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Undocumented Community College Students: The Impact of Strategic Enrollment Management Frontline Staff in Level of Undocufriendliness

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ABSTRACT

UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT FRONTLINE STAFF IN LEVEL OF UNDOCUFRIENDLINESS

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Thousands of undocumented students are enrolled in post-secondary education institutions across the nation and continue to encounter challenges in accessing the resources and support for an equitable transition into these institutions. The goal of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences and knowledge gaps of strategic enrollment management (SEM) staff by examining their perceptions of their role and responsibility in supporting undocumented students and their assessment of the campus climate and culture for undocumented students. While scholarship exists about undocumented students in colleges and universities, this research explores this in the context of the community college, where there is an overrepresentation of underrepresented groups. Findings from this study include a linguistic “us” vs. “them” dichotomy, racism endemic in processes within the institution, and a lack of institutional mechanisms including a diversity, equity, and inclusion office, guidance, or resources. These qualitative findings contribute to the richness of our understanding of the staff experience in the literature on enrollment management for undocumented students in community colleges.

Keywords: *undocumented, community college, equity, admissions, status*

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UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT FRONTLINE STAFF IN LEVEL OF

UNDOCUFRIENDLINESS

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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Kathryn Jaekel

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As a child I was fortunate enough to have a family that shielded me from the realities of how society would continuously label and define my every demographic. My attributes would become statistics regarding Latino* children, children of migrant farmers, first-generation children, Spanish-speaking households and people living in a lower income higher underrepresented minority county and community. For many years, I was somewhat protected from the reality that I was under observation and that my experiences could deter me from achieving the construct of success defined by people who were nothing like me. However, my parents, Alicia T. Garcia and Ricardo A. Garcia, made me believe that I could do anything I wanted.

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DEDICATION

En memoria de
Reverend Dr. Esmeralda Acosta

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Undocumented,” “DACAmented,” and “Dreamer” are all terms that have garnered a significant amount of national attention due to this population “stepping out of the shadows,” an act where an individual discloses their immigration status, and embracing the stance of “undocumented and unafraid.” As of January 2019, 680,000 people held DACA status and approximately 98,000 undocumented students graduated from high schools in the US (Zong & Batalova, 2019). Undocumented students are enrolling in post-secondary institutions across the nation and are met with a unique set of challenges due to their immigration status (Serna, 2017). As thousands of undocumented students graduate from high school, colleges (specifically, frontline student services staff within these institutions) are met with the challenge of helping these students navigate the college-going process. For these students, there are many barriers in general admission, financial aid, and admission to certain academic majors (Serna, 2017). In addition to the college-going processes, this student population also deals with the impact of fear of disclosing their status and the toll on their mental health and overall well-being (Terriquez, 2015).

Navigating the college-going process can be challenging for any student, and understanding the admissions process is vital as it serves as the starting point for all prospective students. Undocumented students bring a unique set of challenges to the proverbial table. They navigate an admissions process full of restrictions and limited access due to their immigration status (Barnhardt et al., 2017). Financial aid is extremely limited for undocumented students (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). This can vary state by state and by institution type, private versus

public colleges and universities. Some states allow undocumented students to complete the FAFSA as a non-eligible applicant for the purpose of determining financial need. The absence of a FAFSA can result in automatic ineligibility for need-based scholarships, as financial need is often determined by the FAFSA. These restrictions can also be found when selecting a major (Terriquez, 2015). Programs that require a background check, such as nursing, health care interpreting, and the certified nurse's aide certification, are not options for undocumented students.

Undocumented students interact with admissions staff, recruiters, counselors in academic advising, financial aid staff, and other frontline SEM staff to complete the admissions process, from application to enrollment. If this process is not perceived as undocufriendly, this can negatively impact the experience and matriculation of undocumented students. An undocumented student's experience with these staff members can result in the student not enrolling and abandoning their goal of post-secondary education. Disclosing their immigration status, which is sensitive information, to someone who does not have an understanding or skillset to serve the student, may lead to a cycle of handing off the student from one person to the next (Serna, 2017). If incorrect information is provided to an undocumented student there can be significant legal consequences. When DACA was first introduced, there was a lot of confusion regarding a student's eligibility to complete the FAFSA, since the student was issued a Social Security number. Submitting a FAFSA as a non-eligible applicant is applying fraudulently and can later impact the student if they have the opportunity to apply for residency and/or citizenship.

Enrollment management departments are key in supporting undocumented students and this demands engaging in inclusive practices (Serna, 2017). The undocumented student

population at community colleges is worthy of equitable, sensitive, and accurate support and should be more than the minimum. If the mission of community colleges is to embrace a mission of open admission and access to post-secondary education, it is important that the staff who work with undocumented students convey this through the implementation of best practices to fulfill the goal of moving a student to matriculation.

The goal of this research project is to explore what awareness and/or knowledge strategic enrollment management (SEM) frontline staff have about working with undocumented students. Additionally, a goal of this project is to then identify the challenges and missing institutional mechanisms that should be in place to support these frontline staff to better serve the undocumented student population. It is imperative that more be done to educate staff and develop best practices to support undocumented students. The goal of this research is to highlight missed opportunities that can further negatively impact the college-going experience of a vulnerable population.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017) is to explore the perceptions that strategic enrollment management (SEM) frontline staff have on the experiences of undocumented students completing the admissions process at Bluestem Community College (BCC; a pseudonym), a public two-year community college in the Midwest. Specifically, this study aims to explore the knowledge gaps frontline SEM staff encounter when working with undocumented students and was be guided by the following research questions:

1. What perceptions do frontline staff have of their role in supporting undocumented students?
2. What knowledge does frontline staff have regarding undocumented students and post-secondary education?
3. What institutional training or strategies have been put in place to support undocumented students?

Findings from this study can help inform what participants know, the processes that they have in place when working with undocumented students, and possibly identifying their personal beliefs while working at a suburban, affluent, conservative, and PWI community college.

As student enrollment at Bluestem Community College continues to diversify, strategies must also evolve to properly serve today's students. The student profile is full of intersecting identities. Community colleges often suffer an identity crisis, fearful of embracing the significant role they play in post-secondary education for marginalized student populations. Community colleges often try to assume an identity and often fail to truly serve the community college student, chasing after being a "first-choice" school or trying to use strategies designed for traditional four-year institutions, resulting in community colleges needing to become more SEM conscious (Hossler, Bontrager, & Associates, 2015). Undocumented students enroll at larger rates at public institutions, with community colleges often being the most accessible (American Immigration Council, 2017; Feldblum et al., 2020; Terriquez, 2015; Zong et al., 2017).

Embracing the community college identity and the undocumented community college student could create a powerful shift. When SEM efforts align with the actual student population, the students that are served are provided strategic, intentional, and meaningful practices designed to help them attain their educational goals. The relationship that community colleges have with K-

12 and four-year schools is an opportunity to strengthen the pipeline to post-secondary education and identify and develop strategies that support undocumented students, which in turn is beneficial to the college. Bluestem Community College has the opportunity to lead in serving its undocumented students and continue to be a model for peer institutions across the nation.

Literature Review

Undocumented students come from many different countries, although it is important to note that the Latino* community is among the highest rate in this population. The literature reviewed within this project places the context of undocumented students within the Latino* community. This literature review consists of studies around the increase in undocumented students in post-secondary education, the admissions process for undocumented students, and promising best practices for college employees to support undocumented students.

Increase in Undocumented Students in U.S. Postsecondary Education

Undocumented students are accessing post-secondary education at rates that continue to increase, despite barriers that differ by state policy and institution type (community college vs. private institutions). The legal issues that impact undocumented students began with the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) case which sought to provide free public education for undocumented students in the K-12 system (MALDEF, 2018). In 2001 the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) was introduced to Congress. The first version of this Act was proposed in 2001 and approximately 10 versions of the DREAM Act have been introduced to

Congress since but not passed (American Immigration Council, 2019). The Dream Act was created to provide current, former, and future undocumented high school diploma and GED recipients a pathway to citizenship through college, work, or the armed forces (American Immigration Council, 2019).

Under the Obama Administration in 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals was resurrected as a solution that provided temporary relief from deportation (deferred action) for undocumented immigrants who met certain criteria (American Immigration Council, 2019). In June 2015, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that DACA was being rescinded and effective immediately USCIS would no longer accept new applications (Chishti & Bolter, 2017). The Trump Administration purportedly gave Congress a small window of time to develop a better solution in response to this action. In June 2020, the Supreme Court overturned the Trump Administration's decision to end DACA (National Immigration Law Center, 2020). The legal issues that affect undocumented students add to the complexity and obstacles that these students face when trying to access post-secondary education.

According to a 2017 data report from the Migration Policy Institute, 18% of DACA recipients were enrolled in colleges and universities across the country (Zong et al., 2017). This number does not account for non-DACA-eligible undocumented students. A 2018 estimate by New American Economy (NAE) reports that undocumented students now account for approximately two percent or 450,000 of students in post-secondary education (Feldblum et al., 2020).

The immigrant population continues to grow and the presence of undocumented students in post-secondary education is most prevalent in community college and four-year colleges and

universities (American Immigration Council, 2017; Feldblum et al., 2020; Zong et al., 2017). Data shows that 82% of undocumented students are enrolled in these types of institutions (Feldblum et al., 2020). Exploring state data, a 2014 report found that 75,000 undocumented immigrants reside in Kansas and made up close to 2.5% of the state's population (American Immigration Council, 2017). These national and state data sets support that there has been and will continue to be an increase in enrollment for undocumented students in post-secondary education.

Undocumented Student Experience and the Admissions Process

The experiences of undocumented students attempting to complete the college-going process requires multiple interactions with strategic enrollment management (SEM) frontline staff. Inclusive enrollment management should ensure that undocumented students be visible, or considered, by the institution. Serna (2017) noted that the only certainty that undocumented students have is uncertainty about their educational opportunities. It is important to acknowledge that the admissions process is different for undocumented students and can be a barrier to post-secondary education.

Financial Barriers

One of the biggest challenges that undocumented students face is access to financial aid due to their immigration status. Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 states that federal

financial aid was created to support disadvantaged students with funds to cover a portion of tuition, fees, and other associated education costs (Enyioha, 2019). However, this congressional act prohibited undocumented students from receiving any federal financial aid for post-secondary education via the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA; uLead Network, n.d.).

Financial aid.

Access to financial aid is one of the biggest barriers that undocumented college students face (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Nienhusser, 2013; Serna, 2017; Terriquez, 2015). Undocumented and DACA students are not eligible to apply for any federal aid. While some institutions allow undocumented students to apply as non-eligible applicants to determine financial need, this varies by state and institution. Undocumented students are often from low-income backgrounds and first-generation students, with approximately 40% of undocumented children living below the poverty level (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Nienhusser, 2014; Serna, 2017). The student's immigration status makes them ineligible for federal loans, grants, or work study (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). Financial aid is one of the college-going steps that can result in an undocumented student learning for the first time the reality about their immigration status.

The general lack of access to resources is an additional stressor for undocumented students (Gonzalez et al., 2013). Ambiguous language can also be confusing for students to understand what they are eligible for (Serna, 2017). Coupled with these barriers, undocumented

students must also make the decision to disclose their immigration status and this can cause fear of putting themselves and their families in a precarious situation by sharing this information with people with whom may not have the time to develop a sense of trust.

In-State Resident Tuition Policy (ISRT)

In-state resident tuition policies (ISRT) are determined by each individual state and “allow out-of-state resident students to attend college at the same price as in-state resident students if they meet certain requirements” (Flores, 2010, p. 241). Kansas is considered an inclusive state and an ISRT was introduced on May 24, 2004, that states that eligible students must meet the following requirements: attend an accredited Kansas high school for three or more years, graduate from an accredited Kansas high school or obtain a GED within Kansas, and submit a signed and notarized affidavit to the college or university that the student is enrolled in (uLEAD Network, n.d.). Across the United States, 20 states have been identified as inclusive due to active ISRTs for undocumented students. Eligibility policies vary from state to state.

