

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Coming out of the Shadows:  
Undocumented Latinx Students Persisting  
into Higher Education through Appreciative Inquiry

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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2017

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## Signature Page

The Dissertation of Morgan Ponder is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego  
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2017

## **Dedication**

My journey through this doctoral program would not have been possible without the help, love, and encouragement of so many people. I would first like to acknowledge the unconditional support from my mother, Marlene Ponder. Ever since childhood, she instilled within myself the importance of pursuing higher education. And during my most difficult times in the program, she was always there for me. She was a single mother raising children on her own and I have no idea how she was able to do it. I believe some of the greatest gifts she has bestowed upon me through her own life experiences were the transformational power of resilience and persistence. I consider these traits the major guiding forces in my life. And for that and much more, I will be forever grateful. I would also like to recognize my best friend in life (and colleague), Dr. Jennifer Brown. She has been a role model to me and was always available to assist me with reviewing papers and literally doing line-by-line edits. She has and is truly an inspiration to me. My current supervisor and friend, Young Miller, was also instrumental in my completion of this program. Her professional and personal support was integral when having to meet the academic demands of the program.

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Lastly, I would like to dedicate this research to the undocumented students I interviewed and all the undocumented students in the United States who are seeking a pathway to higher education. Continue to advocate for social justice, access, equity and inclusion. It is my hope that this research will provide insight into just a snapshot of your life experiences and inspire future researchers in telling your powerful stories with accuracy and integrity.

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I was able to see first-hand throughout this process how passionate the staff in the USP office was. They are literally on the “front lines,” dealing with a wide variety of issues at any given time. I hope that this research complements the already high quality social justice services they provide.

It is also important to acknowledge the invaluable support I received from the Executive Program Associate of the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UCSD, Melissa Wolf. From the application process to dissertation defense, Melissa was integral in my successful completion of the program. Whether it was nervously waiting for the results of the qualifying paper, or preparing for the proposal defense, Melissa was always available to answer questions and alleviate any of my concerns. She is a terrific higher education professional and the JDP program is fortunate to have her.

## Vita

### EDUCATION

- 2017 Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Joint Doctoral Program at University of California San Diego and California State University San Marcos
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## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of Doctor  
of Education

by

Morgan Ponder

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Frances Contreras, Chair

Undocumented Latinx students are currently one of the most disenfranchised racial/ethnic groups in the United States. As demography reaches critical mass levels in many states, visibility has triggered new economic and policy imperatives. The Latinx populations in many states have created a sense of urgency regarding socioeconomic concerns. This cultural shift is re-framing the debate on access to higher education, in-state tuition benefits and labor market prospects. These issues have reached a cultural tipping point, demonstrating that innovative research is needed to address the growing complexity undocumented Latino students face in the K-20 higher education pipeline. The theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was examined through previous

scholarship in a variety of disciplines and applied to qualitative and quantitative studies of undocumented students. This research examines the potential implications researching undocumented students through the lens of AI can have for social justice, leadership and cultivating a growth-mind set. The concept of generative capacity is explored as an impetus for greater social transformation. Policy considerations are discussed in relation to the unique challenges these students face. This review asserts further research is integral in addressing institutional barriers undocumented Latino students encounter navigating through complex educational, political and economic systems. A semi-structured qualitative interview protocol was implemented with 15 undocumented Latinx students utilizing the 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry. Students selected transferred from a California Community College to a California 4-year public research institution. Findings indicated the experiences these students encounter during the transfer process, who supported them, and how institutional, community and family support was integral in successfully navigating this specific pipeline in the K-20 higher education system. Implications and future recommendations will also be presented in relation to undocumented student agency.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The plight of undocumented Latinx students in post-secondary education is reaching a cultural tipping point as demographics are shifting both the political and economic landscapes. The 2000 United States Census reported that self-identified Latinx represented 13% of the total U.S. population, overtaking African-Americans as the largest underrepresented racial/ethnic group in the country (Solorzano, Villalpando & Osueguera, 2005). In the 2010 U.S. Census report, self-identified Latinx increased by 15.2 million or by 43 percent. This rapid change in demography has re-framed previous narratives regarding higher educational access for undocumented students in the U.S. (Gonzales, 2010). Furthermore, it has informed the current academic preoccupation of creating pathways for educational and economic opportunities. The undocumented Latinx experience in the U.S. is fraught with barriers to citizenship, acculturation and long-term economic stability.

Many states have enacted legislation in recent years allowing undocumented students in-state tuition benefits for attending public institutions. Additionally, Federal executive orders regarding the immigration of undocumented childhood arrivals and undocumented parents of U.S. citizens mitigated fears regarding deportation. With the political shift in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the status of these programs faced uncertainty and as of September 2017, President Trump had rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Previous research and literature have provided a solid foundation in addressing the current leakages for undocumented students in the transfer process of the K-20 pipeline. Understanding existing and emerging theories exploring the experiences of these students is paramount in identifying best practices in

persisting into higher education. Academia is bustling with scholarship investigating the structural processes that facilitate and decrease institutional injustices through innovative research and new theoretical frameworks (Munoz, 2013; Perez Huber, 2009; Covarrubias & Lara, 2013; Gonzales, 2010; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009).

### **Policy & Political Context**

It is important to acknowledge the changing political climate during the implementation of this study. First, the U.S. lacks a comprehensive immigration policy. However, in California, the *Leticia A. v. Board of Regents of the University of California* (1985), the Dream Act/AB540 (California Assembly Bill-540, 2001) and DACA (2012) play a key role in accessibility to higher education among undocumented students. *Leticia* (1985) challenged the constitutionality of undocumented students being recognized as California residents for in-state tuition benefits. The definition of California residency was centrality to this case. In 1994, Proposition 187 was passed in a ballot measure that prevented undocumented immigrants from access to public education and a number of other state operated services. AB540 was a California bill passed that allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition for public universities and colleges. DACA was a presidential executive order that shielded children brought into the country as minors before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and before June 2007. The subsequent passage of AB540 and the implementation of DACA shape the current political landscape and continue to impact the undocumented.

This study was conducted during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, which was arguably one of the most divisive in U.S. history. The campaign between Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton and Republican nominee Donald Trump created a level of

uncertainty relating to a number of policy and legislative issues. Specifically, comprehensive immigration reform and the fate of President Barack Obama's executive orders on undocumented students and undocumented parents of U.S. citizens were at stake. Then candidate Trump campaigned on signature issues such as building a wall on the southern U.S. border with Mexico and banning all Muslims from entering the country. He also campaigned on deporting the approximately 11 million undocumented people whom many of them were brought here as children. He spoke at rallies describing undocumented people from Mexico as violent criminals and rapists. The process of demonization was a signature piece in his campaign for the presidency. Millions of undocumented people were protected from deportation by President Obama's executive orders. The state of these programs and whether or not they would be protected was now unknown until DACA was rescinded in September 2017.

President Trump also immediately began signing executive orders and nominating cabinet members to implement his isolationist and anti-civil rights policies. He directed the office Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to aggressively begin deporting undocumented people. From the period of January 2017 – March 2017, ICE raids were conducted across the country in what was known as "Operation Cross Check." Many undocumented people without criminal records who were previously protected during the Obama administration were included in these raids. This drastic change in U.S. domestic policy greatly affected the Latinx and undocumented communities. As discussed later in Chapter four, this shift in policy impacted participant recruitment and data collection.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Undocumented Latinx students encounter institutional barriers persisting through the higher education pipeline. Although many states have enacted policies to allow the undocumented to pay in-state tuition for colleges and universities, Federal tuition assistance extended to the undocumented has been met with high resistance. Therefore, undocumented students must look for other avenues to pay for college. Many of them will work multiple jobs without Federal financial aid to be able to enroll in courses. Leaks in the educational pipeline for undocumented students' spans the entire K-20 system but this study focuses specifically on transfer from a California community college to a Research I California public institution. The majority of undocumented students pursuing a college degree begin at the community college. Navigating the complex transfer system from a community college to a four-year public institution also adds a layer of resistance that could impede the abilities of many of these students from successfully transferring. As mentioned before, this problem has reached a tipping point and it has become increasingly important to understand the experiences this vulnerable group of students encounters when attempting to matriculate from a community college to a four-year public institution. It has become critical for undocumented students to attend highly selective institutions as it can lead to greater representation in both the public and private sector. A college degree from a highly selective university can be transformative and empower undocumented students to influence policy and various social justice issues.

### **Theories**

Scholars have conducted a considerable amount of qualitative and quantitative studies investigating the academic, social, emotional and political experiences of

undocumented Latinx students in higher education through a variety of theoretical lenses (Morales, Herrera, & Murry, 2009; Flores, 2010; Ibarra, 2012; Covarrubias & Lara, 2013; Perez Huber, 2009; Munoz, 2013; Herrera, Garibay, Garcia, & Johnston, 2013; Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Contreras, 2009). Much of the existing literature examines undocumented Latinx students in higher education through the theoretical lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit (a branch of the broader CRT framework), Chicana epistemology/trenzas de multiples (braids of multiple identities), and the psychological capital of resiliency (PsyCap). CRT is grounded in the notion that race and racism are permanent tenants of American society. LatCrit expands traditional CRT theory focusing solely on Latinx issues and Chicana epistemology rests on the notion of being caught between two worlds and having to reconcile multiple identities. While these theories have provided a great deal of insight into the experiences of Latinx students in higher education, it focuses more on an individual/group/personal level. It does not address the relationship between the student and organizational and systemic change. Understanding the resources and processes involved in an organization could assist in evaluating institutional practices.

There is currently a dearth of information regarding the experiences of undocumented Latinx students in higher education through studies employing Appreciative Inquiry as a theoretical lens. The theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed in the 1980's and is rooted in the fields of positive psychology and organizational development. In the decades since its inception, Appreciative Inquiry has expanded the way scholars investigate organizational change through an appreciative process that represents a viable complement to traditional forms

of action-research (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Appreciative Inquiry suggests that a socio-rationalist alternative is needed to counter the belief that a physical science model is adequate to understanding the systemic processes of complex human systems.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) argue that the foundation for socio-rationalism rests on the notion of impermanence and moving from a practice of predictive capacity to generative capacity. Moreover, the shift from a logical positivist framework to a symbolic realm encourages greater social transformation, change and self-propelled development.

Traditional science models of generating human knowledge historically focused on the external world for solving complex problems. In contrast, AI looks internally into the cognitive and symbolic processes of social construction for gaining greater insight and knowledge in the experiences of individuals. AI intersects with issues regarding social justice and leadership, creating a space for participants to report on individual strengths and dynamics within a particular hegemonic structure. The ability to break down and change the cultural barriers and structures of an organization through individual agency is at the heart of Appreciative Inquiry. Individuals can possess or develop abilities by implementing behaviors that elevate positive experiences and exert influence on others.

Examining the experiences of undocumented Latinx students through the framework of AI could contribute in further understanding the collective and individual positive attributes these students possess. Utilizing AI will assist in identifying peak positive experiences of these students and how to leverage attributes that elevated their academic goals and previous accomplishments. Some scholarship focuses on deficit based approaches in examining deficiencies in individuals and institutional structures.

Appreciative Inquiry focuses mainly on examining practices that lead to successful outcomes. It is also a form of action research and could reveal how organizational structures (higher education institutions) interact with their undocumented student populations. Implementing Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle research design can empower a participant's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perceived ability to fulfill their goals. Higher self-efficacy may be directly tied to the ability to achieve academic and professional goals. Moreover, the theoretical framework of AI and enhanced self-efficacy can give voice to members of groups who have been historically and institutionally marginalized, and continued to be marginalized due to others' inability to see this population in anything but from a lens of AI.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

Myriad scholars have researched the experiences undocumented students face transitioning into post-secondary education by employing a number methodologies and conceptual frameworks. Much of the previous research has focused on examining the negative experiences this under-represented group encounters and there is a dearth of research investigating undocumented student's experiences through a positivist lens.

My research questions are:

1. What experiences do undocumented Latinx students undergo when transferring from a California community college to a California four-year research I institution?
2. How were undocumented Latinx students supported during the transfer process?
3. Who supported undocumented Latinx students during the transfer process?

Current research indicates that undocumented Latinx students are transferring to universities rather than going directly from high school. The number of Latinx students pursuing college degrees has reached critical mass in many states, prompting legislation and policies that are facilitating a financial pathway into higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences undocumented Latinx students' through the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry in an effort to provide insight to future generations of undocumented Latinx students in their quest for achieving a four year college degree at a research I public institution. Furthermore, this research could also assist undocumented Latino students in other states transferring to their respective state universities.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

The theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed in the 1980's and is rooted in the fields of positive psychology and organizational development. In the decades since its inception, Appreciative Inquiry has expanded the way scholars investigate organizational change through an appreciative process that represents a viable complement to traditional forms of action-research (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Appreciative Inquiry suggests that a socio-rationalist alternative is needed to counter the belief that a physical science model is adequate to understanding the systemic processes of complex human systems.

