps shape recommendations for day-to-day policy and program changes. Based on the interviews, these administrators are typically in departments or divisions that are direct student-serving, such as student services or the multicultural center. Having a champion, as the administrator from SC2 called it, can also help address some of the organizational and community resistance that all the colleges experienced to varying intensity and at different stages in the change process.

For faculty and staff, if an administrator as an advocate is not in place, then these individuals will need to break down the barriers and start change through tireless advocacy work on the grassroots level. One common theme apparent at all the colleges is that at some point in their change process, faculty, staff, and managers were making incremental change through consistent advocacy, often in the face of institutional and community resistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGES IMPLEMENTING UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT SUPPORTS

The data gathered through this research helped to identify the following best practices for community colleges in the process of improving their service model for undocumented students and their families.

Establish a central digital and physical location to house all resources and offices where undocumented students can receive direct support. This study showed how accessible resources in a centralized place on the college's webpage can make it easier for students to utilize these resources. A physical board or location (such as a multicultural) center that had visible resources easily accessible by undocumented students serves more of these students who are less likely to come forward and ask staff for help.

Provide comprehensive and permanent professional development on basics of working with and advocating for undocumented students that is open to all employees. This research has revealed that administrators perceive gaps in the knowledge and comfortability of employees when working with undocumented students, which can be improved by implementing a permanent professional development program that is open to all employees. This professional development should be led by a range of faculty, staff, and/or administrators who have roles directly impacting undocumented students.

The administrator who is most directly involved in coordinating resources and shaping policies affecting undocumented students, typically in Student Services, serves on executive council and reports directly to the president. An administrator who has the ear of upper leadership and is a part of high-level conversations shaping policies and procedures is invaluable in efforts of championing change and supports.

Develop a permanent cross-departmental team or committee that champions and coordinates policy changes and service implementation. It is particularly important that this team is comprised of staff and faculty from admissions, counseling and advising, and financial aid. Research showed that colleges were able to enact changes more swiftly to policy and initiate services when a taskforce or employee group was formed. When this group was led by an administrator serving as an advocate, their efforts were most fruitful in creating impactful change. When an administrator as advocate is not present, an employee group or taskforce will need to advocate for change through regular meetings with administrators in key departments. This may also include speaking at board of trustees' meetings.

Build trust with students and larger undocumented community through outreach to K-12 schools and services open to community (such as legal or financial aid workshops). These outreach efforts should be sensitive to the unique needs of the immigrant community, including bilingual college representatives and hosting services in the communities they live in rather than solely at the college. Research interviews highlighted the importance of developing trust with students and their families before they enroll at the college. For some of the colleges, this took shape as giving presentations and workshops at middle and high schools, and having workshops open to community such as free legal services.

What was clear from the research, even for the colleges that made significant strides in the implementation of supports for undocumented students, was that change can still take several years to come to fruition. Administrators spoke about the painstakingly, laborious change process they endured over many years, making incremental changes along the way. For some of these colleges, the impetus towards change was largely outside of their control, as changes to the political landscape, including the passing of the DACA and the election of President Trump, pushed college officials to revisit and revise their policies and procedures.

The college most closely implementing the recommendations above was SC2. Other colleges had elements of these best practices or provided temporary initiatives in response to significant changes in immigration policies. After a short time implementing new programs or coordination though a taskforce, typically one to two years, these colleges went back to their standard operating procedures and practices. SC1, UC, and RC would all benefit from developing permanent cross-departmental efforts that are institutionalized and remain in place beyond the current leadership. These three colleges serve as a lesson for other colleges that want to improve their supports for undocumented students: any new programs or services must be permanent to produce effective change. The experiences of the administrators in the change process also showed that policy, services, and procedures need to be revised based on state and national policy changes, along with shifting needs of undocumented students in response to external forces like the economy.

DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

I employed purposive sampling and had a small sample, which was not a full representation of administrator perceptions at each college. Though this study sought to gain insight into administrators' perceptions of adequacy of their college's supports for

undocumented students, only one administrator was interviewed at each college and may not have been representative of shared perceptions of all administrators at that college. Also, the administrators' perceptions may not align with the undocumented students' perceptions at their respective colleges.

Other delimitations of this study include the assumption of interviewees' honesty and transparency when answering questions. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing, which may have caused limitations on the richness of data gathered. At the time when interviews were conducted, it was safer to do video conferencing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. My role as a counselor at a community college, along with pre-formed opinions of interviewees, needed to be addressed as potential biases of the study.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research highlighted several best practices for creating a college environment that is most supportive of the retention and completion of undocumented students. The following recommendations were made based on the research and data collection process and convergent themes.

Include Undocumented Students as Participants

Because of the vulnerable status of undocumented students, any research involving undocumented participants must be carefully and cautiously constructed. Although limited at the community college level, there has been an increasing amount of research interviewing undocumented students about their experiences. Including undocumented students and administrators as research participants would help illuminate disconnects between student and administrator perceptions and form best practices that are rooted in the true needs of undocumented students.