Conger and Turner (2017) found that the removal of an ISRT, even in the time span of one semester, impacted re-enrollment, credit accumulations, short- and long-term educational attainment, and earlier college exit behaviors for undocumented students. An ISRT can significantly lower the cost of tuition for students. Conger and Turner (2017) assessed that the financial impact of the removal of an ISRT is a 113% tuition increase for undocumented students. This means that the financial impact of an ISRT is significant, as many undocumented immigrants have lower incomes and almost 40% live below the poverty level (Nienhusser, 2014).

If an ISRT exists, access to this information is important for these students and for SEM frontline staff to be familiar with. Information is often difficult to locate online or completely absent on college websites, and staff (particularly in admissions, recruitment, and financial aid) are not properly trained how to support undocumented students or even locate the appropriate information online. Vulnerable populations often have inadequate access to accurate college information (Nienhusser, 2014; Serna, 2017). Simple errors that financially impact or deter students from enrolling in college can be having incorrect information, such as explaining how DACA and ISRTs are not synonymous.

Undocumented Student Stressors

National trends are telling a story of shifting “demographics of the U.S. population, which is becoming less white” (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 6). The growth of the undocumented student population is continuing to climb steadily, and enrollment numbers reflect that. Institutions should be cognizant and mindful of this when developing SEM plans that are intentional, respectful, and responsive to this student segment demographic. The challenge lies in institutions being aware and educated when addressing these challenges and not falling prey to antiquated stereotypes or personal bias about the immigration status of the student.

As Serna (2017) stated, the only certainty that undocumented students have is that they will experience uncertainty in the post-secondary education arena. Undocumented students experience additional stressors when they encounter barriers directly related to their legal status (Gonzales et al., 2013). The admissions process for undocumented students at times includes

processes that directly ask about residency/citizenship status. This can often be found in the admissions application that may contain threatening language under the residency/citizenship portion. The difference between having the option to select “non-resident” as a residency type vs. “unlawful immigrant” as a visa type can result in an undocumented student feeling more uncertainty about their safety at the institution. This language can be perceived as being offensive and a mischaracterization of these students. This example highlights the challenge of frontline staff having to interpret and apply policies that they may not be properly trained on (Nienhusser, 2014; Serna 2017).

Inclusivity is also important for messaging and access to campus messaging via the campus website. Public demonstration of support and messaging across campus for undocumented students is essential for creating a climate of inclusion (Barnhardt et al., 2017). At times undocumented students will encounter college staff who are not willing to share information with these students due to improper training (Nienhusser, 2014). It is important to remember that SEM offices are the primary conduit of information for prospective students, including undocumented students, and can be viewed as the gatekeepers of post-secondary education (Serna, 2017). This makes the role of frontline SEM staff even more relevant to the experiences of an inclusive climate for undocumented students.

Resources and Support Services

Working with undocumented students can feel like navigating through a myriad of obstacles that do not always have clear-cut solutions. The many departments that comprise SEM

offer different resources, and this can be an obstacle for an undocumented student as they try to complete the admissions process and understand their eligibility to access certain resources within each department.

Counseling departments provide support for students in the forms of academic advising, personal counseling, and career counseling for those who are still in need of selecting a major. The challenges of ambiguous language and the responsibility to interpret those policies by SEM frontline staff can be frustrating for both the employee and the undocumented student trying to understand what it all means (Nienhuser, 2014). University agents who are unfamiliar with policies regarding undocumented student rights or access, for example eligibility to select a degree program, may contribute to students' psychological stress (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). This combination can result in an undocumented student struggling to successfully communicate and trust college employees, further impacting their mental and emotional health (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013).

There are many other SEM offices that an undocumented student must interact with solely to become a fully admitted and enrolled student. Research conducted by Valenzuela et al. (2015) suggested that community colleges have work to do to meet the needs of undocumented students, as they have higher enrollment rates of this student segment. Cultural competence, a positive campus climate, embracing diversity, equity and inclusion, and fulfilling the mission of post-secondary education require an ethic of care, justice, and absence of social stigma regarding these students (Valenzuela et al., 2015). Admissions, the International and Immigrant Student Services office, and testing centers for placement tests are just a few of the other offices that share a responsibility in helping undocumented students complete the admissions process.

Promising Training and Best Practices for SEM Staff

Training can help frontline staff be prepared and sensitive to the needs of undocumented students who may already be struggling with having to disclose information that can be frightening. Training should include information about “the unique characteristics that limit undocumented student enrollment, retention, transfer, and graduation” (Valenzuela et al., 2015, p. 89).

As institutions that have developed for other marginalized populations, undocumented student safe-space training can help identify allies and has been identified as a promising practice. A safe space can be both a physical location and metaphorical place that serve marginalized populations to move from non-beingness to beingness (Davis, 1999). The importance of safe-space training lies in the ability to address campus climate that is affected by micro and macro sociopolitical and institutional structures that then impact post-secondary access and success (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). An institution and its employees will need to evaluate whether the institution’s commitment is a diversity of convenience and come to terms that it may be working towards maintaining a hostile racial campus climate (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). An institution does not have to be explicitly racist in order to create a hostile environment (Gusa, 2010). La Casa Cultural Latina at the University of Illinois--Urbana-Champaign is a model example of thorough and thoughtful safe-space training for post-secondary education (About La Casa, n.d.). Safe-space models such as this provide undocumented students with a space that alleviates fear and addresses the insider/outsider narrative (Serna, 2017).

Institutional and systemic support for undocumented students has been recommended due to the influence that frontline staff have on the student experience (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). This can be accomplished by having dedicated staff designated to support undocumented students, which allows for the mobilization of resources (Nienhusser, 2014, Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). Empowering staff and providing mandatory training can facilitate this process (Serna, 2017).

Inclusivity is at the core of many of the challenges and promising practices to support undocumented students; this is true of technology and access to content for undocumented students on institution websites (Nienhusser, 2014; Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Serna, 2017). Information that can easily be found online, may be especially important for undocumented students as they may be more apprehensive to visit campus or speak to college employees directly (Nienhusser, 2014). This can also include social media presence as this is a prominent online tool for traditional-aged college students (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This study has been influenced by Aguilar's (2019) developing theory, undocumented critical theory (UndocuCrit). This theory is based on tenets rooted in critical race theory (CRT), Latina/o critical theory (LatCrit), and tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit). Aguilar (2018) describes the experiences of undocumented immigrants through a lens that is nuanced and liminal and challenges the immigrant binary rhetoric. UndocuCrit tenets helped guide data

collection and analysis. UndocuCrit theory states that fear is endemic among immigrant communities; different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality; parental *sacrificios* (sacrifice) become a form of capitol; and *acompañamiento* is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemptions, and community engagement (Aguilar, 2019). This research will primarily examine the role of fear and feelings of liminality for undocumented students in the context of the admissions process at BCC.

UndocuCrit theory highlights how undocumented immigrants navigate realities such as post-secondary education that can make an undocumented person not feel like a normal college student. This case study will attempt to capture data that supports how SEM frontline staff contribute to feelings of fear, absence of identity, and experiences of reality interfering with a student's perception of undocufriendliness of the admissions process.

At the core of this theory is the challenge of the immigrant binary rhetoric. BCC is a PWI, in a conservative county, and institutional politics have made immigration topics challenging. In 2017 when DACA was rescinded and institutions began to release statements of support for its undocumented students, BCC was hesitant. BCC administration suggested that a statement of support be drafted by a director in the International and Immigrant Student Services and a recruitment coordinator, rather than the BCC president. The hesitancy can be attributed to a lack of understanding and awareness regarding the immigrant binary rhetoric. The biggest problem is that the student's immigration status is politicized and supporting the student is interpreted as a liberal stance or pro-immigrant.

One of the biggest challenges when working with undocumented students is to understand why the student is in the country unlawfully and reconcile that internally. These

students are already struggling and do not need the added weight of opinions about their status. Many of the students can feel displaced as both their country of origin is foreign, and the country in which they reside and call home is not theirs. Research participants may struggle with the subject matter and the concept of unlawful presence. UndocuCrit seeks to explore the multidimensionality of the undocumented experience.

Of importance is to acknowledge that Aguilar is of Mexican descent and his theory highlights the Latino* undocumented experiences and some of the theory components are in Spanish. BCC's entire undocumented student population will be considered in this research, not only students of Latino* and/or Spanish-speaking descent. It is important to emphasize that immigration and being undocumented is not only a Latino* issue.

Research Design

The qualitative case study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017) research project is designed to explore how SEM frontline staff impact the experiences of undocumented students at Bluestem Community College as they complete the admissions process. The design of this study seeks to explore how SEM offices support the undocumented student population. SEM offices have been described as the primary conduit of information for prospective students, which includes undocumented students, and are viewed as the gatekeepers of post-secondary education (Serna, 2017).

This study was developed through the lens of a critical research paradigm. This particular paradigm argues that reality is influenced by factors such as culture, politics, ethnicity, gender,

and religion. The interactions of these categories shape the construct of a social system that is inequitable for marginalized populations, which for this study is defined as the undocumented student population. In addition, the critical paradigm argues that an individual's lived reality or truth is flawed due to the oppressive nature of the social system that was created by those who hold authority (Jones et al., 2014). According to the critical research paradigm, it is expected that the researcher will be directly affected by the research that will be carried out, and lived experiences will assume the role of researcher "baggage" carried along throughout the process. This study attempted to collect and share the stories of how SEM frontline staff serve or fail to serve undocumented students.

The critical research paradigm also suggests that lived reality is shaped by extenuating factors and constructs enforced by those with more power. Aguilar's (2019) developing theory, undocumented critical theory (UndocuCrit), supports that the realities that undocumented student experience are shaped by liminality. UndocuCrit theory highlights how undocumented immigrants navigate realities such as post-secondary education that can make an undocumented person not feel like a normal college student. This study will attempt to capture data that demonstrates how SEM frontline staff impact undocumented students feeling like average, normal college students. In using this as a central theoretical underpinning, the study aligns with my worldview and position throughout the research. Bluestem Community College is a predominantly White institution (PWI) that has experienced a shift in student demographics. The college also has access to a state policy created to provide an in-state tuition residency policy (ISRT), making it an inclusive institution for undocumented students pursuing post-secondary education.

Methodological Approach

For the purpose of this research, an explanatory case study design was selected. Explanatory case studies have the primary purpose to “determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 39). The case was bounded by time and location. The Fall 2020 semester at BCC was selected due to the number of “traditional” students enrolling and most ISRT students becoming eligible due to meeting the high school graduation requirement for HB 2145(KS ISRT). Frontline staff are accustomed to the influx of students completing the admissions process in the fall and BCC enrollment data suggests that several thousand students enroll two weeks prior to the semester beginning. The fall semester captures both degree and non-degree-seeking and dual-credit undocumented students. The majority of dual-credit courses offered are yearlong and students must enroll in fall. By examining the impact of the admissions structure, development, interactions and collective behavior of the designated group, the research explored how SEM frontline staff impact the college-going process for undocumented students (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

Research Site

Bluestem Community College (BCC) enrolls approximately 18,000 credit students. The large enrollment size of the college and the number of undocumented students enrolled at BCC increase the likelihood that SEM frontline staff have interacted with this

population. SEM offices at BCC include admissions and recruitment, testing, the International and Immigrant Student Services office, counseling (academic, personal, and career), ACCESS services for students with accommodation needs, and student life and engagement.

The county backdrop is critical to understand the conservative response or position that the college has taken on issues that can carry a political undertone, specifically the undocumented student population. When DACA was rescinded in 2016, college administration was apprehensive to release a public statement in support of its undocumented student population and failed to advocate for or stand in solidarity with the students. This provides a glimpse into the external factors that contribute to the research site context.

Bluestem Community College (BCC) was established in the 1960s in the Midwest. BCC is a public community college with a Fall 2019 student enrollment of 18,311, making it the third largest college in the state of Kansas (KBOR, 2019). According to the United States Census (2018), the demographic composition of the county the institutions resides in is:

- 86.9% of the county residents are White.
- 95.7% are high school graduates or higher.
- 54.6% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- \$81,121 is the average household income.
- 5.3% of the county is living in poverty.

This makes the county the wealthiest in the state of Kansas and one of the wealthiest in the nation. This demographic information provides environmental context for BCC.