The increase in visible undocumented Latinx students and the social, economic and political issues they currently encounter can be greatly enhanced through the lens of appreciative inquiry. AI may assist undocumented students in creating safe spaces to explore the values, beliefs and actions that lead to their previous academic, economic and

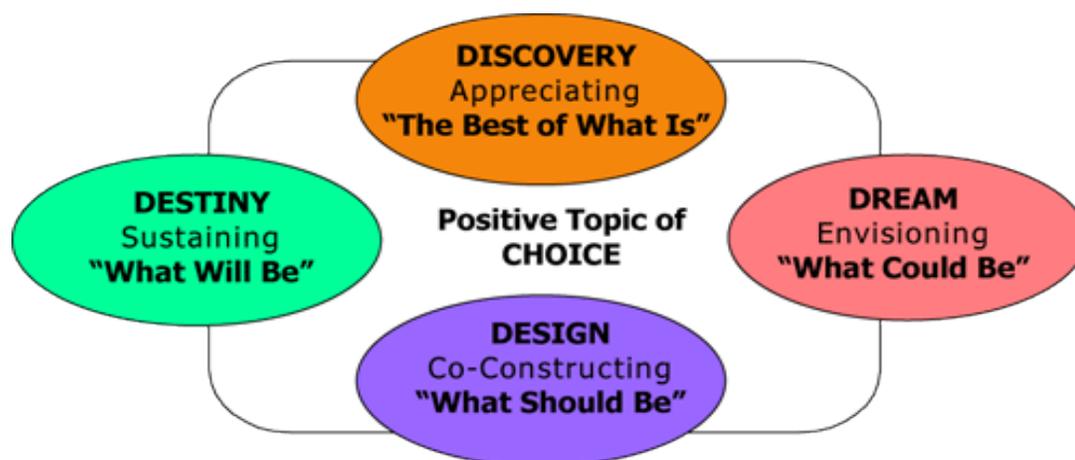
social accomplishments. AI fosters the possibility of greater social transformation and can assist in unpacking social justice issues (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Undocumented Latinx students in higher education are constantly battling the fear of deportation, depression, tuition benefits and poor labor market prospects (Perez et al. 2009; Solorzano et al. 2005). Appreciative Inquiry can assist in identifying narratives that capture the successful experiences of undocumented Latinx students in higher education and how to leverage the processes involved in previously successful experiences for continued academic and personal growth.

The use of Appreciative Inquiry in studies has been growing rapidly in primary, secondary and post-secondary education. Particularly, its implications for leadership have changed the way people view themselves and each other. One of the main arguments from Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) was that we all largely create the world we want to live in. What they mean is that through the assumptions and choices we make in the decision-making process, we have the ability to affect the people in our lives and the organizations that we are affiliated with. Coupled with the plight of undocumented Latinx students, Appreciative Inquiry and generative capacity allows people to examine the strengths they possess and determine how to utilize that in a leadership capacity that positively affects others. Calabrese et al. (2010) elaborated this notion when discussing how the AI framework fosters mutual respect and the belief that every participant is integral to the larger community or organization.

Appreciative Inquiry also assists people in realizing the efficacy of their leadership styles and practices. Day and Holladay (2012) framed this as attitudinal, behavioral and cognitive self-efficacy. The more people are aware of each other's

positive behaviors towards each other and the system as a whole, the more they respect one another and value their capacity for leadership. By definition, leadership is about influence, and thus awareness of positive attributes allows people to be influential. Conklin and Hartman (2013) also examine these issues in their study of autonomy-supportive classrooms. By asking open-ended questions to participants regarding their peak learning experiences in an interactive manner, their responses have the potential to influence the way future courses and curricula are structured. Moreover, it can affect the way teachers lead and the impact they have on students. The higher education pipeline is integral to the academic success of undocumented Latinx students and their leadership capacities. Pathways to higher education can develop leaders from this historically disenfranchised group and promote greater influence in education and policy.



**Figure 1. 4-D Model, (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005)**

AI also incorporates a process called the 4-D Cycle that includes *Discovery*, *Dream*, *Design* and *Destiny*. Historically it has been used for as an adaptable change method in various processes for organizational change. One of the main purposes of choosing the theoretical framework of AI and the 4-D cycle is the staying power and

longevity that AI has demonstrated in previous research (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Starvos, 2005).

### **Research Methodology**

The research was conducted on site at a California flagship public Research-I institution. The research methodology I utilized in data collection was 15 one-on-one hour long semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol garnered demographic information and insight into the lived experiences of undocumented students in higher education. I believe the semi-structured interviews assisted in the continuity of the study. The interviews were crafted using Cooperrider's 4-D model mentioned above. There were 4 categories of questions focusing on discovery, dream, design and destiny. The interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. Each participant was also given the same set of questions. A number of follow up questions were asked to elicit more information from the participants.

### **Significance of Study**

The numbers of undocumented Latinx students in the United States has reached a critical threshold impacting multiple sectors of society. With higher levels of undocumented students being educated in the public K-20 education systems, more undocumented students are attempting to matriculate to post-secondary education. Unfortunately for many undocumented Latinx students in the U.S, they receive no state or federal financial assistance compared to their documented counterparts. Even though some states have enacted in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students, many have

not, thus preventing many undocumented students from being able to pursue a post-secondary education.

This study explored the experiences undocumented Latinx students encounter while transferring from a California Community College to a California flagship public Research I institution. I believe that utilizing the theoretical framework of Appreciate Inquiry enabled me to gain insights into the roles that community colleges are playing in supporting or not supporting the transfer process for high academic achievers who happen to be undocumented. Employing AI to expose institutional failures and benefits at the community college level can only be understood through the experiences of undocumented students. This study could highlight not only the experiences of undocumented Latinx students in community college but also the state of transfer programs at their respective community colleges.

**Organization of Study.** Chapter one explained the urgency and relevancy regarding undocumented Latino students persisting into higher education. Current scholars and theories have contributed greatly in understanding this disenfranchised group of people and employing Appreciative Inquiry, as a theoretical lens, will shape the culture of this study. Chapter two discussed the current literature on both Appreciative Inquiry and undocumented Latinx students in political, social and labor market engagement. Chapter three described the proposed study, research design and methodology. Chapter four discussed the results of the study and chapter five provided a summary, insights into limitations, recommendations and a conclusion.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter provides an overview on literature relating to Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and undocumented students in the educational pipeline. The current research on undocumented students intersects heavily with public policy and has been explored throughout the K-20 pipeline in the literature. Employing an AI qualitative approach can enhance understanding of how academically thriving undocumented students have used various assets to overcome barriers to success. The conceptual framework of Appreciative Inquiry historically has been applied in the field of organizational change and behavior but has never been used in qualitative research regarding undocumented Latinx students. While the focus of this study is on the experiences of undocumented students in the K-20 higher education pipeline, the literature review also examines how Appreciative Inquiry has been employed in a variety of sectors. AI has been an effective method in eliciting the peak positive experiences of individuals that culminated in positive outcomes. I decided to use this form of action research in addressing my research questions regarding undocumented students.

### **Resilience, Identity & Persistence**

Educational researchers have been using an appreciative disciplined inquiry to better understand the relationships between organizations, institutions and individuals. From investigating the institutional systems of rural school district communities to evaluating the challenges of undocumented Latinx students in higher education, appreciative inquiry can be implemented in various settings with diverse participants. Through this type of inquiry, researchers are equipped to analyze issues regarding

efficacy, empowerment and potential. Synthesizing the current scholarship of appreciative inquiry with the socio-economic and political challenges of undocumented Latinx students will illustrate the need for further research utilizing an AI framework.

Appreciative Inquiry has been applied to students in multiple school district settings. In a rural school district and community in the mid-west United States, an action-research process was employed by researchers to examine how to improve communication and collaboration among school officials, community leaders and regional stakeholders (Calabrese, Hester, Friesen & Burkhalter, 2010). Although undocumented Latino students were not the focus of this study, it demonstrates AI's effectiveness in educational settings. The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D model of discovery, dream, design and destiny was used through qualitative representative samples to understand the individual strengths, peak learning experiences, and aspirations of the participants. Calabrese et al. (2010) found there was an increase in the level of respect and value of individual strengths/assets through shared narratives regarding positive experiences in the district and community's most successful moments. The authors also highlight how essential it is to form close-knit relationships built upon mutual trust between officials and community members. The capacity to deal with change requires various members of the community to trust each other's opinions and decisions. Referring back to the work of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), appreciative inquiry recognizes that the concept of impermanence and change is necessary to comprehend the systemic processes of organizational change and development.

In a study conducted by Perez et al. (2009), the academic resilience amongst 110 undocumented Latinx students was explored through a mixed-method approach. The

authors used a convenience sample identifying undocumented students in high school, community colleges and universities across the U.S. Myriad elements focusing on personal protective factors and environmental protective factors were analyzed through a series of questions. The psychological capital of resiliency was used as a theoretical framework to conceptualize how undocumented Latinx students overcome the negative effects of risk exposure. Comparable to theoretical frameworks such as resiliency, Appreciative Inquiry assists in uncovering positive behavioral traits that can improve an individual's academic and psychological potential and assist in mitigating external factors. While Perez et al. (2009) address external factors that may directly influence an individual's ability to be resilient, appreciative inquiry focuses on the individual with the 4-D model of discover, dream, design and destiny. Rather than examine external factors that can affect an individual's self-efficacy, appreciative inquiry seeks to examine the successful decision making strategies that people use despite negative external factors. In sharing stories through an appreciative approach, the work of Calabrese et al. (2010) could supplement the data collected on protective factors in relation to the individual strength's, peak-learning experiences and aspirations.

In understanding these strategies, another stress factor that could impede persistence in academic achievement is gender. Munoz (2013) conducted a qualitative study focusing on stress factors pertaining to female undocumented students. Munoz interviewed four Mexican-born female students between 20 and 23 years old. Each interview lasted 90 minutes and focused on five themes: family, culture, prior schooling, immigration and college experiences. Even though the study was limited in scope by a small sample size, the author identified typical stressors often experienced by the

undocumented regardless of gender. Missed opportunities, making meaning in their college degrees, coping with stress while navigating legal status and anxiety from seeking campus resources. A larger sample size is needed to conduct a more thorough investigation and explore whether these same themes emerge across a broader sample of women. Munoz utilizes the framework of Anzaldúas (1987) borderland theory and Chicana and epistemology/trenzas de multiples (braids of multiple identities) in examining the experiences of Chicana identified undocumented students. Perez Huber's (2009) study on the cultural wealth of undocumented Chicana students provides further insight into the experiences of this group. Perez Huber challenges the racist nativist framing that exists by uncovering the cultural wealth and navigational strategies of undocumented Chicana while resisting racist framing. She draws upon a community cultural wealth framework (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Garcia, 2007) in interviewing 10 Chicana identified undergraduates at a top tier research university (as cited in Perez Huber, 2009). She employs LatCrit as a theoretical lens that can challenge hegemonic ideology on racist nativist framing. Her findings uncovered a number of resilient behaviors that assist undocumented Chicanas in navigating the racist framing that exists in higher education. Perez Huber's findings indicate that students utilize community cultural wealth that directly conflicts with the current racist nativist framing that is present on college campuses and in policy. She specifically mentions how undocumented Chicana students leverage their support from community cultural wealth in aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, spiritual, resistant and navigational ways.

Hispanic serving institutions are playing a role in mitigating the social and economic barriers that undocumented students face in higher education. Thirty-four

participants were interviewed in an attempt to capture deficiencies in post-secondary contexts that impede a student's self-efficacy (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte and Meiners, 2011). Twenty Latinas and 14 Latino men between the ages of 18-27 were interviewed. Their findings indicate that higher education institutions could do a better job assisting undocumented students even if current policy directly conflicts with its actions. The authors assert that institutions need to partner internally and externally to increase financial resources for undocumented students. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of partnering with community colleges to create programs that sustain greater matriculation and attrition.

Further emphasizing the institutional barriers faced by undocumented Latinx students, Contreras (2009) conducted a study on the experiences undocumented students face in persistence. Contreras frames the study within the context of current political immigration policy in Washington State. She implemented a qualitative case study using a snowball sample of 20 semi-structured in depth interviews. Twelve men and eight women participated in the study. She incorporates previous scholarship regarding policy identification of California's AB540 (Assembly Bill 540) students versus the Washington's HB 1079 (House Bill 1079) designation. Contreras cites Abrego's (2008) assertion that AB540 status has had a sustained, empowered impact on undocumented students in California, thus causing greater social transformation (as cited in Contreras, 2009). Data collected from her interviews did not capture that same sense of empowerment in Washington State. One of the most pivotal aspects of the data is that most of the students interviewed referred to the term "ganas." Translated; ganas means "the will or determination to achieve" (Conteras, 2009, p. 625). Contreras captures the

vulnerability of these students, coupled with policy considerations that can undermine or promote greater academic achievement depending on the context. She asserts that greater oversight and professional development is needed in both K-12 level and post-secondary educational settings. Both Gonzales (2010) and Solorzano et al. (2005) support Contreras assertions, emphasizing how integral structural and pipeline issues are in K-12 settings that can directly affect an individual's ability to persist into higher education.

### **Social Capital & Structural Barriers**

Studies examining the challenges facing undocumented Latinx students in higher education intersect with issues regarding identity, acculturation, social capital and persistence. A study conducted by Gonzales (2010) examines the effects that school structures and social capital have on the higher education pursuits of undocumented students. Gonzales specifically deconstructs how the rising level of immigration and immigrant legal status issues are uncovering the structural problems is assisting undocumented students that exist in schools and colleges. Furthermore, Gonzales asserts that a student's ability to succeed or fail directly relates to their relationships with school officials and their own peers. Calabrese et al. (2010) came to similar conclusions when investigating how to improve communication and collaboration in a community of stakeholders. Gonzales used qualitative interviews in collecting 78 life history ethnographies in the five-county Los Angeles metropolitan area from 2004 to 2007. His findings indicated that educational advancement is shaped by one's place in the hierarchical structure of the school. Students who are placed in lower track classes are often shut out of educational opportunities because they are less likely to form positive relationships that could help identify individual social capital. Utilizing the theoretical

lens of AI could enhance Gonzales's interview process by specifically asking questions regarding their dreams and destinies. Through an AI approach, Gonzales describes the stratification of undocumented students in schools could assist in gathering more information between undocumented high academic achievers and undocumented students who have academic potential but fall through the cracks because of weak structural processes in schools. Even though his study focused primarily on high school students, it was directly tied to barriers undocumented students face when transitioning to college (Gonzales, 2010; Covarrubias & Lara, 2013).