Include Quantitative Data

All of the best practices and initiatives that the study found as making an impact on the completion and retention of undocumented students were based on qualitative data obtained from interviews with administrators. Yet, this is merely anecdotal data, which could be strengthened by quantitative data of how many undocumented students use the services and their reviews of the services if the colleges use point-of-service surveys. For those colleges that have a database of their undocumented students, compare retention and completion rates of these students over time as new services or policies have been implemented. Identifying how many employees participate in the college's professional development program annually could be helpful to determine impact. If numbers were low or concentrated in certain departments, the professional development may not be having as wide or significant of an impact.

Interview Other Regions of the United States

Since this research was limited to Midwest community colleges, what was identified as best practices may not work in other regions of the country. A study that compared community colleges in the Midwest with colleges in regions that are viewed by advocates as pioneers in supporting undocumented students, such as California, would provide insight into how community colleges from other regions underwent the change and implementation process to support their undocumented students.

Impact of Recent Legislation Changes

With the signing of IL House Bill 3438, undocumented students will have more support at public colleges and universities starting at the 2022-23 academic year. HB 3438 requires every public community college and university to designate an employee to serve as an undocumented student resource liaison. This liaison will assist undocumented and mixed-status students to

access financial aid and academic support. As of the writing of this dissertation, it is unknown what the process Illinois community colleges are undergoing to implement the new requirement, and whether they will expend fiscal resources by converting an existing position or creating a new position rather than adding the duties on to an existing employee. The provisions of the HB 3438 do not include the establishment of undocumented student resources or any fiscal support from the state to implement these changes. Further research is needed to determine the impact these requirements will have on persistence and completion rates, which is the stated goal of the Bill.

Focus on Culture of Resistance

Several administrators mentioned experiencing internal and external resistance and ignorance that permeated their institution's culture and stymied efforts to make substantive change. Future studies could interview constituents from different areas of the college, board of trustees, and community to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of undocumented students and the college's role in providing services to this population.

CONCLUSION

This research identified best practices at Illinois community colleges in advocating for and implementing changes to policies, procedures, and services to support undocumented students and their families. These best practices aligned prior research on supporting this population, including Valuenzuela's et al.'s (2015) IUC framework.

The differences between the five colleges in the study highlighted that change implementation was a slow and difficult task at any college, and efforts were constrained by factors such as internal and external resistance. Even SC1 and SC2, which exhibited the most significant changes, faced resistance at times and made incremental gains over many years.

Further research can help guide administrators to better plan and implement their change processes to have the greatest impact.

The finding of the greatest impact from the research is that undocumented students at community colleges need specialized advocacy and support of their institution to persist and complete their educational and career goals. That advocacy and support starts with individuals at the institutions who have more power and influence over their colleagues and students than they may believe. Even if it is only one individual pushing for change for years, that one individual can influence their coworkers, managers, and administrators, and this research reveals that the institutional agents with the senior administrative role can then push for more systemic and comprehensive change.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

Basic/Demographics

1. How long have you been employed by _____ College/University?
2. What are your duties/responsibilities?
    a. How do these impact (directly/indirectly) undocumented students?
3. How long have you worked in higher education?

Basics about College's Undocumented Students

1. How does you college track undocumented student populations, if applicable?
2. Do you have statistics on the approximate number of undocumented students at your college?
    a. Do you have estimates of how many students received DACA?
3. What are the largest ethnic groups that are represented by your undocumented students?
    a. Follow-up: Do your institutional scholarships require citizenship, residency or a Social Security #?

Interview Questions

1. What are the biggest barriers/challenges facing undocumented students at your college?
2. What do you believe are the most important factors in the retention and completion of undocumented students at your institution?
3. Where have you encountered the most resistance in response to undocumented students?
4. What degree of influence does your College's Board have on the response to serving undocumented students?
5. What offices or personnel do undocumented students most frequently interact with at your institution?
6. What financial assistance is available to undocumented students?
7. What programs, clubs or student organizations are available that directly support undocumented students?
8. What training/professional development does the college offer employees on serving undocumented students?
9. Is there anything else in relation to this topic you'd like to speak about given the theme of this research?

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307
www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: January 21, 2021

To: Sandra Balkema and Devin Chambers
From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY17-18-111 Best Practices in Serving Undocumented Students at Illinois Community Colleges*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for an extension to continue using human subjects in the study, *Best Practices in Serving Undocumented Students at Illinois Community Colleges (IRB-FY17-18-111)*. This approval has an expiration date of one year from the date of this letter. **As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined in your application until January 21, 2022.**

Your project will continue to be subject to the research protocols as mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) for using human subjects in research. It is your obligation to inform the IRB of any changes in your research protocol that would substantially alter the methods and procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB in your application. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board