A shift in student demographics at BCC is evident and census enrollment data for the Fall 2018 semester was 67% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 6% African American, 4% Asian, 1%

American Indian, Alaska Native, and <1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Site institution's report, n.d.). This data aligns with the statement that this generation of college students is "the most racially and ethnically diverse in the nation's history" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 3). This cohort of students also reported their educational objectives: 54% earn associates/certificate, 35% transfer, 2% job related, 3% personal reasons, and 6% other (Site institution's report, n.d.).

BCC offers 45 programs of study, including 99 degree and certificate options (Site institution's report, n.d.). While an open-admission institution, 16 of the programs of study are selective admissions. The main campus, located in the Midwest, sits on over 200 acres and has 24 buildings. A fine arts and design building and a career and technical education center were opened within the past two years, with state-of-the-art, sustainable facilities. Two additional satellite campuses, located near the main campus, house the cosmetology program and several healthcare-related programs.

BCC student segments include traditional, first-time, full-time freshman, and non-traditional students and international and immigrant students. BCC's dual-enrollment program within the mega-school districts of the county result in approximately 4,000 students or 23% of enrollment (Site institution's report, 2019). In addition, Kansas state policy provides an inclusive in-state resident tuition policy (ISRT) that provides undocumented students who have completed three years of high school in an accredited Kansas high school and graduated from an accredited Kansas high school or obtained a GED the ability to obtain Kansas residency for tuition purposes. A large population of undocumented students, not eligible for the ISRT, also attend BCC. This overview provides some insight into the college culture. BCC was established and has

functioned as a predominantly White institution (PWI). However, changes in student enrollment are beginning to tell a story that is shifting.

Due to the size and location of BCC, neighboring Missouri, which that has implemented numerous restrictions for undocumented students to access post-secondary education, coupled with an in-state tuition residency policy (ISRT) in Kansas, the undocumented student population at BCC has continued to grow. According to findings reported from the Migration Policy Institute (Zong et al., 2017), there are approximately 5,900 DACA recipients in the state of the Kansas. It is important to remember that the undocumented population may be larger, as these figures are not inclusive of undocumented, DACA-ineligible residents. As the population moves from the K-12 pipeline to colleges and universities, new challenges are being found in how post-secondary education supports these students.

Participants

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the goal is to identify participants who contribute to the collection of good data and thick descriptions. The number of participants for this study was determined by the development of the data collection methods. I developed stronger and more targeted data collection methods in order to conduct fewer interviews and recruit less participants. Using purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2001), I identified participants who had worked at the college for more than six months and self-reported a minimum of fair to good grasp of the responsibilities their office handles. The participants also had experience

working with undocumented students completing the admissions process at BCC. Any staff who had not worked with undocumented students was not be eligible to participate.

A minimum of eight to twelve participants selected from the following BCC SEM offices was determined to be ideal: Admissions, International and Immigrant Student Services, Academic Advising, and Financial Aid. The invitation to participate was sent to all staff within each department in order to identify willing participants. I sent out a brief email introducing the goal of the research and a request to recruit participation from two or three representatives from each department. The participants would, ideally vary in level of position within their respective departments and include supervisors and participants who have more direct day-to-day interactions with the student population. Individuals who responded were given the opportunity to discuss the time commitment and confidentiality aspects of the study, along with any questions that they may have for the researcher.

Due my position at the college, many of the participants had worked together frequently. As a staff member in the same division, Student Success and Engagement, the recruitment team and I work with prospective students and supporting students through the admissions process. The recruitment team collaborates with these departments for campus events, campus visits, and educating and information sharing with prospective students. It was important for participants to understand the researcher's position and intention throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and findings. The interviews were sensitive due to the nature of the topic and the political and cultural climate of the college. I needed to be mindful of this throughout data collection.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2007) and a document analysis (Merriam, 2001) of the BCC website. Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow space for participants to elaborate on certain questions and provide information about their experiences as frontline staff working with undocumented students. Participants were invited to complete two rounds of interviewing, which ultimately contributed to data quality and trustworthiness. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes each. This data collection helped tell the story about the role of SEM frontline staff and their role as “gatekeeper” for undocumented students (who are already invested in BCC when they complete the application for admissions) as they attempt to complete the admissions process.

All interviews were conducted on campus in a neutral space that provided both the participant and the researcher a location away from the central SEM building. Many buildings on campus have a collaborative open-space design, so it was important to secure a space on campus that was neutral but also allowed for more privacy, with limited open windows facing into hallway traffic. Interviews were scheduled during the work week in the time span of two to three business days. Each interview was scheduled to last between 45-60 minutes each in order to account for setup time or any technical difficulties. All interviews were conducted during the Fall 2020 semester (see Appendix A).

A document analysis of the institution’s website was also conducted in order to identify resources and information specific to undocumented students. Content specific to admissions, financial aid, counseling, and the International and Immigrant Student Services office was

documented in order to align with the departments that were selected to be interviewed.

Webpage content was categorized as “undocumented student specific” or as “ambiguous/unclear”. The number of clicks it takes to reach resources and information specific to undocumented students was tallied. A keyword search also yielded results, since the BCC website was recently updated to search by keyword.

Data Analysis

Data collected from this research was constantly compared to assess if interview questions were needed or if they needed to be adjusted in order to collect the intended data. During the timeframe that interviews were being conducted, I began to analyze previous interviews and make notes that ultimately helped during formal data analysis. All interviews were transcribed.

Following the data collection in Fall 2020, all data was organized and prepared for coding. Data was coded using descriptive coding in order to develop a description of the setting, the people interviewed, and events in the setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Coding occurred at two levels in order to identify themes and interpret and analyze (Merriam, 2001). Codes were identified and multiple rounds of coding for interview transcripts and website content were conducted. Some codes were pre-determined based on previous research about undocumented students in post-secondary education. Any unexpected codes identified throughout the coding process were specific to this case. I relied on available information about the coding process in order to increase reliability in findings. Codes were collapsed into themes with the goal of

establishing themes and patterns, identifying data that was disconfirming, and interpreting findings. An important component, as has been mentioned previously, is thick descriptions of the campus and department setting and the interviewees.

Criteria for Quality

In order to improve research trustworthiness, multiple strategies were used to increase validity and reliability. Triangulation was one of most important strategies used. Data were collected from multiple sources, both interviews and website document analysis which help confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 2001). Triangulation serves the purpose of providing a holistic understanding of the data and does not guarantee validity (Merriam, 2001). Triangulation helps reduce bias due to research positionality. Although all interviewees are part of the Student Success & Engagement branch of the college, they represent different departments with different internal reporting structures.

Interviews were the central data collection method for this research, and member checks were conducted throughout collection in order to confirm with participants that tentative interpretations are accurate (Merriam, 2001). This case study relied heavily on thick descriptions throughout the data collection, analysis, and the compilation of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study explored and told a detail-rich story that supports the research purpose statement. In addition, all data underwent peer examination and an acknowledgement of researcher biases, including how the research paradigm influenced the study.

Researcher Positionality

This study was developed due in part to my experience at the college. These experiences are due to individual social identities and the unpaid labor that I have felt has been expected of me. I identify as a female, Latina*, first-generation college student, and wife of a former undocumented person who was initially hired as a diversity recruiter in 2012. I am currently the Recruitment Coordinator, and while underrepresented minority student populations and equity in post-secondary education are my passion, staff and faculty continue to route to me undocumented students with issues that extend beyond the recruitment phase of prospect to matriculation.

The diversity recruiter position was created in 2012, around the same time that DACA was introduced. The college and my former direct supervisor encouraged and expected that this position would serve as a source to increase diverse recruitment practices. Although this has evolved across the years, the primary focus was students in school districts that were more diverse, lower income, and more likely to be first generation. Due to my bilingual, Spanish-speaking skills, students and families who needed information and support fell under my responsibility.

I have been supported in dedicating time, professional development, and participation in community organizations and on-campus committees with a diversity focus. I also currently serves as the chair for a BCC committee, called to order by the Dean of Student Services to identify and develop programming for Latino* students at the college. In addition, I serve as a co-advisor for the Latino* student organization, am a member of the Multicultural Programming

Advisory Committee, serve on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Taskforce that helped interview and select a third-party company to complete a campus-wide diversity audit, and serve as co-chair of a local scholarship event associated with the Greater Kansas City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Kansas City Hispanic Collaborative. These experiences have allowed me to participate, learn, and be active in the college and community and work with many undocumented students.

Through my work, BCC has been active in hosting an annual conference addressing the needs of Latino/a students and, with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, a day-long undocumented student safe-space training. I have acquired additional skills by attending the annual conference hosted by the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). My background experience has developed and includes collaboration with local K-12 districts, immigration attorneys, and local advocacy groups with the goal of sharing this skillset across campus in order to best support undocumented students.

Community colleges typically enroll disproportionate numbers of lower income, under-represented minority, first-generation, and undocumented students. BCC enrolls approximately 200 undocumented students but there are no policies and very limited resources in place to address the admissions needs of this population. The topic of immigration has become more visible at the national and state levels due to challenges to repeal the ISRT policy known as HB2145, the federal decision to rescind DACA, which has prohibited any new applicants and USCIS accepting only renewal applications, in addition to rhetoric and false narrative about immigrants in the United States.

This study has the potential to contribute to the literature of enrollment management for undocumented students. The enrollment process is the gateway for students to access post-secondary education and has the potential and responsibility to be “the mechanism for social inclusion, equity, and financial well-being” (Serna, 2017, p. 45). About 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school every year and research that contributes to understanding this population, identifying gaps in the admissions processes, and developing best practice on how to better serve this population is imperative.

Significance

According to the College Board (n.d.), there are approximately 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school every year. Community colleges typically enroll disproportionate numbers of lower income, underrepresented minority, first-generation, and undocumented students. Currently, BCC enrolls approximately 200 undocumented students but there is an absence of policies and very limited resources in place to address the admissions needs of undocumented students. The topic of immigration has become more visible at the national and state level due to challenges to repeal the Kansas ISRT policy known as HB2145, the federal decision to rescind DACA, which has prohibited any new applicants and USCIS accepting only renewal applications, in addition to polarizing rhetoric and false narrative about immigrants in the US.

This study has the potential to contribute to the literature of enrollment management for undocumented students. The enrollment process serves as a gateway for undocumented students

to access post-secondary education. The admissions process and the corresponding enrollment management departments have the potential and responsibility to be “the mechanism for social inclusion, equity, and financial well-being” (Serna, 2017, pg. 45). Thousands of undocumented students graduate from high school every year, and research that contributes to understanding this population, identifying gaps in the admissions processes, and developing best practice on how to better serve this population is imperative.

The legal issues that impact undocumented students began with the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) case, which sought to provide free public education for undocumented students in the K-12 system (MALDEF, 2018). The fight for undocumented student rights continues at the federal, state, and institutional levels. As the research and resources for undocumented students in post-secondary education have developed, it is important that institutions like BCC, which continues to see increases in undocumented student enrollment, examine their role in creating an inclusive climate. BCC’s accomplishments have placed it as a leader among peer institutions across the nation. BCC has an obligation to support marginalized student populations and possibly lead other institutions to do so as well. As the demand for social justice and educational equity increases, no one should overlook that undocumented students are part of that story.

CHAPTER 2

DOING THE BARE MINIMUM: AN UNDOCUCRIT EXAMINATION OF STAFF *ACOMPANAMIENTO* FOR UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

Introduction

Undocumented students are present by the hundreds of thousands, but often invisible, in post-secondary education. According to a 2018 report published by New American Economy for the President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, it is estimated that 450,000 or approximately 2% of students enrolled in post-secondary education are undocumented (Feldblum et al., 2020). Data was not categorized by institution type, public or private colleges and universities vs. community colleges. Despite an absence of the data, undocumented students are enrolled at institutions across the country, with students facing numerous obstacles that lead to the central issue of immigration status. The fight for equitable access to education for undocumented students can be traced to 1982 with *Plyler v. Doe* (1982; Flores, 2010; MALDEF, 2018). While this case concerned access to public, free education in the K-12 system, it points to a history of the plight that these students have encountered for years.