In addition to understanding the narrative of undocumented Latinx students through resilience, identity and social capital, acculturation is a major factor in their emotional, academic and psychological development. Arbona, Olvera, Rodriguez, Hagan, Linares and Wiesner (2010) examined the differences between undocumented and documented Latinx immigrants in regards to separation from family, tradition and language acquisitions/difficulty. A qualitative study was employed with 416 participants living in two major cities in Texas. The findings indicated that the major hurdle to acculturation for both undocumented and documented Latinx immigrants was the fear of deportation (Arbona et al., 2010; Perez et al. 2009). However, undocumented immigrants reported higher levels of anxiety regarding deportation. The fear of deportation is a major psychological and emotional hurdle for this group of students and can cause hesitation in pursuing educational opportunities

Beyond the use of appreciative inquiry as a method for capturing individual positive attitudinal behaviors, AI can also be used to challenge existing learning methodologies and their effectiveness within an organization. Moreover, adopting the

principles of AI could help faculty and administrators better understand a student's psychological and emotional hurdles. Similar to Gonzales (2010) investigating the structural barriers that exist in school organizations, Day and Holladay (2012) study an academic medical center in Texas, where an Appreciative Inquiry construct was used to determine if AI was effective in improving learning outcomes compared to traditional methods. The researchers gave pre and post assessments to approximately 497 employee participants in an attempt to gain insight into each of their respective knowledge and their attitudes regarding interpersonal dynamics and fostering positive change using a quasi-experimental methodology. The Appreciative Inquiry intervention was sub-divided into AI-teambuilding, AI-training and AI-only. The first two categories were based on principles of appreciative inquiry theory with the latter focused solely on "interviews based on AI questions with intent of developing actionable steps to create a mentoring program" (Day & Holladay, 2012, p. 1127). The interventions assisted the authors in quantifying the scope of knowledge, skill-sets and attitudes of the employees. The authors surmised that appreciative inquiry was similarly effective to traditional learning methods in regards to attitudinal, behavioral and cognitive abilities. Initiating interventions through an appreciative inquiry framework leaves many participants feeling positive, energized and hopeful about their practice and goals. Rather than focusing on negativity, an appreciative approach centers on positive possibilities and the untapped skills and social capital of individuals within an organization (Calabrese et al., 2010; Day & Holladay, 2012; Gonzales, 2010).

AI has also been used to inform learning practices in high schools. A qualitative case study conducted by a district administrator and university professor to assess

whether or not at-risk students could be empowered through an intervention strategy using appreciative inquiry. The purpose of this investigation was to collect information from at-risk students that would inform teacher pedagogical practices. San Martin and Calabrese (2010) chose an alternative high school where students have a higher risk of experiencing violence, committing suicide, contracting STD's, and engaging in activities that facilitate chronic health problems and habits. Four themes emerged that indicated "relevant experiences were important for learning, a cooperative and respectful learning environment is a core value, learning should be enjoyable, and the concept of family became an important metaphor for the learning environment" (San Martin & Calabrese, 2010, p. 114). Unlike the previous study discussed by Calabrese et al. (2010), this particular study used only the first two sections of the AI-4D cycle, discovery and dream. The authors assert that more study is needed with at-risk students using the entire 4-D model to better qualify the results.

One of the main objectives of the aforementioned study was to capture experiences that may potentially inform teacher pedagogical practices. Solorzano et al. (2005) conducted research on educational inequities and racialized barriers as examined through Critical Race Theory (CRT). Through examining the navigational experiences Latinx students face while in college, the authors collect information that can inform the racialized practices, structures and policies of institutions. CRT rests on the premise that race and racism are defining characteristics of American society. The five tenants to CRT are the centrality of race and racism, the challenge to dominant ideology, a commitment to social justice and praxis, a centrality of experiential knowledge, and an historical context and interdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano et al. 2005). The authors examine

the failure of two-year community colleges in providing the “pipeline” necessary for an upward academic trajectory. Unlike Appreciative Inquiry, CRT focuses on the notion of permanence. AI focuses on the impermanence of individual attributes and generative capacity. An approach combining both CRT and AI could offer insight into balancing the permanence of racism with the impermanence of individual attributes in the hopes of exposing barriers that could inform improved practices.

In a leadership pedagogical study, a strength-based reflexive process was employed through a qualitative study of 22 schools within the Vancouver School Board in Canada. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine what processes of Appreciative Inquiry facilitated emergent leadership within individual stakeholders with diverse interests (Dickerson (2010). In turn, this could potentially affect the pedagogical practices of stakeholders in their relationships with the districts over 100 schools and approximately 57,000 students. The interactive AI process allowed multiple diverse stakeholders to reflect on the big picture and consider the meaning of their work. It also allowed them to be more empathetic with colleagues and re-discover the meaning that teaching has for them (Dickerson, 2010). The author observed that the process created a space for informal leaders to emerge outside of the official leader management system controlled by the district. This study is central to the work of Gonzales (2010) and Perez et al. (2009) who examine the power of administrative and staff support for undocumented students. Measuring emergent leadership in K-12 settings can enhance scholarship regarding the pipeline and transition of undocumented students to post-secondary settings.

Studies involving the application of Appreciative Inquiry through empirical research have informed academia about the power of investigating through a positivist lens. It is through this awareness that scholars have begun to implement projects with an appreciative approach. AI has been used to examine pressing educational issues at both the macro and micro level. In higher education, appreciative inquiry has been used in multiple ways to improve systems both inside and outside the classroom.

Autonomy-supportive classrooms as interactive environments where teachers facilitate the interests of students by asking questions that elicit students' dreams and aspirations are beneficial for multiple reasons (Conklin & Hartman, 2013). This process empowers students to discuss their concerns, praise their progress and support each other's values and strengths. It also operates on the notion of a growth mindset, the belief that a student's intellectual capacities are not finite and can be molded and expanded. The authors apply the 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry in the autonomy supportive classroom to find out if AI increases greater self-efficacy and conceptual understanding in these environments. They conducted surveys in 10 different classrooms, three at the undergraduate level and seven at the graduate level, over a three-year period utilizing an AI approach. The findings indicated that Appreciative Inquiry was a viable method that assisted students in creating meaningful learning experiences they valued that leveraged their historical peak learning experiences (Conklin & Hartman, 2013). As stated earlier in the research conducted by Calabrese et al. (2010) and Day and Holladay (2012), Appreciative Inquiry builds on the peak positive experiences of individuals to foster potential for even greater positive outcomes. A similar study conducted with

undocumented Latinx immigrants could enhance the visibility of individual and collective strengths in the classroom.

AI study participants report an increase in their belief in their capabilities. This can be useful when working with students overcoming significant barriers. Another study focused on student perceptions in the higher education setting and used a survey to assess the perceptions of graduate students in a school counselor program. The authors, Lewis and Emil (2010), launch the investigation on the assumption that college level counseling programs are based on diverse philosophies and a multitude of practices. They assert that its foundation is rested in humanistic thought and strength-based approaches. Their goal was to understand how students enrolled in these programs perceive their effectiveness and training. They collected information from a variety of stakeholders, including graduates, program administrators and members of the school counselor advisory committee. An Appreciative Inquiry-based questionnaire using open-ended questions provided respondents an opportunity to narrate their experiences. The narratives unveiled two themes.

The first finding was that prospective counselors felt a meaningful connection to the school-based community clinic operated by the program. The second finding unveiled individual contributions and strengths that enrolled students brought to the program. As discussed previously in the study by Conklin and Hart (2013), participants responded well to the appreciative framework of open-ended questions that elicited responses regarding their individual strengths and agency. The AI process of asking questions that elicit individual strengths could greatly enhance scholarship on the socio-economic issues of undocumented Latinx students.

## **Policy & Economic Considerations**

It is difficult to discuss the challenges faced by undocumented Latinx students without recognizing the role policy plays in mitigating or enhancing institutional barriers. Policy issues can enhance or impede undocumented students' abilities for greater academic achievement (Contreras, 2009). Furthermore, policy regarding tuition and citizenship can directly affect individual agency and self-efficacy.

Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010) examine AI as a shadow process in two different organizations, a mid-level management agency and, the other, a monastery. The shadow process is defined as everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about him or herself. Two case studies were conducted using a qualitative framework of the AI 4-D process. The first case study was conducted at an agency with mid-level management. The researchers found a palpable shadow, with participants being too quiet in their responses and assenting to everything the director said. Compliance was becoming a substitution for participation. The second case study was conducted with a group of monks regarding the relocation of their monastery. Utilizing the AI framework, the researchers asserted the hierarchy of the monastery prevented actualization of the AI process. The researchers did not take into account the voices of 'priests' compared to the voices of monks identified as 'lay.' Self-censorship occurred with the lay voices as they ceded to the voices of the priests. The AI process compensated for this by purposefully calling attention to this issue and placed all members in the same position rather than an "us versus them" dynamic. The researchers concluded that AI was highly effective as an intervention strategy in illuminating the shadow. This study supports the notion of AI being an acceptable theoretical lens in capturing the "shadows" of undocumented

students and creating a space for students to speak without the fear of yielding to authoritative figures. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) specifically mention how carefully crafted AI questioning can penetrate contexts that inherently push back against a growth mindset framework.

The generative capacity and growth mind set of appreciative inquiry run contrary to the limitation imposed by public policy. The United States Supreme Court decision in *Plyer v. Doe (1982)* changed the cultural and economic landscapes for many undocumented students in the U.S. (Flores, 2010). While the ruling only addressed the educational rights of undocumented students to attend public primary and secondary schools, it did not address enrollment in post-secondary education or in-state tuition benefits. Flores (2010) specifically addresses the relationship between undocumented Latinx student college enrollment and the costs of attending college. She employed a research design using the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey. Through this representative sample from 1998-2005, she employed Becker's (1964) cost-benefit framework to examine the effect of tuition price reduction on college enrollment behavior. She employed a logistic regression analysis to aggregate the data between undocumented students living in states with in-state tuition benefits and those who do not. She concluded that undocumented Latinx students are 1.54 times more likely to attend college in states that enact in-state tuition policies. Her work demonstrates the urgency for further studies to be conducted to assess the impact that tuition policies have on the academic efficacy of undocumented students.

In the years since the decision in *Plyer v. Doe (1982)* many states have enacted laws that will enable undocumented students to receive in-state tuition benefits, thereby

making post-secondary education more accessible. Abrego (2008) conducted a study specifically focusing on California's Assembly Bill 540, which enables undocumented youth to pay in-state tuition. She conducted a longitudinal study before and after the bill was passed, employing a qualitative process of 43 interviews with 27 respondents. Abrego's findings indicated that AB540 allows the historically marginalized group of undocumented students to feel more enfranchised. Respondents indicated that the term AB540 gave them a greater impetus to work with the law instead of against it. Contreras (2009) suggests this could be due in part to a larger critical mass of students in California. An Appreciative Inquiry approach to both Flores (2010) and Abrego (2008) could provide additional data by focusing on positive attributes rather than a problem-based lens. AI could enhance the notions of respondents regarding AB540 by re-framing their issues as potentials rather than deficits.

Appreciative Inquiry can also be valuable in capturing the regional and national experiences of undocumented students throughout the U.S. in relation to tuition and college financial assistance. In Texas, House Bill 1403 granted access to higher education for undocumented students (Ibarra, 2012). Ibarra examines the climate in Texas using a qualitative research design and narrative analysis. Despite advances for undocumented Latinx student's in-state tuition benefits, Ibarra found that undocumented students still find barriers when trying to navigate through complex rules and systems that actually act as a deterrent to post-secondary education. Ibarra's findings indicate that the transition from high school to college for undocumented Latinx students is difficult because of complicated bureaucracy, misinformation regarding programs and requirements, and eligibility. His data also addresses an underlying notion that there is little assistance for

undocumented students from high school administrators in navigating the complicated processes of reaching college. The pipeline into higher education is a re-occurring theme that is preventing undocumented Latinx students from getting the support they need to attend a university (Gonzales, 2010; Contreras, 2009; Diaz-Strong et al. 2011). Ibarra uses a deficit-based approach and utilizing AI instead could provide greater awareness about the individual attributes that can assist in reaching college without help in high school.

In a study conducted by Dougherty, Nienhusser and Vega (2010), state higher education policy in Texas and Arizona is examined through the advocacy coalition framework (ACF). This theoretical lens focuses on the social, economic and political context in which policymaking occurs. They conducted a qualitative study and interviewed a variety of stakeholders in each state, including legislators, opponents and proponents of in-state tuition benefits legislation. The interviews were semi-structured with a standard protocol but were adapted to content given by the interviewees. Coalition building and support across multiple sectors plays a major role in the passage of state legislation. The authors attribute the success of Texas's HB 1403 to strong coalition building while the passage of Arizona's Proposition 300 is said to be the result of an anti-immigrant advocacy coalition. Unlike Texas, Arizona's business sector remained silent during the campaign. The silence was a deterrent to forming a stronger pro-immigrant coalition. In North Carolina, similar results were found regarding the failure to pass House Bill 1183, which would have extended in-state tuition for undocumented students (Sanders, 2010). Sander's qualitative case study explored the political debate around the issue and the integral role advocacy group's play. Recommendations from Sander

emphasized re-framing negative perceptions in the debate by policymakers. Examining the processes involved in the failure of HB 1183 through the lens of AI could assist future research on how to positively frame controversial legislation.

Herrera, Garibay, Garcia and Johnston (2013) explore anti-immigrant attitudes utilizing the Unified Instrumental Model of Group Conflict (UIMGC) framework. The authors analyze a longitudinal sample of two surveys administered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute: the 2005 Freshman Survey (TFS) and the 2009 College Senior Survey (CSS). Employing the UIMGC framework enabled the researchers to identify individual ideologies, situational factors and the perception of competing for resources. Their goal was to capture data from individuals who have negative attitudes and perceptions of undocumented immigrant access to higher education. Their findings concluded that an individual's perception regarding undocumented students is shaped by individual-level characteristics, experiences, and institutional structures and contexts. Understanding where negative attitudes against undocumented students come from is integral when attempting to change policy. The re-framing and context of the passage of HB 2008 in Kansas demonstrates how an organizational structure can influence one's belief system.

Framing the debate positively was instrumental in passing House Bill 2008 in Kansas in 2008. Reich and Mendoza (2008) conducted a mixed-method approach to assert that framing the bill as "educating kids" was integral to the bill's passage. Data was collected through committee hearings, semi-structured interviews with state legislators and newspaper accounts. The authors utilized a logistic regression model of the roll call vote on HB 2008. Their findings indicated that re-framing the bill by advocates was

successful in passing the legislation in a state where the current climate is conservative. One of the most crucial takeaways is that local framing of in-state tuition is crucial. They assert that throughout their investigation, advocates for the passage of the bill were consistently bringing their arguments back to local terms. Similarly to Appreciative Inquiry, a positivist lens was used to successfully extend in-state tuition benefits to Kansas's undocumented student population.

Morales, Herrera and Murry (2011) expound the research conducted by Reich and Mendoza (2008) by capturing the experiences of undocumented Latinx students in the Midwest who are Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) eligible. They assert that the voices missing in the Midwest debate are those of children whose futures are in limbo. They conduct their study through the framework of resiliency and implement a qualitative, micro-ethnographic case study of 15 DREAM eligible students in post-secondary education. Although the sample size was not large, the researchers collected data on the unique coping mechanisms that undocumented Latinx students employ. In their conclusion, the authors assert that more humanistic research is needed to capture the experiences of undocumented youth, particularly their relationship with policy and tuition. Using the lens of appreciative inquiry would assist the breadth and depth of the interview questions and perhaps expose experiences that were not reported.

### **Civic Engagement & Labor Market Prospects**

The challenges of undocumented Latinx students are prevalent throughout all aspects of their lives. Civic engagement and work authorization present major hurdles for students who do not have citizenship. There are several studies examining labor market

prospects from 2001 – 2006 (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Abrego conducted 43 interviews with 27 undocumented high school and college student participants in Los Angeles. Gonzales used his own data from three and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork. He conducted 250 semi-structured interviews and 102 individual life history interviews. The data collected uncovered a number of barriers undocumented students encounter and the authors assert that challenges multiply upon graduation. They state that there is no clear policy on what to do with undocumented students once they graduate from high school. The barriers to a post-secondary education may be too challenging for some, and there are minimal alternatives for job market prospects. Students' legal status leaves them with few choices and structural pipeline issues have prevented them from reaching college or a university (Gonzales, 2010; Solorzano et al. 2005, Contreras, 2009; Diaz-Strong et al. 2011).

In addition to poor labor market prospects for undocumented students, there is a lack of information regarding the civic engagement patterns of undocumented students. Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado and Cortes (2010) employed a qualitative study interviewing 126 undocumented Latinx high school seniors, community college and university students and recent grads. Students were selected from a convenience sample using email and flyer advertisements. The authors measured their data against four major civic engagement themes: social service, activism, tutoring and functionary work. Data extrapolated from the surveys indicated that despite concerns over their legal status, undocumented students reported high levels of civic engagement. Even though Dozier (1993) and Munoz (2008) assert that the fear of deportation prevents undocumented students from potentially engaging in civic activities, more undocumented students are

choosing to engage rather than hide (as cited in Perez et al. 2010). Utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry lens with undocumented Latinx student civic engagement patterns can uncover the positive attributes that propelled these students to be involved despite the fear of deportation.

Although the foundations of Appreciative Inquiry rest on the notion of a positivist lens, AI can also be used to elicit experiences that were negative. Catharsis is a powerful tool in uncovering individual strengths and allowing undocumented students to express their grievances through AI questioning is appropriate for issues regarding public policy. Appreciative Inquiry has also been used to understand the relationship between government administrators and their constituencies. A study conducted by Schooley (2008) examined how to increase citizen participation in public policy matters at a local level to improve governance. The author chose to utilize a qualitative, semi-structured interviewing technique. Even though the author asserts that AI can be used to improve local government citizen participation, he also addresses the issue that focusing on the positive and restricting negative opinions regarding policy could be detrimental to participation. Unlike the previous scholarship discussed with Calabrese et al. (2010) and Day and Holladay (2012), Appreciative Inquiry is not as effective in this particular study. In contrast, Schooley asserts that Appreciative Inquiry can be antithetical in situations where people need to express negative opinions and how those opinions formed without the goal for organizational improvement. This finding is a stark contrast to much of the literature surrounding appreciative inquiry. Instead of facilitating group cohesion and citizen participation, AI was actually a deterrent to people voicing their opinions.

Through a positivist lens, Appreciative Inquiry can uncover the hidden personal attributes that help individuals remain resilient and persistent.

### **Summary**

This literature review represents only a fraction of the current state of knowledge on both undocumented Latinx students and the theoretical lens of Appreciative Inquiry. Researchers have conducted extensive investigations into the broad range of challenges this particular group encounters in both national and regional contexts. Through diverse theoretical lenses, scholars have gathered large amounts of data that can be applied to a variety of fields. The literature on undocumented students demonstrates the intersection of race, gender and citizenship. It highlights the structural barriers in the pipeline that prevent undocumented students in persisting through K-12 to post-secondary settings and offers approaches to mitigate challenges.

Furthermore, this review demonstrates the flexibility of Appreciative Inquiry as a theoretical construct that is a viable complement to research on undocumented students. Scholarly articles were chosen from a wide cross section of education and public policy to specifically illustrate its potential to be used in conducting further research on undocumented Latinx students.

*Plyer v. Doe* (1982) paved the way for access to public primary and high school for the undocumented. Subsequently, it left lingering questions on financial access to higher education and states began to implement their own policy regarding access to post-secondary education for undocumented students. The literature not only addresses states like California, Texas and Arizona with a large critical mass of undocumented Latino students, but also analyzes DREAM efforts from the Midwest to North Carolina.

The research asserts that the incongruence of multiple legislative acts in various states exacerbate this population's unique challenge in higher education access. Policy is constantly re-framing the legal status of undocumented Latino students, thus impacting their ability to achieve financial access to college and labor market prospects.

Scholarship on the barriers undocumented Latinx students encounter has been available for the last few decades. Likewise, appreciative inquiry is a fairly new theoretical construct. In almost 30 years since the development of this theory, appreciative inquiry has expanded the knowledge in positive psychology and organizational development through empirically driven research. Through disciplined inquiry, the appreciative approach has empowered individuals, organization and institutions to tackle deficiencies in complex human systems. It has challenged the status quo of traditional fixed humanistic capital in exchange for social capital that can be developed and shared. Through Appreciative Inquiry, we create the world we want to live in rather than navigating through a world where we have no control (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Appreciative Inquiry assists leaders in learning the potential of their own efficacy and at the same time elicits leadership qualities in people whose voices have been marginalized by institutional injustices. It is an intervention strategy that has been successful in yielding the best experiences from individuals for implementing best practices. It can be applied to various sectors of society and is instrumental to fostering positive change. This theoretical lens in higher education has recently been applied in the form of Appreciative Education or Appreciative Advising (Bloom, Hutson, He & Konkle, 2013). The current research on Appreciative Inquiry in higher education could be used to

re-frame interactions between students and faculty at both the micro and macro level. It particularly emphasizes the roles between students, staff and faculty members in administrative positions (Bloom et al. 2013). The intersection of Appreciative Inquiry and undocumented students is primed and ready for innovative disciplined inquiry. One of the main objectives of this review was to demonstrate the need for future research as this demographic imperative is providing new and relevant challenges for undocumented Latinx students in higher education.

According to Conklin and Hartman (2013), the concept of growth mind-sets is also necessary to understand appreciative inquiry and its implications for social justice. It is the belief that a person's intellectual and personal characteristics are fluid and that effort and dedication are essential to outstanding performance. This contrasts the traditional idea of predictive capacity and challenges the idea that people have fixed attributes and abilities that cannot be changed. The belief in growth mind-sets enables diverse individuals from all aspects of life to change and refine their abilities and assets. Undocumented Latinx students are arguably one of the most disenfranchised groups of people. If scholars choose to believe that certain individual qualities are innate and un-malleable, they ignore the potential undocumented Latinx students have to achieve their unseen goals. This fixed humanistic mind-set does not allow people to elevate themselves by the perceptions of others, thus having serious negative consequences on the potential and self-efficacy of people. Appreciative Inquiry can assist in uncovering the peak positive experiences of undocumented Latinx students and highlighting how to leverage those experiences for continued success.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

*“Appreciative inquiry distinguishes itself from critical modes of action research by its deliberately affirmative assumptions about people, organizations, and relationships,”*  
*(Ludema, Cooperrider & Barret, 2012)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Age When Entered U.S.	Country or Region of Origin	Primary Language Spoken in Home	Type of Residence	Hours worked per week	College Major	Education Level of Mother	Education Level of Father
Erlyn	Female	29	12	Mexico	English & Spanish	Rent	10	Pre-Med	Grade School or less	Grade School or less
Nora	Female	22	7	Mexico	Spanish	Rent	N/A	Sociology	Grade School or less	N/A
Marcia	Female	24	4	Mexico	Spanish	Rent	20	Statistics	Grade school or less	Grade school or less
Sonya	Female	22	11	Mexico	Spanish	Rent	30	Sociology & Chicano/a Studies	Grade School or less	Grade School or less
Katrina	Queer	22	1	Mexico	English	Rent	35	Gender Studies & American Indian Studies	Some high school	Grade School or less
Lilly	Female	24	13	Central American (El Salvador)	Spanish	Rent	N/A	Anthropology	Some high school	Some high school
Maria	Female	23	11	Mexico	English	Rent	N/A	Economics	Grade school or less	Grade school or less
Lucy	Female	24	4	Mexico	Spanish	University dorm	15	Geography	Some high school	Some high school
Jessica	Female	26	11	Mexico	Spanish	University dorm	9	English	Some high school	Some high school
Juan	Male	23	7	Mexico	Spanish	Lives with family	20	Philosophy	N/A	N/A
Mario	Male	21	4	Mexico	Spanish	University dorm	19	History & Chicano/s Studies	Grade school or less	Grade school or less
Jose	Male	26	3	Mexico	Spanish & English	Rent	N/A	History & African-American Studies	Some high school	Some high school
Valerie	Female	22	9	Mexico	Spanish	Rent	15-19	Communication Studies	N/A	High school degree
Mary	Female	23	3	Mexico	Spanish	University dorm	N/A	Geography	Some high school	Grade school or less
Janice	Female	21	5	Mexico	Spanish	Rent	10	Gender Studies	Some college	Some high school

**Figure 2. Undocumented Student Participants**

The demographic table above provides detailed information regarding this study’s participants whom mostly self-identified as female and came from Mexico. It was not the purpose of this study to only interview undocumented students from Mexico. However, most happened to be of Mexican origin. The amount of hours worked per week was important as DACA allowed these students to pursue jobs while enrolling in college. There was a broad representation of academic majors as well. One student was enrolled

in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) discipline and the remaining students were pursuing majors throughout the humanities and social sciences. The education level of their mothers and fathers supports the notion that these students excelled academically despite coming from families where their parents mostly had a grade school or less of an education.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences undocumented Latino students transferring from a California Community College to a public Research I category institution through the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry. Exploring these experiences through AI will expand its existing usage and theoretical application. At the same time, utilizing this framework may uncover both positive and negative aspects of the transfer processes that this particular group experiences. As stated in Chapter 2, Appreciative Inquiry could also produce positive results through catharsis that can empower individuals to tell their respective stories. The research questions of the proposed study are:

- (1) What experiences do undocumented Latino students undergo when transferring from a California community college to a California four-year research I institution?
- (2) How were undocumented Latino students supported during the transfer process?
- (3) Who supported undocumented Latino students during the transfer process?

### **Qualitative Research and Methodological Approach**

A qualitative research design was selected as the most effective tool in collecting the stories of undocumented Latino students because it can yield practical and specific

insights (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, combining narrative inquiry through Appreciative Inquiry may assist in collecting information describing the lives of individuals through a positivist lens. As discussed in both Chapters 1 and 2, Appreciative Inquiry has demonstrated to be an effective tool of action research in various sectors of society.