Undocumented people face a number of challenges, and students pursuing post-secondary education are met with barriers that do not exist in the K-12 education realm. The transition from K-12 to higher education is not seamless due to the multiple processes in place designed to route students from prospect to matriculation. The college-going process for undocumented students demands not only a knowledge of federal law but also awareness of

information regarding state legislation for inclusive states that offer in-state resident tuition policies (ISRT). Undocumented students must also possess the skills to understand and navigate institutional processes including admission requirements, financial aid opportunities and limitations, available resources, documentation requirements, academic major eligibility, and more. Simultaneously, students have to protect themselves when disclosing their own immigration status and that of family members if the student is from a mixed-status family.

Community colleges typically have student enrollment that is disproportionate. with an overrepresentation of underrepresented groups in race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and first-generation students. Due to the intersecting identities and characteristics of undocumented students, community colleges may also be enrolling a disproportionate number of undocumented- status students. The current data supports that undocumented students are most prevalent in community colleges and four-year colleges and universities (American Immigration Council, 2017; Feldblum et al., 2020; Zong et al., 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore how strategic enrollment management (SEM) staff members perceive undocumented students, knowledge of available resources, and knowledge and training, specifically for working with undocumented students, and to assess the campus climate and culture for this vulnerable population. Specifically, the guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What perceptions do frontline staff have of their role in supporting undocumented students?
2. What knowledge do frontline staff have regarding undocumented students in post-secondary education?

3. What institutional training or strategies have been put in place to support undocumented students?

This study is critical because strategic enrollment management departments are a vital part of the life cycle for all prospective and current students. These departments are high touch, ostensibly student centered, and often identified by institution administration, through the use of institutional data and strategic planning, to develop recruitment/enrollment goals integral in attaining and maintaining these targets to avoid declining enrollment. SEM offices are often described as the primary conduit of information for students and are viewed as the gatekeepers to post-secondary education, making them the best fit for this research (Serna, 2017).

Findings highlight the missed opportunities to support prospective and current undocumented students and indicate imbalances in systems that negatively impact the college experience. Recommendations that emerge from this study discuss the critical nature of education of frontline staff, the creation of accessible resources for undocumented students, and funding for scholarships.

Undocumented Students: Legal Aspects, Population Growth, and Presence in U.S Postsecondary Education

Undocumented students are a unique underrepresented group due to the legal and systemic issues that impact them holistically and in multiple arenas including academia, employment, and housing. This can be further complicated by conflicting or overlapping federal, state, and institutional regulations in place. The Supreme Court case of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982),

which sought to provide free public education for undocumented students in the K-12 system, made it unconstitutional for states to withhold funds from school districts that were educating undocumented students (MALDEF, 2018). The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) was introduced in 2001 and 10 versions of the act have been introduced to Congress but not passed (American Immigration Council, 2019). The Dream Act would have created a pathway to citizenship for recipients through post-secondary education, employment, or enlisting in the armed forces (American Immigration Council, 2019).

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals was reintroduced in 2012 under the Obama Administration to provide temporary relief from deportation (American Immigration Council, 2019). Recipients became eligible to apply for temporary work permits, and with an issued Social Security number, many could for the first time obtain state ID's, driver's licenses, and seek employment. When the Trump Administration rescinded DACA in 2015, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) stopped accepting new applications and the future of renewals was unknown (Chishti & Bolter, 2017). On June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court overturned the Trump Administration's decision to end DACA and allowed new initial applications and renewals for the foreseeable future (National Immigration Law Center, 2020). The impact of these laws has also contributed to shaping the reality for undocumented students.

It is important to note that undocumented status is not only a Latino*¹ issue, and other underrepresented racial and ethnic groups can also fall into an undocumented status. For the purpose of this research, the Latino* undocumented student population will serve as the primary

¹ Here, the use of the asterisk denotes the evolving term of Latino and/or Hispanic to be more inclusive; this pan-ethnic and gender-neutral term allows for those that identify as such to interchange the term to be more representative of the community.

focus. As of January 2019, 680,000 people held DACA status (Zong & Batalova, 2019); however, this data is not inclusive of the entire undocumented population in the United States. Examining data in the state of Kansas from 2014, it was reported that 75,000 undocumented immigrants reside in the state, making up approximately 2.5% of the state's population (American Immigration Council, 2017). The Latino* population in Kansas is relatively young, with 21% of the 329,000 Latino* Kansans falling in the age range of 18-29 years (Kansas Department of Commerce Creative Arts Industries Commission, 2017). This data points to an expected increase of undocumented students moving from the K-12 pipeline into Kansas post-secondary institutions.

Undocumented students make up 2% of post-secondary enrollment in the United States (Feldblum et al., 2020). A 2017 report from the Migration Policy Institute further found that of the undocumented population, 18% of undocumented immigrants who hold active DACA status are enrolled in colleges and universities (Zong et al., 2017). National and state data suggest undocumented students will continue to be enrolled in post-secondary institutions across the country. Federal immigration legislation, state mandates, and institutional mechanisms work to shape what the collegiate experience will be for undocumented students.

Undocumented Students and the Admissions Process

The admissions process is complex, and it is important to acknowledge that the process can be a barrier for undocumented students. There is not a singular approach for undocumented students or undocumented-adjacent students. Undocumented students can hold DACA status,

come from a mixed-status family, and be eligible for state ISRT. Serna (2017) noted that the only certainty that undocumented students have is an uncertainty regarding their educational opportunities. This conveys the precarious nature and ever-important work of SEM staff to create an admissions process that does not Other the undocumented student.

Financial aid is one of the biggest challenges undocumented students face, and trying to understand federal, state, and institution aid eligibility is directly impacted by a student's immigration status. Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 established federal financial aid to support students who meet income guidelines and provided funds to cover a portion of tuition, fees, and other associated education costs (Enyioha, 2019). The Act prohibited undocumented students from receiving any federal financial aid and undocumented students are considered non-eligible applicants on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Undocumented students are typically from lower socioeconomic status and first-generation households, with approximately 40% of undocumented children, 0-18 years of age, living below the poverty level (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Nienhusser, 2014; Serna, 2017). Some institutions allow for undocumented students to apply as non-eligible FAFSA applicants in order to determine financial need and increase income-based aid opportunities. Financial need is already a stressor for undocumented students, and this is exacerbated by ambiguous, confusing language regarding the student's eligibility for unrestricted aid (Serna, 2017).

In-state tuition resident policies “allow out-of-state residents to attend college at the same prices as in-state resident students if they meet certain criteria” and are determined by individual states (Flores, 2010, p. 241). In the United States, there are currently 20 states that have been identified as inclusive states due to active ISRT bills in place for eligible undocumented students.

In 2004, the state of Kansas introduced House Bill 2145 that provided undocumented students tuition adjustments if they met the following criteria: attendance at an accredited Kansas high school for three or more years, graduation from an accredited Kansas high school or obtained a GED in Kansas, and submission of a signed and notarized affidavit to the public university or community college in the state (HB2145, 2004; uLEAD Network, n.d.). It has been estimated that the financial impact of the removal of an ISRT is a 113% tuition increase for undocumented students (Conger & Turner, 2017).

Access to financial aid and ISRT eligibility can be the biggest factor that determines whether an undocumented student has the financial means to pursue post-secondary education. After applying, while finances and available funds are being assessed, undocumented students will continue to encounter additional stressors that are embedded into the admissions processes. These barriers are always directly related to the student's legal status (Gonzales et al., 2013). The student-institution relationship begins with the admissions department, specifically application processes and its intricacies and recruitment.

The prospective student relationship is ideally established by participation in recruitment events such as college fairs, preview days hosted on campus, or individualized campus visits for the student and their family. Moving students through the application and touring campus can be a threatening experience. Admissions applications may include language that is unwelcoming and can rely on violent communication that induces feelings of blame, guilt, or shame. It is vital to assess the language on residency or citizenship screens during the online application process. For several years, the only option for undocumented students at BCC was to select "unlawful

immigrant.” This language was updated and now reads “non-resident” and undocumented students are categorized as UD (undocumented).

Campus visits are considered key in the recruitment cycle. The public messages and demonstration of support for undocumented students are critical for creating a climate of inclusion (Barnhardt et al., 2017). SEM offices efforts in creating safe and welcoming spaces for undocumented students, who are also underrepresented BIPOC people, more likely to be lower income, and more likely to be first generation, are very important. It is important to assess how long it takes for a visiting or current student to “see” themselves on our campuses.

Undocumented students also face barriers in academic major selection and co-curricular involvement due to programs that have residency requirements or courses and certifications requiring background checks such as nursing, student travel, internship and practicum opportunities, and other arenas of the engaged student experience that may not seem obvious to college staff and faculty. Undocumented students also undergo the emotional labor of identifying college employees to trust as they disclose their status, putting themselves and their families at risk, which negatively impact their mental and emotional health (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013). Valenzuela et al. (2015) states that cultural competence, a positive campus climate, embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and fulfilling the mission of post-secondary education requires an ethic of care and justice and an absence of social stigma in order to create accessible and equitable access for undocumented students.

Undocumented Students: Best Practices for SEM staff

The scholarship on best practices and training for staff who work with undocumented students should meet “the unique characteristics that limit undocumented student enrollment, retention, transfer, and graduation” (Valenzuela et al., 2015, p. 89). A model that has been applied to vulnerable student segments is safe-space training. Safe-space training creates a campus environment where students can easily identify allies by visible placement of placards or signs that designate physical spaces on a college campus (Valenzuela et al., 2015).

A safe space is both a physical and metaphorical space that should move students from non-beingness to beingness (Davis, 1999). Safe-space training is important as it shifts responsibility to those in power and lies in the ability to address campus climates that have historically been impacted by micro and macro sociopolitical and institutional structures that are inequitable and can negatively impact post-secondary access and success (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). The work of safe-space training requires the institution and its employees to evaluate whether the institution’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is meaningful or one of convenience and assesses whether mechanisms in place are working towards maintaining a hostile racial campus climate (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). A hostile campus environment can exist even when an institution is not explicitly racist (Gusa, 2010).

One of the best practices that institutions can implement is having designated staff to support undocumented students who can mobilize resources, and facilitate the admissions processes, and provide support during the student’s life cycle (Gildersleeve & Vigil 2015; Nienhusser, 2014). Mandatory training for all SEM employees and empowering staff can

streamline this process (Serna, 2017). Inclusivity is at the core of these best practices (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Nienhusser, 2014; Serna, 2017). Physical space, metaphorical space, training, staff that specialize in the student segment, and inclusivity require institutional and systemic support (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

This study was informed by a critical research paradigm lens, which argues that a reality influenced by factors such as culture, politics, ethnicity, gender, and religion shapes social system constructs that are inequitable for marginalized populations. Jones et al. (2014) argues that a person's experienced reality is inherently flawed due to the oppressive nature of social systems that were shaped by those who hold authority. The lived reality of undocumented students is shaped by multiple layers of individuals and entities that hold power and shape the constructs and systems that directly impact them.

The design of this case was influenced by Aguilar's (2018) emerging undocumented critical theory (UndocuCrit). The tenants of the theory are rooted in critical race theory (CRT), Latina/o critical theory (LatCrit), and tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit). The theory attempts to understand and appreciate the problems faced by undocumented immigrant communities but also to provide a lens to understand the lived experiences, including in educational institutions, of undocumented people and communities in the United States (Aguilar, 2018). This framework reframes the undocumented community from a vulnerable population to one that is resilient, with experiences that are nuanced and not overly simplified or invalidated (Aguilar, 2018).

Undocumented people are under constant exposure to fear and oppression and have had to develop methods to navigate these obstacles to succeed (Aguilar, 2018). Ultimately, UndocuCrit challenges the immigrant binary rhetoric. The tenets of UndocuCrit (Aguilar, 2018) argue that fear is endemic among immigrant communities, different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality, parental *sacrificios* become a form of capital, and *acompañamiento* is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement.

This research primarily examines the tenets of fear, experiences of student liminality that shape post-secondary experience or reality, and the role of SEM staff in *acompañamiento*. At the core of this theory is the challenge to the immigrant binary rhetoric. The research site is a PWI, located in a more affluent, less diverse, conservative county. The influence of external and institutional politics has made this particular immigrant population a politically charged one and in essence has shaped how the institution works with or against its undocumented students.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017) was to examine how SEM college employees impact the experiences of undocumented students through knowledge gaps, unconscious bias within the department, inequitable practices, and institutional mechanisms and support that may be absent. Applying a critical research paradigm that argues that lived reality is shaped by social system constructs that are inequitable for marginalized populations aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of UndocuCrit Theory (Aguilar, 2018).