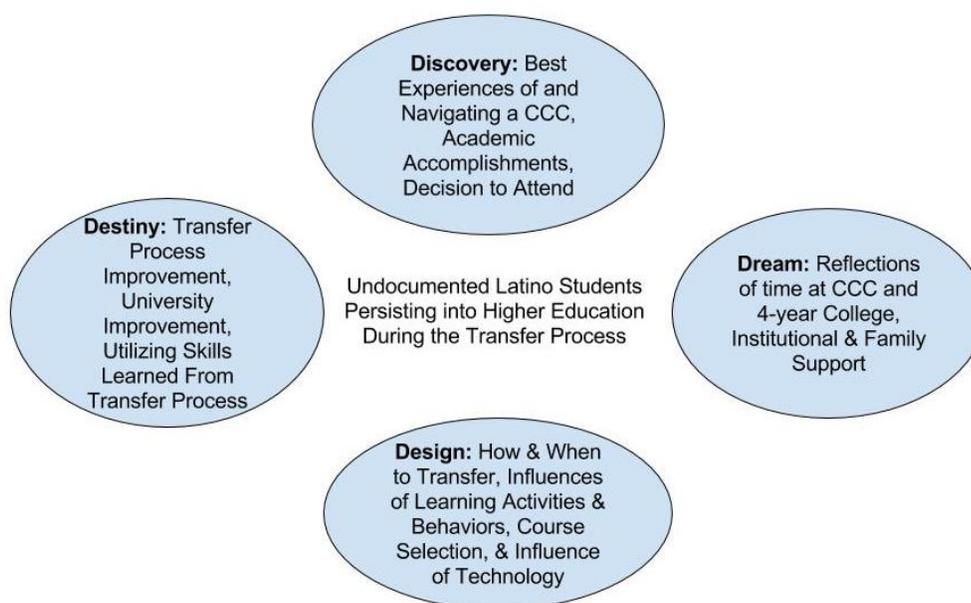
The study employed Cooperrider's 4-D model of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny in designing the questionnaire that was given to participants (Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Burkhalter, 2010). The results of the study indicated that using Appreciative inquiry as a theoretical framework and qualitative protocol in interviewing could uncover the invisibility of assets of both individuals and organizations. By implementing a similar framework and interview protocol, I believe that this method can be used to not only understand the lived individual experiences of undocumented Latinx students persisting through the higher education pipeline but also the community colleges they come from. Understanding the 4-D cycle is paramount; as it will directly inform the types of questions the investigator will ask regarding particular themes.

### **Methods Overview**

The study was guided by a qualitative approach framed by the theoretical lens of Appreciative Inquiry. It was the purpose of this study to better understand how the successful experiences and interactions of undocumented Latinx students have encountered transitioning from a California Community College to a four-year public research institution. Questions were divided into four sections of the 4-D model and follow up questions were asked for elaboration.

## Qualitative Approach

Using a qualitative approach is arguably the most effective tool in capturing the experiences this group of students encounters while navigating the complex nature of the transfer process. Questions focused on experiences regarding the personal and institutional mechanisms that successfully enabled them to transfer to a four-year Research I university. It was semi-structured and created an environment in which participants were telling a story. The questions were not linear in nature and allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and how they were interrelated between the pre-transfer processes to its culmination.



**Figure 3. Undocumented Latino Students & the 4-D Model**

### **Discovery Stage**

The first part of the 4-D cycle is called *Discovery*. Cooperrider also describes it as the “Best of what is.” Interview questions asked during this part of the cycle primarily have to do with best practices. Undocumented Latinx students were asked questions about highlights and positive factors about the institutions they transferred from. Particularly, it would be interesting to learn if the receiving institution played any pre-transfer role. Ludema, Cooperrider and Barret (2012) assert that by asking questions related to best practices at organizations and institutions, it “Opens the way to building a better future by dislodging the certainty of existing deficit constructions,” (p. 2). The uncertainty aspect of this phase in the cycle is essential as it can free participants from deficit vocabularies and allows them to consider new ways of describing their previous experiences.

### **Dream Stage**

The second phase of the 4-D model is *Dream*. The dream phase requires questions be asked about “What could be.” Following the *Discovery* phase, the dream phase asks questions that allow participants more latitude in sharing their stories in full and rich detail generating more data for theme building (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005). One of the main components of questions asked during this phase has to do specifically with wishes, hopes and dreams. This phase encourages the researcher to probe and ask questions about best practices and peak experiences in their individual lives, separate from their transfer institutions.

### **Design Stage**

The third phase of the 4-D cycle, *Design*, asks questions that are focused on visions for a better future, powerful purposes in life and strategic intent. The design section specifically asks questions that are related to the best practices section in the first cycle, *Discovery*. These questions build on the responses from the discovery cycle. Cooperrider calls this “possibility propositions” that bridge “the best of what is” with “what might be,” (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros). Questions pertaining to this cycle must integrate the best of both the past and future possibility.

### **Destiny Stage**

The fourth and final phase of the 4-D model is *Destiny*. The primary purpose of the destiny phase is to elicit responses to inquiry regarding future individual and institutional experiences. Moreover, the destiny phase enables participants to answer questions pertaining to constructing the future through innovation and action. The interview protocol will specifically ask questions that could enable participants to build a language through their answers that creates broader and deeper possibilities for action. As the researcher, I will be looking for answers that translate their ideals into reality and their beliefs into practice (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005).

### **Research Site**

The research site for this study was a Research I California public flagship institution. This university was selected for not only being one of the most highly selective public universities in the United States, but also because of the high volume of undocumented students that are enrolled and the institutional support they receive while

attending. The research site maintains a broad online presence that showcases multiple resources for undocumented students. The institution chosen also has a robust Undocumented Student Program (USP) office that supports students financially, academically, emotionally and psychologically.

### **Recruitment**

A snowball sample was used and an email was composed and sent out looking for participants to students in the undocumented student listserv. A consent form was also constructed and sent to all participants via email. Flyers were posted around the USP office, particularly in their transfer support offices as well as many academic units. The USP office has one full time director, one part time coordinator and a part time attorney that provides legal counsel to students seeking guidance regarding DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals).

### **Participants**

I interviewed 15 undocumented Latinx students at a public Research I institution. I also understood that it might be difficult to find participants, as this is a highly disenfranchised group of people who may be unwilling to participate. Even with the passage of AB540 and President Obama's executive action DACA, I expected there could be a number of undocumented students who are afraid to participate in my investigation for fear of deportation and breaches in confidentiality. All participants must have transferred from a California community college which further narrowed the pool of possible respondents. Although there are some California community colleges that are considered "feeders" into highly selective public universities, there was not a specific

California community college that was targeted for this study. Undocumented students have had to navigate the community college system through both official channels and underground networks. Illuminating this invisibility through Appreciative Inquiry may provide invaluable information. All participants were assigned pseudonyms and their demographic information was collected to provide insight into their country of origin, length of time in the U.S. and various identifying information.

The United States 2016 Presidential election played an influential role in the data collection process. Prior to the election, I was able to interview six students. I had an additional 6 interviews scheduled for the following week but they all cancelled due to the election of Donald Trump. I immediately contacted my research site's Undocumented Student Program (USP) office and they informed me that many of their undocumented students were coming in for counseling and uncertain about the election's consequences. I decided take a break in data collection and contact the USP office in the beginning of January to begin recruiting additional students. After sending out my recruitment email and flyers several times to the undocumented student email listserv, I was able to interview nine more students in February. I had several more students scheduled but they either cancelled last minute or never showed up. Although these students were facing a high level of uncertainty, I was able to collect extensive qualitative data regarding their experiences from the beginning of the transfer process to their matriculation to a 4-year public research institution.

### **Interviews**

I conducted interviews at the research site using the 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry in guiding my interview protocol. Above is the same 4-D model presented in

Chapter 1 but adapted as it pertains to undocumented Latinx students persisting into higher education. The interview protocol was influenced by Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros (2005) and adapted to higher education.

During the period of October 2016 to February 2017, I interviewed 15 undocumented Latinx students at a 4-year public research institution. All of the students had transferred from a California community college. Out of 15 students, three self-identified as male, 11 as female and one as queer. To ensure anonymity, the participants were assigned pseudonyms asked basic demographic questions. They did not have to disclose which California community college he or she transferred from. As mentioned previously, the interviews were approximately 45-60 minutes in length and can be found in Appendix D. The data collected draws directly from the interviews recorded and provided detailed insight into navigating the complex transfer process of an undocumented Latinx student.

Each participant was asked four questions from each section of the cycle for a total of 16 questions. Participants were asked specific questions regarding their experiences at their respective community colleges, the transfer process, family support, institutional support and the role of technology. Clarification and follow up questions were asked if participants had difficulty answering some of the questions. Each interview was audio recorded and I also conducted member checks, allowing participants to look at and correct any inaccuracies in the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed, coded for themes, and followed by a discussion of the themes and where they emerged in the 4-D model.

## **Coding**

My methods of coding were descriptive and cross-checked using In Vivo software. Descriptive coding is assigning a word or phrase to best describe the summation of a passage of qualitative data. I believe the qualitative data captured lead to using both descriptive and In Vivo measures. After each interview was transcribed, I highlighted words and phrases that were repeatedly used and grouped them by theme. For example, many of the participants used the terms “AB540” and “DACA” when describing their experiences navigating the community college system. This eventually emerged as a theme. Furthermore, myriad participants discussed how important third party transfer course selection websites were in finding out what courses were transferrable. Even though some of them did not specifically mention the word technology, it became an overarching theme integral in their transfer experience.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

This study explored the experiences of undocumented Latinx students when transferring from a California community college to a 4-year research public institution. The 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry was used as a theoretical framework in constructing the interview questions and facilitating concepts of a growth mind-set. The participants were asked a series of questions under the themes of *Discovery*, *Dream*, *Design* and *Destiny* in an attempt to gain insight into the complex processes of navigating through this specific leakage in the K-12 higher education pipeline. The study's three research questions were:

- (1) What experiences do undocumented Latino students undergo when transferring from a California community college to a California four-year research I institution?
- (2) How were undocumented Latino students supported during the transfer process?
- (3) Who supported undocumented Latino students during the transfer process?

### Review of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of Appreciative Inquiry framed my interview protocol and the methods used to interpret students' responses from the interview questions. The 4-D model from Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005) provided a guideline on how to formulate questions that would elicit detailed responses. The questions chosen were also specifically designed to address all three of my research questions. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on assets rather than deficits and can assist individuals in leveraging their

peak positive experiences for future success. Moreover, AI is a form of action research that can improve the quality of an organization. Utilizing the 4-D model uncovered both positive and negative attributes about the California community colleges these students transferred from and the 4-year public research university they transferred to. I was not only able to capture the individual experiences of undocumented students during the transfer process, but also examine the leakages in the transfer pipeline.

### **Findings**

The main goal of this study was to capture the experiences of undocumented Latinx students during the transfer process applying the theoretical framework of the 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry. There were a number of themes that emerged from the research design and interview protocol. The themes were not confined to one particular section of the 4-D model and appeared throughout the interviews in multiple stages. The findings are discussed theme by theme and indicate where they appeared in the 4-D framework.

The first theme to emerge was *State Legislative and Federal Directives: AB540 and DACA*. Most of the participants, if not all, mentioned the terms AB540 (California Assembly Bill 540) and DACA (Deferred Action for Child Arrivals). AB540 allows undocumented students to attend institutions of higher education in California and pay in-state tuition. DACA was an executive order signed by President Barack Obama that halted undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors from being deported and allowed them permission to work in the United States. Prior to the passage of AB540, undocumented students had to pay out of state tuition to attend any of California's public higher education institutions. Furthermore, the participants mentioned

AB540 and DACA in different contexts. Some participants felt positive about the labels, as they believed it was easier to access assistance in an administrative office if they mentioned AB540 or DACA. Noting that some advisors and counselors knew how to advise them based on this identifiable status. Other participants came from community colleges where the transfer office was not knowledgeable about AB540 and DACA and did not provide encouragement. Responses indicated that the students preferred the title of AB540 and DACA instead of undocumented.

The second theme that emerged was *Community College & University Institutional Support*. Through the theoretical lens of Appreciative Inquiry, some of the participants were able to recount stories of how joining clubs and organizations were instrumental in forming a network to ensure academic success. Participants discussed in depth how on campus clubs and groups were essential in their goal to transfer to a 4-year institution. The third theme was *External Support: Community and Family*. Many of the respondents indicated that family played a considerable role in their ability to succeed in the transfer process. As indicated by the demographic questionnaire, many of these students' parents did not achieve a high school level of education yet valued the political, social and economic capital of higher education. Some respondents also indicated that Community College personnel were instrumental in their transfer decision-making process. The fourth theme was *The Role of Technology in the Transfer Process*. Most participants explained in detail how technology was essential in both the transfer process and choosing the 4-year public research institution they matriculated to.

The findings also illustrate each student had different experiences depending on which California community college they originated from. While some participants felt

supported during the transfer process, others did not. Utilizing the 4-D model and interview protocol was successful in answering all three research questions and enabled participants to recall peak positive experiences. At the same time, students were also able to reflect on the organizational structure of their respective community colleges and discuss institutional barriers and avenues of support.

### **State Legislative and Federal Directives: AB540 and DACA**

Almost all participants in multiple stages of the 4-D model mentioned the categorization and concept of AB540 and DACA. They were very familiar with the terms and both historical and current implications of usage. Descriptive and in vivo coding was applied as multiple participants used the term undocumented and both the legislative and Federal executive order acronyms several times. The general consensus on the label AB540 was positive and allowed students to navigate in their interactions with community college and university personnel without having to explain their undocumented status. During the *Discovery* stage of the 4-D model, Sonya, who is Mexican in origin and was brought to the U.S. at age eleven, discussed the process of identifying as AB540 after communication with a community college counselor. Both of Sonya's parents had a grade school education or less and she is studying Sociology and Chican/o studies. Sonya shared:

That's when I was able to actually find some sort of word that would identify me. I identified as an AB540 student. You kind of learn about the differences there is between AB540 students, the undocumented community in general. It's not that it sets you a part, but in a way I would think that...Let's say I approach or go into an institution to request some sort of help. If they know that my academic journey is different because of my status, I want to have that term to be able to tell them, you know what? I'm this type of student. What is there for me?

Sonya illustrated in her response how important the term AB540 was in navigating through the transfer process. The identification of AB540 provided Sonya with the language to express her needs and concerns without the having to go into detail about her undocumented circumstances.

During the *Design* stage of the model, Jessica also mentioned the term AB540 and the role it played in choosing a university attend. Jessica also hailed from Mexico and was eleven at the time she entered the U.S. The primary spoken language at home in Spanish and she is majoring in English with a minor in Chicana/o studies. Many of the respondents were very methodical in terms of finding a university that understood their unique situations. Furthermore, Jessica was concerned mostly with “fitting in” and finding structures of support. Jessica shared:

It seemed like (this four year institution) had a lot of AB540 students. I was like, I want to go to a university that has that specific kind of group because I want help. I want to be comfortable enough to go into an office and ask for help and I don't know what to do. I found out they had this AB540 program ant it was pretty big, and they had a lot of incentives they could give me and workshops they offered so I was like I want to go there because it seems like they know what they're doing. I feel comfortable enough to think they're probably going to help me if I need any at some point.

It became clear during the process of the interviews that finding an institution with large AB540 students as well as an established network of academic and social support was instrumental in transfer decision making. Jessica would later go on to echo the views of Sonya by stating how important it is to attend an institution that had college personnel who were fluent in AB540 and other legislative terms. Jessica graduated high school in 2011 and was hesitant about applying to college even knowing about the resources available to an AB540 student. She decided to attend community college and it was not

until the passage of DACA before she felt comfortable pursuing a four-year degree at a public research institution. It is important to also highlight one of the goals of the model mentioned in Chapter 3 was to ascertain whether or not the “receiving school” assisted in the pre-transfer process. Sonya clearly illustrated that the high threshold of AB540 students enrolled in the receiving institution played a major role in the transfer process.

Other participants also mentioned how vital the resources of being an AB540 student were in their transfer journey. Lucy supported the assertions of Jessica by describing community college resources during the *Dream* stage. Lucy is 24 years old and was brought from Mexico at the age of four. Neither of her parents completed high school and she is currently Geography major. She shared:

We had a lot of events for AB540 students so that bringing the family members in and providing them with financial aid and pamphlets and just resources, the community along with the family members coming together and sharing all these resources and knowledge. I think it’s essential for a student’s success.

Lucy expounded on this notion by discussing the impact the representative from the four-year university on her decision to transfer to that particular institution. She decided to attend a transfer session for that school and learned that the representative was also an AB540 student who transferred. He became a mentor to her and was instrumental in her transfer and higher education experience. Maria also spoke of her community college experiences driving her attendance and ultimate transfer, which further supports the aforementioned theme. Maria is of Mexican origin and came to the U.S. at the age of 11. She is currently 23 and majoring in Economics. She described having a club at her community college called “The Dream Team” that exposed her to DACA and its benefits.

This topic emerged during the *Discovery* stage. When discussing her experiences with “The Dream Team,” Maria shared:

I know there was one guys in particular that would bring in lawyers to talk a little bit more about DACA. I remember going to one of their sessions, because at this time I wasn't too comfortable with the idea of reporting myself as an illegal immigrant. I was just trying to get a little bit of an idea, and to see that other people have done it, and they were okay, and nothing had happened, [they] eased me into okay, maybe I should go into this and seek more information.

They explained to her that enrolling in DACA would enable her to receive a work permit, which greatly influenced her application to the program. She eventually was able to apply for DACA with a social security number. Once enrolled in DACA, pursuing a 4-year degree became more of a financial reality. Access to work and the ability to apply to financial aid led to her decision to apply for transfer to 4-year public research institution.

During the *Destiny* stage, Maria also discussed being enrolled in DACA as an on-going process. It is not as if the DACA program requires a one-time application and provides lifetime status. The DACA program requires you to renew with the Federal Government every two years and you must apply for renewal four to five months before the expiration date. Maria elaborated on this issue and how her current institution assists with DACA renewal. She also shares how stressful the renewal process can be, especially when you are in college and assuming leadership roles. She discusses how her current university brings in attorneys to assist in the process. She shares her procrastination in the renewal process and said:

Another thing that I want to do next quarter is seeing one of the lawyers they bring in. That's if you're ready to renew your DACA. I know I'm getting so close to that. So this quarter I'm not going to lie, I'm a little bit stressed. I just assumed a leadership position, so I am all over the place. A lawyer comes in and tells you how, and guides you through it, so I would

love to do that. I feel very welcomed here, like very, very welcome. We have our own little person (attorney).

Even though DACA has brought much relief both financially and psychologically, it remains an anxiety inducing process. Maria is not only dealing with the demands that accompany attending a 4-year research institution, but she also has to learn how to navigate a Federal process that requires legal knowledge and literacy.

It became clear throughout the interviews that policy implications and considerations were inherent in the undocumented Latino experience during the transfer process. Previous research in the literature cited in Chapter 2 indicated the fear of deportation is one of the greatest concerns of the undocumented. From the participants' responses, it appears that policies such as AB540 and DACA not only alleviate concerns of deportation, but also empowers these students to move through this particular section of the higher education pipeline with less reservation.

### **Community College & University Institutional Support**

The second theme to emerge was the role that community college and university affiliated clubs and organizations played during the transfer process. Many of the participants gave detailed information regarding specific programs that targeted both undocumented and documented Latino students. Despite facing institutional barriers, many of the respondents spoke to the importance of seeking out networks of students and programs that would assist them in persisting through the transfer process. As stated before, the 4-D model is also a form of action-research and can uncover positive attributes about an organization that might otherwise been unknown. There was one particular organization that was directly involved with the receiving institution in this

study. The title of this program cannot be disclosed, as it is unique between California community colleges and this specific 4-year public research institution. Lucy discussed this program and shared:

It's before you even get in. So that program, even though it's here at [receiving institution], prepares you to apply to all universities. So your dream school, even if it's not [this receiving university]. They help you get into X and Y or even Cal State's. They'll go step-by-step with the application process, how to be competitive in your academics, and how to take on your personal statement as well. They have different sections but I did the one which was nothing but undocumented students in a cohort. It was specifically designed for our needs.

This type of pre-transfer program affiliated with the receiving institution allowed Lucy to experience the environment of a research university. The students in the program spent a week in residence at the institution, promoting network and collaboration. This theme emerged in the *Design* stage and was in response to one of the interview questions regarding learning behaviors. It was during this on-site pre-transfer program where Lucy developed learning behaviors helping her strengthen the skill set required to matriculate to a 4-year public research university.

Subsequent mentions of community college and university institutional support was more linear in nature rather than transactional. Participants spoke about programs separately at the community college and then at the receiving institution. During the *Discovery* stage, responding to the questions regarding “Were there other (undocumented or otherwise) Latino students at your community college that helped you navigate through the community college system,?” Jose responded that he went through it on his own. Jose is of Mexican in origin but describes himself as Chicano. He is 26 years old, brought to the U.S. when he was three and earned his bachelor's degree in History. He is

currently working towards his master's degree in African-American studies at the same institution he received his undergraduate degree. His goal is to eventually earn a PhD. He provided detail about how he sought out a program that was specifically for undocumented students and learned about IDEAS (Improving Dreams, Equality, Access & Success). He explains how IDEAS provided undocumented students with resources, activism and community building.

Lilly also mentioned how joining programs like IDEAS was central in her transfer process and further elaborates on the necessity of having similar programs available to more students. Lilly's family is from El Salvador and she arrived in the U.S. at the age of 13. She is currently 24 and majoring in Anthropology. She elaborated by sharing:

Programs like that (IDEAS) at community colleges and especially high school are important. Because I know that many students don't go straight to four-year institutions, they prefer to go to a community college. I think prepping them for, this is what you need to do if you go to a community college, and then to transfer. Because the goal is trying to emphasize that their goal is to transfer, not just to stay at the community college.

What is most striking about this quote is that it emphasizes early intervention for undocumented students who wish to transfer beginning in high school and reaffirms previous research which indicates that most undocumented students and immigrant students go directly to a community college after high school rather than to a 4-year university.

The type of early intervention mentioned by Lilly was echoed partially by Katrina. Katrina is currently 22 years old and entered the U.S. when she was one year old. She is of Mexican origin and is majoring in Gender Studies and American Indian Studies. She came from a community college in San Diego County and emphasized how

she lacked formal guidance for undocumented students who wished to transfer to a four-year university. She had attended three different community colleges in the district and affirmed they all had resources available for students who wish to transfer but not for the undocumented. She took it upon herself to create a new club in her last community college specifically to assist undocumented students during the transfer process. The program was called RISE (Rising Initiative Scholars through Education). When asked how and why she created the club, she shared:

The way this came about is that I had to learn to navigate a lot of the community college system through going to office hours, really taking the extra step. I took a lot of honors courses. I completed the honors program. It was a lot of work communicating with professors on campus, telling them about my schedule, could they work with me, if they could give me some extensions and all that. I was like, I noticed there's no undocumented people here to even talk with (that are visible), and financial aid is really picky about being undocumented. Then we started navigating how we can support undocumented students on campus.

Once the program was up and running, she proceeded to do workshops on access to higher education, how to get into EOPS (Extended Opportunity Program & Services), the California Dream Act, and various way to apply for financial aid to pay for community college and the transfer process. The success of implementing Katrina's RISE program had a long-lasting impact on this community college. She said, "to this day, they tell me that it was because of that initial workshop and that series that I did that they hired an undocumented student counselor. There's now a counselor that focuses on AB540 students at (this community college)." This was uncovered in the *Discovery* stage and Katrina was the only student interviewed who created a community college transfer program for undocumented students. Most of the respondents had mentioned either joining organizations and/or the need for more.

The initiatives created by Katrina had an impact in also collecting statistics on undocumented students. After her involvement in EOPS and the creation of RISE, she realized how important collecting statistics was to better address the state of affairs for undocumented Latino students at the community college level. Katrina's efforts paved the way for the community college to hire a counselor for AB50 students. Collecting statistical data on undocumented students was crucial to justifying the hire of personnel to assist this population. She shared:

After I started the program (RISE), we were really pushing for and collecting statistics on undocumented students about how many are receiving financial aid, we found that the retention rate was lower, way lower, and drastically lower. It wasn't until we were pushing and showed them the statistics of it and said, hey, this is what's happening. Why is it that this is happening? Now undocumented students can work. We didn't really go into all the research components, but we were like, hey, these are statistics, and they're in your face.

The level of participation and efficacy demonstrated by Katrina was instrumental in changing organizational practices and behaviors. The institutional support she received in response to her efforts had immediate and long lasting impacts in her community college. Her ability to take advantage of current programs and create her own will assist other undocumented students in this particular section of the higher education pipeline.

As discussed earlier, EOPS was mentioned by Katrina as an invaluable program that assist students who are navigating the transfer process. When asked in the *Dream* stage, "What institutional support could better improve the transfer process you went through?" Jessica shared:

Honestly my college (community) had a great program in EOPS because you have your own counselor, and that counselor talks to you and they make your whole academic plan from day you arrive to that program to

the day you graduate. They tell you a year before you graduate. They're like, so you're about to graduate, you need to start applying.

This type of program and direction appears to have major implications on the educational outcomes and achievements of undocumented Latinx students.

During the *Discovery* stage, Valerie discussed how empowering joining PUENTE was in propelling her in transfer to a 4-year institution. Valerie came from Mexico when she was nine. She is currently 22, majoring in Communication Studies and also pursuing a minor in Chicana/o Studies. When asked, "Can you tell me about a time when you felt academically accomplished?" She immediately answered, "When I joined the PUENTE program." PUENTE is a community college program that provides students with academic, mentoring and counseling resources. The program also has an English proficiency component and assist students in transferring to a 4-year college. For Valerie, PUENTE was the defining moment in her decision to pursue a 4-year degree after community college. She shared:

They (PUENTE) are very focused on transferring and motivating students to become leaders in community college. My biggest accomplishment was being nominated as the most dedicated student in that program. I remember my professor had me stand on top of a desk and give a speech. He said, "This is how I see Valerie, as somebody who is just heard. Even though she is small in height, she has a powerful voice and she's going to get to a lot of places." I think that was the moment that I felt like, wow, I'm really empowered and I really do see myself speaking loud and proud.

As illustrated earlier, programs such as IDEAS, RISE, EOPS and PUENTE, have provided a variety of support mechanisms that facilitate the persistence of undocumented Latinx students who seek to transfer to a four-year institution. Valerie specifically mentioned feeling empowered, thus enabling herself in believe that she has agency over

her own decisions regardless of her undocumented status. Other participants mentioned their membership in community colleges honors program and Mario mentioned an organization called CLAVE (Council of Latino Admission Volunteers for Education) but was not a member and did not go into much detail about it. Mario was born in Mexico, is currently 21, arrived in the U.S. at four, and is double majoring in History and Chicana/o studies. Both his parents never completed grade school and he is hoping to one day be a professor.

Lilly was also involved in programs but believed it was the support from one of her community college professors who inspired her the most. In response to the question about a time when she felt academically accomplished, she provided details about a specific professor and how she was also the faculty advisor for her community college chemistry club. Lilly was able to find her first job through the DACA program in the chemistry store on her campus. Her interactions with this professor/supervisor turned out to be one the greatest impacts on her to transfer to her current institution. Lilly described how this professor was consistently asking her questions related to her academics and was present when she emotionally “broke down.” They discussed her plans to transfer about once a week for four months prior to the beginning of the application process. She was going to apply only to comprehensive state colleges because she viewed the research 1 institutions as too expensive and unlikely to admit her. A week before the deadlines, her professor asked again about her transfer applications and said:

I think you need to consider that there are other options. You’re amazing, you’re talented; don’t let your (undocumented) status stop you from doing what you want to do. The worst you can hear is a no.

Lilly went ahead and decided to apply to her current institution and the rest of her applications were various CSU campuses. As she began receiving acceptances to CSU campuses, she completely forgot she applied to her current university. It was not until one of her friends sent her a text message saying she was accepted that she remembered. She then received a text message from another friend that she did not get accepted. Lilly rushed to check her emails and found she was accepted. She further describes emotional moments between her family, a friend at another UC school, and eventually her professor. The reaction from her professor was a moment Lilly said she would never forget. She described her demeanor, as professional and that she never touched students. But upon Lilly's announcement the professor immediately hugged her. Lilly said:

That pretty much to me was so meaningful. I froze because she was hugging me, and she was extremely happy, and that made me cry too because we all know she didn't show affection to anyone at the school. Because she had often made comments that because she was so young, students will not tend to respect her. She was always making sure that yes, you're my student and I'm your professor. I pretty much owe it to her for her unconditional support.