These frameworks are especially useful as student demographics continue to shift at BCC, as they empower understanding of how those with the power to shape a marginalized person's lived reality may fail in fulfilling the mission of community colleges, which promote their accessibility.

An explanatory case study design was selected because one of the primary purposes of this design is to “determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 39). This design allows for the examination of the admissions structure, development, interactions, and collective behavior of participants in order to identify the impact on the college-going process for undocumented students (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). As a researcher and Spanish-speaking Latina*, my experience in working with undocumented students and knowledge of processes, language, and resources are high. As the advisor for the Latino* student organization and chair of internal and external organizations that serve the Latino* student and community population, I have had many opportunities for professional development and to develop, plan, and execute programming designed to engage students and professionals geared toward underrepresented groups, particularly the Latino* student segment. These experiences helped shape the research design.

Research Site

Bluestem Community College (BCC; a pseudonym), located in the Midwest, enrolls approximately 18,000 credit students per year. County demographics are critical to understand the political and racial undertones that contribute to the conservative response and position that

the institution has taken on issues specifically impacting the undocumented student population. According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), 86.9% of the county residents are White, 95.7% are high school graduates or higher, 54.6% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, the average household income is \$81,121, and 5.3% of the county is living in poverty. The institution is located in one of the wealthiest counties in the country and provides the environmental context for BCC.

Student demographics and enrollment have continued to shift. In Fall 2016, BCC conducted an environmental scan that identified mega trends in demography, economics, and education completion (Site institution's report , 2017). At this time, predictive analysis indicated that the county would remain primarily White but underrepresented groups would continue to grow, specifically in the Latino* and Black populations. Fewer of the county's White residents attend BCC than compared to the national average, with current White student enrollment at 67%, Hispanic (term selected by the institution and used in reporting) enrollment has increased 26.9%, and Black student enrollment has increased 1.2% (Site institution's report, 2019).

Participants

The Student Services branch of the college was selected to recruit research participants and four departments were selected by considering departments that are required of all undocumented students: Admissions, International Student Affairs, Counseling (specifically but not limited to academic advising), and Financial Aid. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants employed by the college and within the departments that were selected and those

who self-identified as having a fair to good understanding of their respective department responsibilities (Merriam, 2001). All participants also indicated, by responding to the recruitment requests, that they have had experience working with undocumented students completing the admissions process or with current enrolled undocumented students who seek guidance from the department they represent. Staff who have not worked with undocumented students were ineligible to participate. Pseudonyms were assigned to the research site and all participants to protect identities.

Participant Recruitment and Demographics

An email invitation was sent out to all Admissions, ISA, Counseling, and Financial Aid employees. Some Admissions employees were excluded due to conflict of interest with the researcher. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who met criteria developed to identify participant attributes essential to and directly reflected in the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2001). Six participants were selected to participate in the research, including two employees each from Financial Aid, ISA, and Counseling. Admissions employees who were contacted did not respond to either recruitment email. All participants indicated substantial experience working with undocumented students at BCC or, if employed at the college for less than a year, met sampling criteria due to number of years working with the student segment at previous places of employment. Participant demographics were not explicitly collected, but through data collection, some demographics were self-reported.

Research Participants

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Department	Supervisory Role
Janine	White	Woman	Financial Aid	Yes
Sara	White	Woman	ISA	Yes
Maya	White	Woman	ISA	No
Hope	non-White	Woman	Counseling	Yes
Symone	non-White	Woman	Financial Aid	No
Ami	White	Woman	Counseling	Yes

Data Collection

Data was collected through two rounds of semi-structured interviews. Round 2 interview questions were drafted after the completion of first-round interviews. Through the use of notes and re-listening to first-round interviews, five guiding open-ended questions were developed for Round 2 interviews. Round 2 interview questions focused on accuracy of first-interview responses, questions regarding emerging themes of employee agency, compassion fatigue, institutional responsibility to support undocumented student needs, and participants' views on what they would like for the institution to know about their experiences in working with

undocumented students and the need for institutional support for marginalized student segments, particularly the undocumented student population.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were conducted via Zoom and participants were informed that due to the technology, video and audio recording would occur. All meeting requests were made private, and upon Zoom entry, participant names were removed and only initials were used. Interviews were conducted during the Spring 2021 semester. Second-round interviews were scheduled one week after initial interviews, with a total interview time of 75-90 minutes per participant for both interviews. Due to varying work-from-home guidelines, most Zoom interviews occurred off campus. In addition to audio recording, notes were taken during all interviews, and interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and constantly compared to assess whether semi-structured interview guiding questions needed to be adjusted in order to collect the intended data. Notes were taken during all interviews to capture nonverbal contextual cues and any comments made after recording stopped while interview wrap-up and next steps were discussed. A narrative analysis strategy was used because at the core of this approach is an emphasis on the study of experience through stories (Merriam, 2001).

Descriptive coding was used to analyze transcripts in order to develop a description of the setting, the people interviewed, and the events in the setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Coding occurred at two levels in order to identify themes and for interpretation and analysis (Merriam, 2001). Some a priori codes were identified based on research of previous scholarship about undocumented students in post-secondary education and tenets of UndocuCrit theory.

These included politicization of undocumented students and undocumented student labels (DACA, undocumented, “papers”). Unexpected codes emerged through direct analysis of the data.

Through axial coding, themes and patterns were identified and codes were categorized to reflect the purpose of the research and to improve conceptually congruent themes (Merriam, 2001). Throughout this process, I worked with my dissertation chair to discuss methods and receive guidance on the best approach to data analysis. Through reviewing interview transcripts, audio recordings, and coding, the data were analyzed, and three larger themes emerged.

Quality and Trustworthiness

In order to improve trustworthiness, multiple strategies to increase validity and reliability were used. According to Merriam (2001), triangulation is an important research analysis strategy, as it serves the purpose of providing a holistic understanding of the data and reduces researcher bias due to positionality and should not be interpreted as a tool that ensures validity. Although all participants represent the same branch of the college, multiple departments were selected, each with different internal reporting structures. Member checks were conducted after Round 1 interviews in order to confirm with participants that initial interpretations were accurate (Merriam, 2001). Thick descriptions were used through data collection, analysis, and the compilation of findings in order to explore and tell a detail-rich story supporting the research purpose statement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data also underwent peer examination.

Merriam (2001) stresses that in qualitative research, researcher positionality needs to be acknowledged because it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon being explored. The critical research paradigm also assumes the role of researcher “baggage” that is carried along throughout the processes (Jones et al., 2014). As a Latina* woman, my work has centered on supporting underrepresented students and I have worked with numerous community organizations that work with the Latino* community. My community, my friends, students I have mentored, students who worked under my supervision, and my family have included undocumented people. My spouse was undocumented when we met as teenagers and remained so for many years into our marriage and following the birth of our children. My research interests center on addressing the needs of and creating equitable institutional mechanisms for underrepresented groups.

Limitations

As with all research, there were some limitations to acknowledge in this study. First, the initial design of the study was to interview four departments, including the Admissions office. Due to conflicts of interest, all Admissions employees who report to me were eliminated from participation. Surprisingly, the other half of the department who are not my direct reports, did not respond to either research recruitment email. The absence of a department that adjusts tuition due to ISRT fulfillment and processes all general admissions, selective program admissions, and all incoming high school and college transcripts is important. Secondly, one interview participant has only been employed at the college for fewer than six months but was included due to

extensive previous work experience with undocumented students (her prior employment in the education realm at an institution served by BCC recruitment). In addition, all participants were women; no employees who identified as men responded to the call for participants. Participant demographics closely represent SEM employee demographics.

Findings

From participant interviews, three primary themes emerged. Findings include the “us” vs. “them” dichotomy, racism endemic in processes, and a lack of institutional mechanisms, including a diversity, equity, and inclusion office, guidance, and resources. Participants noted there were absent institutional mechanisms and thus BCC failed to support undocumented students. All participants shared their experiences working with undocumented students and the stressors that not only impacted the students but the employee as well. The experiences that participants shared point to individuals who have taken it upon themselves to support undocumented students within the parameters that exist.

“Us” vs. “Them” Dichotomy

The “us” vs. “them” dichotomy impacts the undocumented student implicitly and explicitly in perceptions and processes that Other the student and distance the student from campus community belongingness. Specifically, this dichotomy is found in the use of language regarding “home” and an absence of status, that places undocumented students in categories of Otherness or liminality, belonging neither to “us” – documented people – or “them”-

international students. This differentiation can also be found in the absence of accessible resources and processes that are automatically afforded to students who appear to be White and non-Latino*. The “us” creates a presumptive script that assumes the student holds some type of legality and is welcomed to a college-going experience conveying belonging and conferring rightful resources. Applicants who indicate a United States citizenship status are exempt from invasive questioning and are automatically welcomed into the presumptive “us.” The “them” scenario is found in language, default stereotyping, and invisibility due to an absence of resources and processes designed to fully support undocumented students. These students are Othered and do not hold the same rights or access to belonging. It is important to recognize how the experience of being neither from here nor there, plays out differently and is dependent of the person or entity on the other side.

When participants discussed how undocumented students are identified at BCC, the responses identified the differences in employee beliefs regarding undocumented students’ automatic routing to the International Student Affairs department, challenges inherent in humanizing the student and their experiences, and the processes or individuals that Other the student. Symone shared her thoughts on how undocumented students who are “from here” are Othered when the student’s experience is not similar to an international student studying in the United States temporarily:

Because they're not international students. They're here in the U.S., they live here in the U.S., they've lived here all their life, or, they've come here, and now they're part of us. They're not international students and the access to resources is really lacking, especially when I found out that they are considered out of state students. Quit playing. If they went here and went to a high school here and graduated from high school here, or, in the United States period, and especially if they are not out-of-state, why are they charged out of state anyway? If I went to . . . high school and graduated, why am I charged out of state because I'm an undocumented or a DACA student? That's really sick. I'm not a fan.

For Symone, validating the undocumented student's lived reality that the Midwest is home was important for employees to recognize.

Maya shared her thoughts on the ISRT (in-state resident tuition policy) process and student intake processes in her department that can Other the student. This experience can have a negative impact on the new relationship formed by the undocumented student and the institution. All ISRT-eligible undocumented students begin their relationship with formalities that are required and beneficial but are also harmful and scary for the student. A student's liminality and closeness to legality is quickly shaped by the process of identifying a student's status. Maya's experience taking the time to reflect on how privacy and student dignity are impacted by unpleasant but necessary questions highlights this:

I think realizing that needs to be had [sensitivity toward undocumented students]. In our office, for example, we have to ask everybody's status type and that's really awkward. Maybe a little less so now when it's not as busy, but particularly at the front desk when there are multiple people and there's a line, just being aware that there could be instances where it might be better if somebody wanted to go to the back office or something like that to talk about something, that that would be fine. Or just heading it off with, "This is why we ask this," or maybe also being able to interpret sometimes if somebody's not saying, "I'm not." You don't want to say, "I'm not with status," but it'll be, "Here's my EAD [employment authorization document] card and this is all I have." "Here's something and this is what I have." And to realize that that's [an indicator of undocumented status]. I think just training about sensitivity towards that [is important].

Maya's reflection shows how ISRT requirements can be a very public process that demands undocumented students acknowledge their Otherness in order to try and move into the "us" of an average community college student.

Participants mentioned how admissions processes demonstrate the imbalance of the student-entity relationship. If an undocumented student has lived in the United States for years

and knows nothing else but this “home,” imagine the impact of moving into the post-secondary education arena with formalities that constantly remind you of your perceived “Otherness.” The junior and senior year of high school can be especially challenging for undocumented students as they begin to actively engage in the college-going process of college visits, applications, and applying for scholarships. As Sara expressed:

And so, it's a very transactional conversation. It's very focused on just how to do things to get in as a student. And then we'll ask that, "What's your status type?" And that's even a confusing question because a lot of undocumented students, this is the only home they've ever known. This is where they live, right? That's not a conversation that you, one, want to share with a stranger or, two, feel like you should prove to a stranger.