What resonates so strongly with this passage is the emotional connection that accompanied the institutional support she received. The personal connections within institutional support appear to be a factor in the pre-transfer process. Her professor was cognizant about her undocumented status and conveyed to Lilly to not let this legal "barrier" prevent her from achieving her goals or considering other avenues of success that never occurred to her.

Mary also responded in detail regarding community college support when asked, "Can you tell me about a time when you felt academically accomplished?" during the *Discovery* stage. Mary was three years old when she arrived from Mexico and she is

currently 23. She lives on campus in the dorms and is majoring in Geography. She transferred from a San Francisco Bay Area community college and discussed how impacted she was by three women employed in the college's career center. She described her community college being so small that "It's literally one standing building," but it enabled her to form strong relationships with college personnel. Regarding the three career center counselors, she shared:

They empowered me to believe that I was qualified to apply and go to a school like this. I told them I applied to UC(a) and UC(b). I was like, I don't know if I'll get in. They were like, Yeah you can do it, yeah you can, you know? They were hyping me up in a way. They helped a lot and then it made me want to try harder. Then when I told them the news (that I got into this university), they were super happy for me.

Mary highlights institutional support that was integral in her transfer experiences. Even though her community college was very small and lacking resources, she still persisted while encountering various institutional barriers. Both Lilly and Mary forged personal relationships within their respective institutions that were instrumental in the transfer process.

During the *Destiny* stage, many of the participants mentioned how important institutional support was once they matriculated to their receiving university. The transfer process in the higher educational pipeline does not end once the student reaches the university level. The receiving institution also plays a major role in outreach during the transfer process and assists in helping students adjust academically and socially. Specifically, participants mentioned multiple levels of outreach from their receiving institution. University groups such as MECHA, EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) and the Undocumented Student Program Office (USP) at this institution are active in the

transfer process. Participants mentioned in some of their responses that one or more of these organizations notified them after they gained admission. The group MECHA for example, hosts a day for undocumented and students of Latino descent called “Raza Day.” Furthermore, the USP office at their receiving institution also has a visit day and contacts admitted students regarding resources should they decide to join the institution. Given the legal barriers these students have faced throughout their adolescence due to their legal status, the support of individuals and organizations at the schools they attend play a vital role in their successful transfer.

### **External Support: Community & Family**

During the *Dream* stage, participants were specifically asked, “Do you think that community and family support is integral in strengthening the transfer process for undocumented students to a 4-year public institution?” Each participant not only replied yes to this question, but also provided detailed information from their personal experiences. Their responses indicated how vital community and family support was during the transfer process. Some of them spoke to community support, some spoke to only family support and others spoke to both. During times of great uncertainty in navigating academic advisement, course selection and multiple different transfer programs, family support was critical. In response to the aforementioned question, Marcia encountered barriers dealing with transfer pre-requisites and not having the necessary information in enrolling in the correct courses. Marcia is 24 years old and arrived in the U.S. at age 4. She currently works 20 hours a week, rents an apartment and is pursuing a degree in Statistics. She shared:

I would say yes. Even though they (her family) didn't have certain information at hand when I was at home provided to me. Because I didn't know that I had to take pre-requisites. Especially if the pre-requisites are like math and you need to take one before the other and what not. I remember I was on the couch and I was crying. And I'm like, you know what? Fuck this. I'm done with this. I'm not gonna do another two years and then transfer and then have to do two more years for a total of six years for just a bachelor's degree. I was just making that decision right there and then. Then my Mom, she was the one that talked me out of it. She told me, two years from now you're gonna look back and you're gonna say, I should've done that and now I'm two years behind. At that moment I was just pissed, frustrated, I was everything you think of except thinking clearly. There were definitely times when I had those long days at school and I just didn't want to wake up and go and do all of that. But my brother was going to the same community college I was, so when I didn't have the strength he would have the strength for both of us.

This passage from Marcia provides a window into her family dynamics and the pressures many undocumented students encounter regarding remedial and/or pre-requisite course work. Many undocumented students face an additional level of resistance persisting in higher education due to required remedial course work. Her mother was able to help her reflect on how she might feel if she did not persist despite not having taken the proper pre-requisites. At the same time she has her brother who is attending the same community college with her and alludes to a high level of resilience in her brother as he encouraged Marcia through her tough times.

In response to another question in the *Discovery* stage, "Who had the biggest impact on your decision at the community college to attend your current institution?" Maria insisted it was both her parents. As also indicated the demographic section of the interview protocol, Maria's parents did not have formal education and specifically did not finish high school. She shares in the interview that her parents wanted to continue their education and realized they could not. She continued by saying she felt very privileged

and grateful because her parents had worked so hard to give her the opportunity to go to school. She was accepted to many four-year schools directly from high school but she could not afford to attend at that time. She received additional support from high school counselors who suggested she enroll in community college as it was much more affordable and she could transfer in two years. Maria also did not apply for DACA as she was too scared. The moment when she decided to enroll in community college was when her parents said to her, “You worked so hard. You just keep going. It’s going to take you a little bit of time, but you’ll eventually get there.” This encouragement was just the type of support she needed in deciding to transfer to a 4-year public research institution from a community college.

Both Nora and Erlin discussed family support being important in strengthening the transfer process for undocumented students. Nora is 22 years old and has spent 15 years in the U.S after arriving from Mexico. She is a full time student majoring Sociology with a minor in Entrepreneurship. Erlin is Mexican in origin and is 29 years old and has been in the U.S. for 17 years. While Nora could not think of community in the transfer process but asserted that she could not have succeeded without family support. Nora shared:

Just telling them what I wanted to do and telling them my goals and what I wanted to accomplish, that kind of just inspired me and made me more confident in myself, imagining myself here or imagining myself at UC(a), that kind of perspective. That helped me a lot and made me actually believe that I could be here.

There appears to be a level of self-actualization that transpires with family support. Many of the participants mentioned how their families were not capable of providing financial support in pursuit of higher education but emotional support was just as essential. Valerie

also contributed to this notion as she expressed how important her mother was in supporting her during the transfer process. Support from family members appear to have revolved around themes of worthiness and validation. When most of Valerie's friends were enrolling at 4-year institutions directly from high school, she expressed feelings of disappointment in herself and her academic performance. She called her mother who said to her, "Well, don't worry about going to a community college. Yes, all of your friends are going to four-year universities, but that doesn't mean you're any less intelligent than they are. It's just different circumstances that you're in." Valerie went into detail further about not only her mother's support, but also her siblings and friends. She responded that the most important takeaway from their support was that she was not alone and "It really does take a community to build a student."

Mario also stressed how important his mother was in the transfer process because she wanted to see him succeed outside the service industry specifically, and encouraged him for education to access greater opportunities. He shared:

It reiterates why you're doing this whole thing in the first place. I would go home sometimes from community college and I would just be like really tired. My mom would be like, well, you've got to do it, you've got to complete your work unless you want to be a dishwasher for the rest of your life. Then I also have younger siblings and they'd (check on me) and be like, what are you doing? Are you going to school? Just the fact that I felt like if I dropped out, I don't want to be just working all day. They would bring up the questions, Hey, when are you going to school again? What am I going to say? Oh, shit I dropped out?

This was the only response in which someone in the family support structure during the transfer process specifically mentioned how they did not want their child to end up in a job that required little to no formal education. Since his admission to his current

institution, Mario indicated his family is even more involved in his educational experiences and has increased the pressure on him to do well.

Erlin expanded on the themes mentioned by Mario about his father in regards to his family's support in the transfer process. Specifically, Mario discussed how his father did not have formal education and did not understand how to navigate higher education. He was not able to be there for him in course selection and he could go for help at the community college. Even though Erlin's father was also unable to provide this level of support, he was integral in helping her out both emotionally and psychologically. In her response, Erlin explicitly mentioned that she valued her father's emotional support more than anything. He would always say, "Go to school. It's okay. You can make it. Blah, blah, blah." This emotional support really strengthened her decision of continuing with higher education.

One of the respondents in particular, Lucy also stated that family support helped her through the transfer process but also that community support could help students without family support or with family that lacked the academic information to assist their children in the transfer process. She shared:

Sometimes families don't even know the resources that are out there for their own daughter or their son. So that's where the community comes in, and the community takes a responsibility in educating those family members and providing them with those resources. So I think it takes a whole community. We had a lot of AB540 students so that bringing the family members in and providing them with the financial aid pamphlets and just resources, the community along with the family members coming together and sharing all these resources and knowledge. I think it's essential for a student's success.

Lucy's response illustrated how support through community and family collaboration could enhance the transfer process for undocumented students. She also frames the

community as a type of fallback or safety net for students who need the academic guidance in their family lives but cannot receive it at home.

### **The Role of Technology in the Transfer Process**

During the *Design* and *Destiny* stages of the 4-D model, almost every participant mentioned the role of technology in the transfer process. Specifically, two questions in the *Design* stage, “What challenges did you have to overcome in terms of course selection?” and “What role did technology play in choosing the transfer program and university to attend?” generated myriad responses from the participants. Particularly, utilizing the Internet, university websites and third party college transfer resources specializing in course selection, were technological avenues of support. Multiple participants mentioned a website called Assist.org that they credit for giving them the necessary tools in navigating the transfer process. Katrina discussed how useful using Assist.org. She shared:

I literally spent hours on Assist.org really going through it, like which UC had ethnic studies. I literally selected and did a lot of back and forth because I’m a visual person. I need to see it on a map before I see it on paper, and seeing what classes would get me the most majors, while at the same time making me transfer. It was a lot. It sounds like a lot, like extra work, but I did that in order to get me here.

I was unfamiliar with the website and immediately asked a follow up question for clarification, “Can you tell me more about Assist.org?” Katrina stated:

Assist.org basically tells you which courses are UC transferable and which ones are worth taking in order to get you in, what classes you need in order to get accepted for the major. For example, because I was transferring as an ethnic studies major, there wasn’t any classes that were the same as ethnic studies that were aligned to transfer either to UC(a) or to UC(b). I didn’t have to take any of those classes. I just had to take a lot of electives.

The above passage is just one of many of the participants' responses regarding Assist.org. As this course selection website reappeared in the student's responses, I asked what Assist.org meant to them and the role it played in their individual experiences in the transfer process. As the primary investigator, I became interested in seeking further information about how they each approached working with the website. After Katrina mentioned how instrumental Assist.org was in her transfer experience, I asked her to explain what the website meant to her. She shared:

Assist is the online database that allows you to check the UC's and I believe, the Cal State's have their requirements for majors for transferring. You're able to put the community college that you're coming from. It tells you the classes that you need to take for whichever quarter or semester because I know different schools accept on a different basis, which courses you have to take at what time in order to meet the requirements for the transfer process for that institution.

Through this virtual academic advisement, undocumented students were able to research on their own the requirements necessary to transfer. With diminished community college resources and the hesitation of AB540 students to ask in person, Assist.org became a safe space for students to research and learn the transfer process at their own pace and in their own time. Juan supported this notion when asked about course selection as well. Juan came from Mexico when he was seven and is now 23. He lives with family and is pursuing a degree in Philosophy. He was informed about Assist.org after having an advisement session at his community college. He did not find his in-person counseling very effective and took his advisor's recommendation to peruse the website on his own. Once familiar with the site, he knew what courses he needed to fulfill to complete the IGETCI (Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum) program. The IGETCI

program is a series of courses taken at California community colleges that satisfies the breadth, depth and lower division courses required to transfer to a California State University or a University of California campus. On using Assist.org, Juan said, “If you didn’t have great counselors, you went to technology.”

After meeting with a community college counselor for academic advisement, Maria also had a difficult time getting advice for transferring to a 4-year university. Once they met, she immediately identified herself as an undocumented student and the counselor did not have any knowledge on how to advise undocumented students. After the advisor began “Googling” questions she had on her computer, she decided to leave and pursue transferring on her own. This is when Maria became acquainted with Assist.org. She shared:

That (Assist.org) was super helpful to me because once I made the changes to business or economics, it gave me an outline of what courses I needed. Since I was determine to graduate and transfer in 2015, I knew that I only had three quarters. So basically I was able to plan out my classes. I was able to eliminate some schools that required me to take more pre-requisite courses. So assist.org was really beneficial.

Maria further shared that she benefitted from a similar system to Assist.org while she was attending community college in process of receiving her AA (Associates Degree). The website is unique to this particular community college and cannot be named. However, the program allows a student to enter an AA degree they would like to pursue and it audits your courses taken and informs you about what outstanding requirements you need to take. Since Maria already had experience with this program within the community college structure, it allowed her to navigate Assist.org with ease.

Additional respondents spoke to technology in general rather than a specific site such as Assist.org. Similarly to Juan and Maria, Nora had difficulties meeting with an academic counselor in person to discuss the transfer process. She discussed the importance of technology in context of weak academic services on campus. She shared:

It (technology) was huge role because I was able to search online first of all to see the requirements and guides on how to transfer successfully, especially being undocumented. I felt like my community college or I just wasn't as comfortable asking for help. So when I would go in it was kind of embarrassing asking for help or especially because we had this system where you had to type in your social security number for anything so if you had an appointment with financial aid or counselor, every time you had to go they would ask for your social security number and I didn't have one. So I would tell them, well I don't have one. Sometimes they would ask, why don't you have one? That's why I was always afraid to go in and just ask for help.

Nora went into great detail explaining why technology was so important in the transfer process, especially being an undocumented student. Many of the participants mentioned not only the convenience of technology but the anonymity of it as well. It enabled them to navigate through the transfer process without having to explain their undocumented status to members of the academic community.