The expectation that undocumented students will accept their limited pathways to belongingness even as they are required to be vulnerable and disclose sensitive, private information to a complete stranger is complicated. For Sara, these interactions cause confusion and continue to push an undocumented student into Otherness and strip them of the right to declare that the Midwest is home.

Participants were able to identify how personal interactions due to admissions processes feed into an “us” vs. “them” dichotomy. Sara identified a key factor in this imbalanced relationship. Undocumented students are forced to prove their beingness to complete strangers -- where they have lived their lives, if they were aware of and understood what their undocumented status meant, -- disclosing this information to someone they do not know well or trust. If the tables were turned, the comfort level that college employees would feel in disclosing such personal information might keep them from viewing it as just another process.

Racism Endemic in the Processes

Participants identified existing policies, lack of accessible resources for undocumented students to access safely, and failure to publicly support undocumented students due to concern about public image and disrupting external and internal politics. Participants shared personal experiences as an employee attempting to support undocumented students or instances of unequitable practices and hostile campus climate directed at the student. Symone shared how the institution creates barriers for undocumented students:

I feel like they [are] just so out of touch, you know? I know it's a lot of office work, it's a lot of paperwork, it's a lot of policy, I guess. I don't know what they'd be doing, but I just feel like you all get so far removed from the student that sometimes they implement things that [are] not practical, that end up being barriers and that end up being difficult. So, understand the student experience and understand really what they [are] going through. I don't know what it'll take.

Employees perceive a disconnect due to the institutional processes that end up becoming additional barriers for vulnerable student segments. Symone describes a lack of empathy and an absence of equity-minded decision making that indicate out-of-touch leaders who fail to understand students and their needs.

When the political landscape in 2016 shifted, undocumented communities experienced hostile rhetoric at the national level as the new administration made sweeping changes to DACA, leaving many unknowns and threats of permanently ending the program. This period stood out for many participants as a time of fear and unwillingness of the institution to support its undocumented students publicly or via internal communications. Ami recalls how her department attempted to support students, even though the institution failed to release a statement of support to its undocumented students. She offered:

I remember when the former president was elected. . . [I] remember how scared students were. It was horrible. . . but I remember getting those students in our offices and they were so afraid, and it was terrible because we could just say, "You don't know what's going to happen." I mean, and that was over a period of time. It wasn't just one student coming in once, it was numerous students coming in and being so afraid. I mean, I don't remember specific students, but we are, many of us had experiences at that time with the fear that those students were experiencing and how we just felt there wasn't anything we could do to really help them, except say, "This is a safe place for you." But that was horrible. That was a horrible time. And I'm glad that's over.

Ami's experience emphasizes the need that undocumented students had to find safe spaces that would acknowledge their humanity and fears. Employees who took on the day-to-day work of supporting students without institutional backing perceived the institution's failure to make a public statement of support as a decision fueled by fears of political backlash allowing racism and undocumented student invisibility to prevail.

The theme of missed opportunities for the institution also came up as participants reflected on exactly how much they were encouraged to do. Maya shared an experience that impacted her and continues to come to mind when working with undocumented students. She shared, "There was a meeting a few years ago...with somebody higher up...but I kind of felt like we were told, 'Don't do more than you have to and don't have it be public.'" Hope also acknowledged, "I know there's a lot of unconscious bias that people just aren't aware of." Janine shared that there are notable differences even within departments; staff who are student facing tend to be more diverse. She shared, "We have. . . more [of a] problem with race here. . . [offices managing frontline processes are] very racist unintentionally and unintentionally biased."

Sara explained what for her this conflict meant: ". . . you feel out of balance. And it's just not ... It feels like you're contributing to the problem, not the solution. And I don't want to say ...

I think we all want to see students succeed, of any status type. But it feels like we're doing more to divide them and keep them separate than we are to help them.”

Participant experiences reveal how embedded racism is woven into institutional attitudes that support doing the bare minimum in order to avoid disrupting public image and conservative campus and community politics. The presence of explicit and implicit racism and bias creates a sense of complicity and a state of cognitive dissonance for participants due to their limited agency to reject racism and bias.

Lack of Institutional Mechanisms: DEI Office/Guidance/Resources

All participants spoke to the challenge of supporting undocumented students when BCC did not have formal institutional mechanisms in place to nurture skills acquisition or access to resources and programming designed to meet the needs of underrepresented groups. Many longer term employee participants spoke of a now-disbanded diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) office that existed at BCC and the circumstances of the purported “failure” of the office. Many also noted that since the office was eliminated, for years it has fallen to college employees to support underrepresented populations essentially on their own. Sara described the current landscape and the role that the institution takes in creating an environment of inclusion:

And I think that it's really reductive to say that someone is inherently political because of a status. I also don't think it's fair to the student's experience to have to speak to the entire process. I think that people fear, sometimes, what the students could share, what they know. I also think that there have been attempts to try to connect, but these attempts aren't actually grounded in authentic connection or an understanding. It's more of a, "We're going to do the bare minimum to try to look like we're caring." Which I think we never need to do that. It should always be an authentic connection.

The approach BCC has taken to support its undocumented students appears to be one of convenience for the institution. Sara's description of an absence of authenticity points to the danger of how employees' saviorism negatively impacts underrepresented groups and employee trust in leadership that will fully commit to equity-minded leadership and decision making.

While Sara spoke about the role of public perception in the college's willingness to take stances in support of its undocumented students, Symone, a woman of color, shared how an absence of staff resources results in explicit and implied expectations of unpaid labor, trauma bonding, and tokenism:

Also, not looking at the minorities to know how to deal with people that are of different skin tones. Just because I'm [from an underrepresented group], does not mean that, oh yeah, for sure, I'm just going to bond with this person and understand what this person, because I'm also struggling. Yeah, I get it, but I don't want to have to trauma bond with nobody. I should be able to help a student, as a student themselves. . . we just need more training. Everybody needs training. Everybody needs to be more aware and more sensitive to situations. These are the types of students that we have here. So, if we're here to help the students, we need to be educated on all the resources that we can, on all the types of students that we can, to help them out.

Trauma bonding forces non-White employees to engage with underrepresented students and results in both the student and employee experiencing the oppressiveness of systemic inequities. Symone did not have someone advocating for her well-being as a college employee but was placed into a situation of unpaid labor and the denial of her agency to embrace her role as an employee that is skilled to support all students.

When participants were asked to reimagine what institutional support would look like, Hope described an encounter where a White colleague expressed surprise that there were multiple women of color in the department and addressed safe places for employees from underrepresented groups:

It's not a big deal if it was something like that [happening once], but it's constantly and it's because of the way we look. For those comments to be made, who do I go to with that? [A departmental colleague] actually heard the one where she was like, because we were eating lunch together, "There really are two of you?" He heard that. . . but he didn't even know what to do with that or who to go to. Because it wasn't somebody in our department who said it. It was [a] different department. So, for me personally, I need somewhere to go to and report that. Somebody who's actually going to care and listen to me. I feel the same thing with students. I'm sure similar things are happening with them. Who do they go to? They can go tell a teacher. They can go tell maybe the dean, but what are they doing with that information? "Oh, I'm sorry that happened." Then what? That's it?

Hope's experience went unresolved and the bias she experienced was not interrupted. The helplessness and absence of a reporting process and safe space left her to carry the burden of the inappropriate, biased, and racist comment. Students and employees experience this bias without access to mechanisms to create a campus climate supportive of underrepresented students and employees.

Presence on campus, in the form of a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) office could have the potential to build bridges for undocumented students. Janine explains how a DEI office would have the potential to positively impact students and employees:

I was really surprised to come here and find that there wasn't an office. And I asked . . . about it and [they] laughed at me. I'm like, "What am I going to do? I can't do my work without them. I need to know what the students are experiencing," because [in my past work experience with a DEI office, they] were really upfront with me. Like I'd have a colleague call over and say, "Hey, Janine, this student had a really horrible experience with your office, and this is what happened." And then I could triage on the backend and reach out to that student. And I mean, they just knew what was going on because that's a safe space for them, and that's where the students would go, and that's who they would talk to, because when you look at me, I don't look like a safe space for students like that. So, them being able to tell their student that, "Hey, Janine is a good colleague. She really helps students. Go to her." Because they wouldn't naturally come to me, I don't think. So, [a DEI office is] important for bridge building as well.

BCC's hesitation to commit to institutional supports for a diverse campus community is a failure to contribute to equity in academia, and in its failure, the institution is also missing the

opportunity to lead. More importantly, though, robust DEI supports would empower staff like Janine to better serve students. Without simple, nonjudgmental, equitable structures supporting student feedback, undocumented students and the challenges they experience remain invisible or become the individual undertaking of employees who actively work to be allies.

When asked about the role BCC should take in creating a climate of inclusion for undocumented students, the current campus discussions surrounding DEI were brought up. There is hesitancy, though, as Hope expressed, “It sounds good and I’m hopeful, but we’ve been led astray [before].” Sara brought up the importance of how this work is essentially taking a stand to actively dismantle systemic injustice:

And it's also, when you do go forward with when you stand up for things you believe in, it becomes personalized where I think it shouldn't be, it should just be about the right thing to do, and it's more like, "Well who's bringing it forward, and why are they doing it, and what's their agenda when it's really just about the equity and access that we need." So, it's anything to detract from the responsibility and systemic biases that [exist], I mean, systemic injustice...

While most participants expressed hesitancy to believe that current leadership will work to make DEI an institutional priority, Sara suggests the current campus climate leads to employees being misinterpreted and politicized when they attempt to take a stand in support of equity and access.

Participants noted the lack of DEI resources, training, and professional development impacted them in multiple aspects. Employees of color have had to adapt to a campus climate with expectations of unpaid labor, tokenism, and explicit bias from colleagues. The lack of institutional support also creates a state of dissonance for employees who support equity and access when their attempts to stand up for what they believe in is misinterpreted, made personal, or politicized. Participants experienced a sense of complicity in upholding systems of inequity

and a heightened mistrust that leadership will commit to authentic, transparent, and public commitment to DEI.

Discussion and Recommendations

Findings from this study are consistent with the research framework and the tenets of UndocuCrit theory that guided the structure of this case study. By exploring the role that academic “gatekeepers,” specifically SEM employees, play in shaping the lived experiences of undocumented students navigating post-secondary education in community colleges, there is a better understanding of how inequitable practices permeate processes, campus culture, and climate and contribute to missing institutional supports.

The “us” vs. “them” dichotomy speaks to the liminal experiences of undocumented students. This becomes even more complex as closeness to legality separates DACA students and non-DACA undocumented students. Recent studies have demonstrated that DACA recipients report higher rates of feelings of belonging and inclusion as their position to legality is closer than of undocumented people without DACA (Gonzalez, 2015). These external and within group conflicting views and experiences, further complicate beliefs regarding where undocumented students “belong.” An undocumented student’s closeness to legality shapes their lived experiences and feelings of belongingness

In addition to the internal conflict created by challenging the binary immigrant rhetoric, undocumented students also experience “a cloud that follows an individual throughout their intersecting experiences and that manifests differently, and at varying degrees, depending on the

entity with which the interaction occurs, and the context in which it exists” (Aguilar, 2018, p.5). Immigrant and international students are a vital student segment that institutions depend on to contribute to enrollment numbers. Undocumented students can be perceived as immigrants who fail to fit the model minority narrative due to beliefs rooted in bias, that they are not lawfully present and did not enter the country in the “right” way. This argument perpetuates the “them” narrative and supports in-group members’ perception that they are undesired for inclusion in the “us.”

Training focused primarily on undocumented students would be helpful in educating college employees on the topics that are specific to this immigrant population. Training that includes information about international students can result in confusion, as undocumented students are often misclassified as international students. It is important to differentiate between the barriers that this specific population navigates and provide a better understanding of what DACA and undocumented status means at federal, state, and institution levels. Training should include information on countering stereotypes such as all undocumented people are Latino*, modeling nonthreatening language, and approaches to maintaining student dignity during student intake and when identifying immigration status. Relevant training can demonstrate an ethic of care, increase likelihood of developing trust between SEM employees and undocumented students, and result in higher use of student support services (Valenzuela et al., 2015).

Addressing racism embedded in our processes, in our history as an institution, and how these practices continue to be upheld is uncomfortable. Even in a setting that was created to be safe for participants, some participants displayed discomfort in labeling as racism the inequitable

practices, bias, and impact of the historical context of a county that has been explicit in its historical redlining. The desire for the institution to maintain its public image and its inability to stop politicizing undocumented students is due to external community factors that continue to be upheld even as the entirety of BCC's student demographics shift and the population of underrepresented groups grows. Allowing racism to permeate processes and campus climate unacknowledged and unaddressed creates a state of cognitive dissonance for employees from underrepresented groups and those who are allies. When community colleges do not live up to what their name evokes, employees feel misaligned to their core values.

Participants were able to identify how bias continues to uphold the politicization of undocumented students and reinforces the binary immigrant rhetoric (Aguilar, 2018). Instances of trying to “do the bare minimum” and save face point to the historical context of PWIs, as “the gatekeepers of mainstream knowledge, [that] ultimately privilege the voices and perspectives of predominately Western thinkers and practices have marginalized the voices of perspectives of those considered non-White” (Gusa, 2010, p. 476; Patton et al., 2007). These practices are evident in participants who discussed their experiences of being unable to publicly support underrepresented populations with messaging as simple as, “You are welcome here,” and appears to contradict the mission of what community colleges say they are all about.

Dismantling racism can feel like impossible work for employees who have limited agency to actively engage in the work. There should be room for that sense of despair and hesitancy and supportive spaces for employees to develop their skills. White institutional presence requires leadership to acknowledge and re-evaluate the deeply embedded inequities that have been allowed to exist and permeate into processes, practices, and campus culture. Nurturing

equity-minded leaders who are prepared to engage in these conversations is key. Relearning where to look and what to see can help in shifting practitioners' gaze and alter where we choose to look and what we choose to see (Castro, 2015).

Visible and open advocacy that appears simplistic can quickly disseminate information for students and across the campus community (Castro, 2015). Creating a landing page for undocumented students can reach them and help supportive school and college and career counselors understand what the process is at the institution, as well as college employees who need answers to questions that students and families may have. A webpage dedicated to this student segment is a public message of support for undocumented students that conveys a message of institutional support.

Supporting student organizations for underrepresented students is an effective way of contributing to student-led efforts that engage in addressing systemic bias and celebrating and acknowledging the humanity of underrepresented groups (Valenzuela et al., 2015). Supporting the Latino* student organization on campus, increasing the visibility of their programming, fundraising, and events demonstrate commitment to their well-being. This facet of the campus climate should not be neglected. It is important for underrepresented students and employees to experience a campus environment that is more than just not hostile or unhealthy – it is vital that intentionally created and supported spaces exist where underrepresented students can be their fullest, best selves.

The onus should not fall on underrepresented students and employees to educate their peers and speak for the community they may represent. Explicit racism is obvious, but it is the racism infused into everyday practices that goes unnoticed and unchallenged and that can be the

most harmful. As vital as it is for students to have a committed space, it is equally important for employees to have a space where they can exert some agency in peer education, professional development, research, and other opportunities. Findings in this study are reflected by research on the responsibility of enrollment management employees, showing those who have received the skills and support from the institution as a whole may act at their fullest agency, to be “the mechanism for social inclusion, equity, and financial well-being” (Serna, 2017, p. 45).

Participants expressed guarded optimism that current conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion would result in action, rather than dead ends. Participants also described feelings of guilt, shame, frustration, and helplessness when working with undocumented students due to not having the time and access to resources to keep themselves up to date on best practices. The value of institutional support that explicitly and intentionally encourages employees to support underrepresented groups, according to the actual student need and not the assumed needs, would empower employees and point to the institution implementing mechanisms to address inequities. Serna (2017) argues that the nearly 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school yearly are deserving of post-secondary education championing to become a mechanism for social inclusion, equity, and financial well-being.

Campus diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts foster organizational accountability to create a climate of inclusion for students and employees (Barnhardt et al., 2017). DEI offices have dedicated staff who work to serve underrepresented students, create awareness, educate, and take the lead in moving the needle forward for institutional and systemic change (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015). By solidifying the role of a DEI office at BCC, goals and commitment to organizational transformation can be sustained (Barnhardt et al., 2017).

Every participant, at differing levels, identified ways that undocumented students should be supported. In the fullest sense of true equitable social justice fundamentals this included all marginalized, vulnerable student populations. Several participants described the massive complexity of DEI work and noted carefully that though it should not be viewed as the answer to every problem that will create a perfect community college, its absence is notable. Employees and students have been left to figure this out on their own without institutional support. A DEI office-as-resource would be significant for employees and students. The racism endemic in the historical and community context of BCC, a PWI in a White-flight community, looms overhead and has hindered movement toward equity. Castro (2015) emphasizes that “systemic structures, such as entrenched poverty or inequality of educational opportunity, are not insurmountable, but we must see them for what they are and recognize that they need not be permanent fixtures of our society. They can be transformed, and community colleges play a crucial role in this transformation” (p.11).

A DEI office is simply the physical embodiment of administrators and leadership who are equity minded (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcolm, 2012, as cited by Barnhardt et al., 2017). Equity-minded leadership consists of practitioners who possess the professional ability and personal conviction to reconstruct equitable campus policies and practices and redistribute organizational resources that affect the reality and shape the lived experiences of underrepresented groups (Barnhardt et al., 2017; Castro, 2015). Students and employees are the direct beneficiaries of campus climates that work towards social justice. The influence that BCC has among its peer institutions to continue to lead the way in terms of DEI work carries with it so much potential.

A DEI office could engage in trainings that would impact one of the biggest barriers that undocumented students face: access to financial resources. Practitioners dedicated to this work could introduce best practices and research-based findings that would inform the endowment office on approaches for making funds accessible and actively redistributing wealth to those with financial need but limited access. Research on the shifting role of higher education philanthropy suggests that newer donors have shifted toward advocacy philanthropy. Foundations have played an influential role in supporting and reforming post-secondary education (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). While there are differing views on approaching these strategies, advocacy philanthropy is “pioneering an activist approach to higher education reform, one that emphasizes systemic changes and demands quick, measurable results (Parry et al., 2013, as cited by Haddad & Reckhow, 2018, p. 28).

Conclusion

The findings of this study have the potential to contribute to scholarship of enrollment management and overall intentional support of undocumented students. SEM offices serve as the gateway to academia. The challenge is that these students also face multifaceted and complex challenges due to federal, state, and institutional legality barriers. Community colleges are instrumental in becoming the social mechanism in the academic arena to empower and support their undocumented students. As the demand for social justice and educational equity increases, institutions have an obligation not to overlook the undocumented students who are part of their story.

CHAPTER 3
SCHOLARLY REFELCTION
Introduction

This dissertation has been nothing that I expected, but perhaps I should have anticipated the challenges I encountered, considering the topic that I would be exploring and the institution that would serve as my research site. My career began with a set of expectations that I did not understand nine years ago, but as I have acquired the knowledge and language to identify what I have experienced, the research topic I chose was a perfect fit. As a Latina* woman fluent in Spanish, those who created the position that I accepted when I first began working in post-secondary education unknowingly shaped an experience for me that has had both positives and negatives. My work with undocumented students and underrepresented groups in a primarily White institution (PWI) has allowed me to experience the unique set of obstacles these students are expected to navigate. I expected that this would be different because I work at a community college.

The undocumented student experience is nuanced, and each student brings a lived experience unique to them. When DACA was reintroduced in 2012, I had to quickly learn how to support our undocumented students. Within weeks I was immersed in attending community organization informational events, learning from immigration attorneys, and working with undocumented students and families eager to take advantage of the opportunity. I am thankful for each student and family who trusted me enough to disclose their status. Undocumented

immigrants have had to learn how to keep themselves safe and problem solve in order to access healthcare, housing, and post-secondary education when federal, state, and entity-specific regulations exist. To make a challenging situation even worse, the undocumented community has been politicized and demonized by harmful rhetoric that attempts – and for many outside the community —succeeds -- to strip a community of its humanity.

I have never been undocumented, but many of the people I care for are or have been. I have felt powerless when every opportunity leads to an insurmountable number of dead ends. However, I have also had the honor of celebrating the achievements of undocumented student mentees, student employees, and colleagues that have changed who I am. With them, I have celebrated bachelor's degrees in biology, engineering, psychology, and business. I have written letters of recommendation for master's programs, internships, and scholarships. I have celebrated engagements and new jobs and promotions. By revealing to me their status, by bringing me into what prejudice has forced so many to keep secret, I have in essence formed a fictive undocumented family.

Research Intent

Post-secondary education could – and should - be a tool for teaching social justice techniques useful to dismantling institutions that have racism embedded in their histories, current practices, and campus climates. Yet too often leaders in post-secondary education lack an equity-focused mindset and fall back on discriminatory and dehumanizing language and practices that replicate and reinforce harmful practices. Attempting to navigate language intentionally chosen to shame and guilt undocumented students informs the most difficult conversations I have had. For years, informing students that their only residency option on an admissions application was

“unlawful immigrant” and trying to minimize their fear of signing an affidavit admitting unlawful presence in the United States has not been easy. Those of us who work in post-secondary education know it can serve as a catalyst for change that ripples beyond the student. If the work we do is to serve students, it is important to take an honest look at what has been done to keep a healthy, positive college experience out of reach for undocumented students.

My research examines how strategic enrollment management (SEM) employees impact the college-going experience of undocumented students. My goal was to learn about the

- Training and knowledge that SEM employees have regarding undocumented students, such as access to financial aid, barriers in selecting certain academic majors or certifications, eligibility for in-state tuition resident policies, and the process of completing those additional requirements
- Employee perceptions of the campus climate for undocumented students, including bias, barriers, racism, and any other discriminatory behaviors implicit, explicit, or unconscious
- Employee perceptions of the role that administrators should take in creating equitable processes and practices for undocumented students

Research: Successes and Obstacles

For the most part, I accomplished my research goals, despite several unexpected limitations. My initial goal was to interview two employees each representing four departments in the Student Services branch of the institution. I did not expect overwhelming responses due to multiple reasons, but primarily due to the nature of the topic and my experience with a campus climate that is conservative. When my first recruitment email was sent, I received several

responses by the end of the of day. I emailed 66 employees from Financial Aid, International and Immigrant Student Services, Admissions, and Counseling. I received 12 responses from three different departments. Due to a conflict of interest, I had to exclude all recruitment employees within the Admissions department, but I was able to include other Admissions employees who report through a different supervisor. I thought that the people I work with on a daily basis would be the first to respond. They did not. In my literature review, admissions plays a key role in the college-going process for all students. Their absence is a limitation, and had they participated, my research would feel more complete.

Using semi-structured interviews and drafting my guiding questions using the current scholarship and my research design and theory were useful, helpful strategies. I did not anticipate scheduling Round 1 and Round 2 interviews a week apart, but the timetable actually proved very positive. It allowed participants enough time to decompress from the first interview and engage in self-reflection but within a time frame that they would not as easily forget what we discussed. I had originally planned to complete interviews during fall 2020, but the timing of my interviews coincided with a number of campus-wide discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion. College employees have been encouraged or volunteered to attend focus groups regarding the retention of men of color, barriers within student services, DEI strategic planning, and a newly formed DEI taskforce. My interviews occurred at a time when the campus community is saturated with this topic, allowing participants to discuss experiences that for many had been recently recalled in other settings.

Due to current safety protocols limiting face-to-face meetings, all of my interviews were conducted using Zoom. At the beginning of each interview I changed participant screen names

and informed them if I was working from home or in a private meeting space on campus and when I began recording. I am not sure if knowing that an audio and video file would exist adversely affected participant comfort level for some participants, but I did have participants express worry about what they were wearing. I reassured everyone that only the audio file would be used for transcribing. Face-to-face meetings may have felt a bit more comfortable.

One thing that I should have done differently was to practice all of my interview questions with a peer. I was nervous and stumbled during my first interview. My comfort level improved, and after the first interview, I felt I had better transitions between questions. In writing the section about participant demographics, I wish I would have created a participant intake survey in order to collect demographics. Most of the participants self-disclosed their race or ethnicity, but it would have been helpful to gather additional demographic information.

Research Barriers

I think that most doctoral students would agree that the dissertation process is challenging, and I was somewhat prepared for the number of hours of research, data analysis, and writing. I did not expect to experience the roadblocks I encountered at the institution where I work and which would serve as my research site. After receiving IRB approval from NIU, I proceeded to reach out to the one person designated as the IRB contact at my institution. Prior to reaching out to inquire about IRB approval, I carefully read the available information and applications on our website. I was informed that due to my NIU IRB approval, BCC IRB would defer due to NIU oversight of my research. I was informed that because I would be recruiting

college employees that I “should” run my research past the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness. “From an IRB perspective, you are cleared to proceed. However, the IRB can’t make decisions about whether BCC, as an institution, is willing to allow recruitment or other research activities on our campus or from our people. That’s up to [the Director].”

I should have reached out for guidance but instead immediately followed BCC IRB’s instructions. This resulted in a four-week delay that brought about considerable trauma, scrutiny, and discriminatory behavior. I was required to provide my full NIU IRB application, NIU IRB approval, and the entirety of my successfully defended dissertation prospectus. It was suggested that due to the topic of my research, the director was reluctant to approve because – as he suggested - I would retaliate against research participants. I asked for additional clarification, expecting that the director would be satisfied with my informed consent documentation explaining how participant anonymity would be ensured.

Instead, I received a copy of my research proposal filled with notes and highlights that were used to imply how I might be prone to retaliate against participants due to the “Research Positionality” section of my proposal. I was informed that the director felt it was his responsibility to point out that my research participants might disclose personal beliefs or opinions that would affect my ability to work with my colleagues in the future. The director went on to state that since he did not know me personally, he was unable to judge my ability to work with others with differing views. The director felt that, because my research focuses on a topic sensitive in nature, interviewing colleagues had the potential to “invoke strong feelings on both sides.” In all of this, the director spoke with a vice-president at the college in my reporting line who is very familiar with my work. I contacted Human Resources, received guidance from my

dissertation chair, the Associate Vice President and Dean of the Graduate School at NIU, and trusted colleagues, yet I felt shattered.

I have experienced racism in my time at the college but nothing of this magnitude. For years, I have been expected to preform and show up for Latino* community organizations that the college partners with, am transferred calls from across campus when a Spanish-speaking employee is needed, and much more. I have felt tokenized and overlooked, leveraged by my employer, and expected to perform additional actual and emotional labor because of who I am as a Latina*, but never empowered as a professional to make real improvements. I carry the burden of students who are referred to me constantly to have heartbreaking conversations about a lack of campus resources and for whom I have to shape the hope of a positive and successful college-going experience. After so many years of behavior along these lines, and of navigating it from my isolation at a PWI, it was both miserable and somewhat unsurprising that no one that I report to challenged what was said about me.

Much as my research uncovered the racism embedded in institutional practices surrounding the admission of undocumented students, the process of completing my dissertation revealed how structural racism suffused institutional practices and is upheld by leadership that fails to be equity minded. When I began my doctoral studies, I thought a lot about the undocumented students forced into precarious situations due to their status and the ways institutions force them to plead their worthiness to those in power. I thought I had the institutional resources available for my success. What I learned – which I did not expect to learn – is that as much as our institution has to learn about supporting undocumented students, we also have much to learn about being able to critically examine our practices.

Despite the negative impact this experience had on me, I managed to regroup and move forward in my research. Hearing my colleagues and individuals I know acknowledge the obstacles I encountered, and even being assured of my research value by participants I only met during the interviews, profoundly impacted me as an individual. Stepping in to the work of social justice, the rejection of colonization, and trying to actively contribute to the dismantling of White supremacy can be overwhelming. Only after trusted friends called attention to it did I realize when the gaslighting began. I realized then that the whole situation was so surreal; I was denying myself the validation that this was not something I had fabricated. During my interviews, participants put a fine point on why institutional barriers to my research felt so unusual: some participants mentioned that undocumented students also need to “do their part,” but if our institution creates artificial barriers to long-time employees even in understanding their liminality, how can a student without power accomplish that?

Impact on Professional Practice

This fall I hope to reimagine what the Latino* student organization on our campus looks like. I am the advisor for the organization and am struggling with burn out, especially during the past 14 months. In a conversation with my daughter, who recently graduated from high school, she asked me about graduation regalia for students who were active in the Latino* student organization. Several participants mentioned that this student organization contributes to a positive campus climate for undocumented students. The simple act of recognizing students during graduation with regalia that incorporates textiles, prints, or even symbols are visual

representations of belongingness. Some of the undocumented student population has embraced the butterfly as a symbol of migration, representative of their personal experiences as immigrants.

This student organization is so important, and reading the literature of safe spaces during the past three years has made me realize the role this space has for students. Spaces our organization creates serve to move a student from non-beingness to beingness in ways that would not otherwise be possible at our PWI. This student organization is a vital component of that process for our Latino* students. Despite last year being one of the roughest years of all our careers, I know I will use this research experience to re-energize the group. We have hosted a Know Your Rights session and an art therapy group session on belongingness with a Latina* therapist. In the fall I would like to create more sessions for students and allies on topics that celebrate and educate students and college employees on issues that are important to undocumented students and the Latino* student segment.

I am currently collaborating with the International and Immigrant Student Services department on a landing page for undocumented students. This project started early this year and there has been a push for the site to be launched, possibly by fall. Our work group has been researching other post-secondary sites and community organizations. While I was not involved in the conversations that led up to this decision, I am thankful it was approved and that a site will exist for students and families to safely access and for college employees to use as a resource when working with undocumented students. I am also thankful I will be able to use this research to improve our communication with undocumented students. I would like to ensure that current information on current state legislation, internal and external scholarship opportunities, and external community resources that are applicable to the needs of our undocumented students is

accessible. One simple and extremely helpful resource would be including a list of on-campus notaries who can save undocumented students time and money when completing the ISRT affidavit, if applicable.

During this time, I also spoke with my direct supervisor and was authorized to develop and host a professional development session as an introductory opportunity to educate campus employees about the basics of supporting undocumented students, DACA recipients, and students from mixed-status families. I hope to model language that is accurate and equitable and finally to encourage an equity-minded focus on this specific immigrant population. As one research participant mentioned, it can be confusing to educate employees on immigrant students when international students who have different types of visas are also discussed. Undocumented people are not inherently political; others have imposed that narrative on this community. The professional development session will be an opportunity to present this information in a manner to demonstrate that and share basic information and possibly identify a list of employees who would also be interested in completing undocumented student safe-space training.

Eventually, I would like to move into a position that would allow me the agency to develop programming for underrepresented groups. There are so many programs that exist within the K-12 system designed to support students who have been identified as at risk. I was disappointed when the first-generation scholarship mentor program dissolved and was integrated into the general scholarship system at BCC. I would love to work in a position that would allow me to develop initiatives based on best practices sensitive to our student demography. Undocumented students are often unable to take advantage of dual credit due to out-of-state tuition rates. Having the available resources to make this a possibility for more students would be

such an opportunity to support high-achieving students who simply cannot enroll due to financial barriers.

Application to Research: Journal Process and Research Insight

I chose to write my journal article following the format for the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. I have had the opportunity to read and apply several articles that have been published in this journal. Using the available formatting guidelines and the JARS chapter in the APA handbook was extremely helpful. I worry about not “knowing” how to do scholarly things, but these guides helped alleviate some of my concerns. I made sure to read both resources and make notes of suggestions that would help as I began to write the article. I also chose to read the sample articles that were provided on the journal’s website to gain a better understanding of the different approaches that the authors took.

I learned so much about the importance of an abstract and the keywords. I understood how I used an abstract when selecting research for assignments and the literature review, but learning how those are structured and their importance was really interesting. The portion that I enjoyed the most was the “Findings” section. I received guidance from my dissertation chair on the importance of weaving participant interviews in order to create a cohesive story. It felt like trying to put a puzzle together, but grabbing pieces from six different people with different experiences to create a narrative that tied in multiple perspectives.

Throughout this process I experienced a lot of imposter syndrome and struggled to bring my voice into my writing. I am very self-conscious and worry my writing is not academic

enough, meaning sometimes I try so hard to sound “educated” that I end up losing the essence of who I am in my writing. Writing this journal article challenged me to develop better transitions and the importance of using available scholarship in ways that support my arguments.

Now that I have completed this research project, I mostly feel appreciative that I had the opportunity. I have not had the opportunity to process everything that has happened since defending my research proposal. This experience gave me more appreciation for the contributions that researchers have made in academia. When I found Carlos Aguilar’s emerging theory of UndocuCrit, everything that I was thinking about felt like I was going in the right direction. Reading his article about the genesis of how he developed this theory was so validating. His use of Spanish and Spanglish in his writing made me proud. Writing this article developed my skills in reading and applying research tenets and how those can be used in the development of new ideas and contribute to what becomes best practices.

Conclusion

Working at a PWI that is still struggling to actively engage and support equity-minded leaders, I realize the value and impact of empirically sound findings and the day-to-day lived experiences of the students, community, and college employees we serve. I have always used an excuse to shy away from metrics and data, thinking I was not skilled enough to understand and successfully apply those to my work. While I have a lot to learn, this experience has shown me that I can figure it out.

When I was a high school student, I remember times when I would share with my family and friends that I wanted to pursue my education until I earned a doctorate. I am a first-generation college student and am the only person in my extended family who has attained a master's degree and now will be the only one with a doctorate. I did not grow up around people who opted or had the opportunity to pursue graduate studies. I grew up in a low-income, highly diverse neighborhood. My parents were children of migrant farmers who moved across the United States during elementary and middle school to help pick produce. I did not know that we were lower income until I realized that I received reduced lunch throughout school, qualified for ACT waivers, and received a Pell Grant throughout my undergraduate degree.

My husband and I spent more than 10 years and thousands of dollars trying to navigate an immigration system that became even more rigid after September 11th. I remember the fear of his status being disclosed and trying to navigate the barriers of trying to buy a home, purchase a car, obtain a photo ID, and access healthcare. When he finally received his permanent residency, it felt like we could breathe and that he was finally safe. These are the roots of my research. Every undocumented student who trusted me with their truths and trusted me to advocate on their behalf is woven into this research. This research is for them.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Tell me about the training you have received to serve undocumented students in your department.
- 2) Is training specific to working with undocumented students necessary?
 - a. If so, what training is needed?
- 3) Can you share information about resources available for undocumented students?
- 4) Can you recall a time that you worked with an undocumented student?
 - a. What was that like?
- 5) If you need to refer an undocumented student are you aware of any points of contact?
- 6) Please share what you know about HB2145 (ISRT).
 - a. Who is eligible for this?
 - b. What is the process for a student to be eligible for this?
- 7) What is the campus climate like for undocumented students?
- 8) How does BCC create a culture of inclusion for undocumented students?
 - a. How can your department create a culture of inclusion for undocumented students?
- 9) Please share with me anything else that you feel is important for me to know, in order to understand your experience as a staff member working with undocumented students.

APPENDIX B

TERMS

The following terms were used in interviews and are defined as follows:

- **Undocumented:** An undocumented immigrant is a person who entered the US without inspection or with false documentation or entered the US legally as a nonimmigrant but remained in the US without authorization (uLead Network, n.d.).
- **DACA or DACAdmented:** A person who continues to be undocumented but qualified for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA provides temporary relief from deportation. Recipients are issued a Social Security number and work authorization in increments of 2-3 years. DACA recipients' immigration status does not change and is not a pathway to citizenship (uLead Network, n.d.).
- **Mixed status:** An undocumented student's household may include family members, especially younger siblings, who are US citizens. The entire family unit may not all be undocumented.
- **HB2145:** Kansas state ISRT policy in which eligible students must submit documentation that reflects 3 or more years of attendance at an accredited Kansas high school and graduation from an accredited Kansas high school or GED issued by Kansas (HB2145, 2004).