There was also a general consensus among the participants regarding how essential technology was in terms of access. Some described access to laptops and the Internet as something many people take for granted as it was difficult for them to obtain. Janice discussed the role of technology for her during the transfer process and how she had to make extra money to buy a new laptop. She describes herself as a very organized person and that access to technology not only assisted in keeping track of assignments, but also allowed her to communicate. She specifically mentions how iPhone's feature FaceTime enables her to keep in visual contact with her family when she needs to talk

with them and is going through a difficult time. Participant 5 described technology as “How I get informed of events, and things just going on campus, and emails.” Lilly summed up the role of technology in the transfer process by focusing on how it allowed her to re-address situations in which she forgot to ask specific questions about the process. She would sometimes go to the library and use the Internet to email counselors so she did not have to return back to her community college. Thus, technology was used for both academic and personal reasons.

The theme of technology also emerged in regards to the role of the receiving institution. Valerie and Marcia both discussed different aspects of technology in regards to their current institution. Valerie went into great detail and shared:

I would say that (my current institution) really has a strong community online. I know they have the transfer page and everyone is really involved online. I just remember looking and thinking like, oh my God, these people are really involved and it just seems like a strong virtual community. In that sense, I felt like I was already close to this community even though I was geographically not so close. I live an hour and a half away, but in a sense, it's not easy to come so often. Through technology and Facebook and all these websites that the school has, I was able to get connected with the things that are already happening.

This statement demonstrates how instrumental technology was at the receiving institution in the decision for participants to attend.

### **Addressing the First Research Question**

The first research question is, what experiences do undocumented Latino students undergo when transferring from a California community college to a California four-year research I institution? The participants described a number of experiences, both individual and shared. Policy considerations and the specific mention of AB540 and DACA appeared to be frequent during their transfer experiences responses. A certain

level of pattern coding was also used as some of the responses mentioned similar experiences navigating the community college systems. The theme *State Legislative and Federal Directives: AB540 and DACA* best encompasses the students' day-to-day experience. Previous scholarship discussed in Chapter 2 demonstrated that one of the biggest fears for the undocumented was deportation, not only for themselves but also for their parents. Through state initiatives like AB540 and Federal executive orders such as DACA, some participants reported feeling empowered during their experiences and relief in fear of deportation. Others however, spoke in detail regarding how even with the term AB540, they were still apprehensive about approaching community college personnel because some college counselors were not fluent in legislative terms for undocumented students. This was one of the defining features that shaped their experiences during the transfer process

### **Addressing the Second Research Question**

The second research question is how undocumented Latino students were supported during the transfer process? Themes emerged from data collection demonstrated undocumented Latinx students were supported through institutional program involvement. Much of this research question was answered in the theme *Community College & University Institutional Support* and *The Role of Technology in the Transfer Process*. Myriad participants named specific programs and clubs in their respective community colleges that assisted them in the transfer process. As mentioned earlier under the theme regarding *Community College & University Institutional Support*, groups such as PUENTE, EOPS, RISE and IDEAS were central in supporting these

students. These programs allowed students to exchange ideas, discuss concerns and locate academic and financial information that pertained to their undocumented status.

The role of technology in the transfer process also provided insight into how these students were supported in the transfer process. Enrollment in AB540 and DACA defined many of the experiences undocumented Latinx students undergo during the transfer process in the first research question, but it also informed the second research question in regards to technology. Descriptive coding was used to analyze this theme as the role of technology emerged in multiple sections of the 4-D model and many participants did not mention the word technology literally. Technology was used as a tool in accessibility, convenience and assisted in diminishing feelings of embarrassment and promoted a sense of anonymity.

### **Addressing the Third Research Question**

The third research question sought to understand the individual(s) supported undocumented Latino students during the transfer process? This research question was supported by two themes. The first them that was integral in answering this question was *Community College & University Institutional Support* and *External Support: Community & Family*. Specific support mechanisms that emerged under the institutional support theme addressed the role of both groups and individuals in assisting undocumented Latinx students during the transfer process. For one participant, it was community college personnel in the career center who knew about her undocumented status and supported her aspirations to transfer. For another participant, it was one of her community college professors who not only inspired her to transfer through frequent “check-ins,” but also encouraged her to apply to her current institution. In addition to receiving institutional

support from campus groups, community college personnel and faculty members, the community and family play a vital role during the transfer process. Almost every respondent indicated that his or her parents and siblings greatly influenced their desire to transfer and pushed them to excel during times of doubt and uncertainty. It is important to also note that even though many of the participant's parents did not have formal education and most never attended high school, they still valued the role of higher education and were emotionally supportive.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided invaluable insight into the experiences undocumented Latino students encountered when transferring from a California community college to a 4-year research public institution. Their experiences were gathered through a five-month period of data collection that was impacted by the 2016 United States Presidential election. As the primary investigator for this study, I was able to collect detailed information regarding policy considerations, institutional support, family support and technology. I learned that pathways to success in this particular section of the higher education pipeline were influenced heavily by both state and national politics. Specifically, executive orders such as DACA allowed students to receive work permits and alleviate immediate concerns about the possibility of deportation. The theme of community and family support was integral for these students and if their parents are deported it could greatly impact their ability to successfully transfer to a 4-year research institution. The political climate greatly influenced if and how these students could navigate an already complex transfer process.

All of the participants were reflective on their experiences and felt comfortable discussing some of their most intimate feelings and moments during the transfer process with me. Whether they came from community colleges from Northern California, Central California to Southern California, they shared diverse personal experiences during their transfer navigational process. Even with their undocumented status, they let me into their lives and provided deep insight into their educational experiences.

## Chapter Five: Discussions

### Summary

In this final chapter, findings are discussed within the broader context of the literature review. Implications of the study, limitations and future considerations are also addressed.

### Experiences when Transferring

The first research question was, what experiences do undocumented Latino students undergo when transferring from a California community college to a California four-year research I institution? The theme that appeared to shape their experiences as undocumented students during the transfer process was 1) state legislative and federal directives: AB540 and DACA.

**State Legislative and Federal Directives: AB540 and DACA.** State legislative and federal directives appeared to be a common denominator in the experiences of undocumented Latino students (Contreras, 2009; Abrego, 2008; Dozier, 1993; Munoz, 2008; Flores, 2010; Sanders, 2010; Ibarra, 2012; Dougherty, Nienhusser & Vega, 2010; Reich & Mendoza, 2008; Morales, Herrera & Murry, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Solorzano et al. 2005; Diaz-Strong et al. 2011). Almost every participant reflected on their experiences of being undocumented and using the terms AB540 and DACA to assist them in navigating the transfer process. The findings indicated that most respondents took advantage of this legislative language in dealing with community college and university personnel. It enabled them to inform members of the academic community of the particular help they are seeking. Some participants answered they were familiar with the

language while others did not. Regardless, their answers indicated that being able to use terms such as AB540 and DACA was instrumental in their experiences at community college. Many of the respondent's interactions with clubs and personnel also played a role in their experiences but policy considerations appeared to be influential in every aspect of the transfer process.

### **How Undocumented Students were supported during the Transfer Process**

The second research question was how were undocumented Latinx students supported during the transfer process? Themes that emerged in addressing this research questions were 1) community college and university institutional support and 2) the role of technology in the transfer process.

**Community College & University Institutional Support.** Participants indicated the primary role of community college personnel, affiliated clubs and university outreach in supporting their transfer experience. Respondents specifically spoke of community college career counselors, professors and clubs that specifically supported undocumented Latino students during the transfer process. Participation in clubs such as PUENTE, IDEAS and EOPS were an additional form of support for transfer. Participants went into depth when discussing this type of institutional support functioning to help them choose courses, meet other Latinx students (undocumented or otherwise), and access workshops on financial assistance. Previous research discussed in Chapter 2 by Gonzales (2010), asserts that a student's ability to succeed or fail directly relates to their relationships with school officials and their own peers. Calabrese et al. (2010) came to similar conclusions when investigating how to improve communication and collaboration in a community of stakeholders. Responses from this study's participants demonstrate the positive impact

institutional support from groups and academic community members had on their ability to successfully transfer.

**The Role of Technology in the Transfer Process.** Participants also responded that technology played a major role in how they were supported during the transfer process. The role of technology in the existing literature was not discussed in the literature review but emerged as a support mechanism that played a vital role throughout the transfer process. Respondents indicated that third party websites such as Assist.org assisted them in choosing course selection that would be transferrable to a variety of universities and for diverse majors. They also mentioned how websites and emails and information sent to them from the office of USP at the receiving institution also played a role in their decision to attend.

### **Who Supported Undocumented Students during the Transfer Process**

The third research question is, who supported undocumented Latinx students during the transfer process?

**External Support: Community & Family.** Participants responded that community and family support played an integral role in their respective transfer process. Even though immediate family members did not have college level experiences themselves, their level of support was both emotional and psychological. Specifically, some participants mentioned how their parents wanted a better life for their children. As one participant discussed, her mother did not want her to end up washing dishes for a living. Perez et al. (2009) described personal protective factors and environmental protective factors in relation to resiliency.

**Community College & University Institutional Support.** Participants also indicated how central the role of institutional support was at both the community college and university level. Institutional related groups such as EOPS, IDEAS and PUENTE for example, assisted students in navigating the complex transfer process. As mentioned previously in addressing the second research question, Gonzales (2010) emphasized how a student's ability to success or fail was directly correlated in their relationship with the institution. Respondents spoke in detail regarding the support received by both faculty and staff. Without this type of support, some of the participants may have found it more difficult to navigate the transfer process. Findings also indicated that the receiving institution played a role during the pre-transfer process as well. Once the student was admitted, they were made aware of the variety of recourses and support mechanisms available to them as undocumented transfer students at that campus.

### **Implications**

Based on the responses collected, several implications regarding undocumented Latino students emerged. These implications are directly related their experiences navigating the complex transfer process from a California community college to a 4-year public research institution, how they are supported during the transfer process and who supports them during the transfer process. This study could illuminate the experiences these students go through and assist those who wish to transfer or are currently in the transfer process.

### **Community Colleges and Higher Education**

Many of the participants discussed having a difficult time navigating the transfer process and future undocumented students looking to transfer could benefit from the findings in this study. Although the study was limited to undocumented students who are Latinx in origin, it could also benefit undocumented students in general and organizations and institutions who enroll or work with undocumented students of any origin. As a form of action research, the theoretical lens of Appreciative Inquiry could assist organizations in improving the services they provide for undocumented students. Previous research indicates that the majority of undocumented students in California go directly to community college from high school. This is a pathway in higher education that is prevalent throughout the 113 community colleges in California. Out of 113, 96 are classified as HSI's (Hispanic Serving Institutions). These community colleges have lower competition and transfer rates, thus highlighting the significance of the 15 undocumented students interviewed for this study. Student responses can assist in informing faculty and staff at both the community college and university level in a greater understanding of their roles with the undocumented.

### **DACA and Public Policy**

This study also has implications for public policy. Specifically, the current state of the DACA program, the role of institutional leaders in higher education, comprehensive immigration reform and the prospect of granting existing immigrants citizenship. DACA is currently set to expire and the current presidential administration has rescinded continuing the DACA program as of September 2017. Participants indicated that DACA

enabled them in a variety of ways when navigating through the transfer process. Most importantly, DACA diminished the fear of deportation and allowed work authorization. As more undocumented students are persisting into higher education, the urgency for comprehensive immigration reform is vital. Many of these students will find themselves with bachelor degrees from universities and colleges but will still not have citizenship and thus will face a difficult struggle applying that degree in a work setting. A number of states have taken action to improve the status of undocumented groups of people but Federal legislation is paramount in addressing this systematic issue.

### **Undocumented Leadership and Agency**

One of the biggest takeaways was the relationship between undocumented Latino students and AB540 and DACA. Some respondents indicated that this legal vocabulary allowed them to navigate the transfer process for a variety of reasons. Mostly, students were able to explain their legal, financial and academic situation with either (or both) AB540 or DACA. Associating with these terms provided avenues of support self-actualization. Gonzales (2010), Solorzano et al. (2005) and Contreras (2009), discuss this theme in the context of persistence in their respective studies as well.

### **Implications for Appreciative Inquiry and the 4-D Model**

It is important to note that this study used Appreciative Inquiry and the 4-D model as a theoretical lens in investigating the experiences of undocumented student experiences during the transfer process. The purpose was not to expand the theory, but rather explore its compatibility with this research topic. Appreciative Inquiry has been employed by a variety of scholars in diverse studies and this was the first time it has been

used with undocumented students navigating the transfer process from a California community college to a four-year public research institution. I believe it was an effective tool in collecting data from participants that will add to the existing literature on undocumented students in the K-20 education pipeline.

### **Future Considerations**

Further scholarship investigating the experiences of undocumented students in the transfer process is necessary. More broadly, research in general regarding these students' experiences throughout the K-20 pipeline is required now more than ever. The current political climate has created a sense of urgency in telling the powerful and transformational stories of this disenfranchised group of people. Future scholarship using the 4-D model as a theoretical lens and revising the questions in each section to better reflect the various themes could further enrich this body of literature. In retrospect, some of my questions could have been more refined and customizable to each section of the model. Moreover, further scholarship in general regarding the experiences of undocumented students in higher education is needed as this population is a sizeable minority and will continue to impact the socio-economic and political landscape.

### **Limitations**

Every qualitative study is going to have limitations. This study addressed a specific section of the K-20 pipeline and only included participants who were Latinx in origin, and transferred from a California community college. The respondents did not have an equal representation of each gender. This study was conducted at a public research institution and experiences may be different if implemented at a private research

university. The election of President Donald Trump diminished the number of participants I was able to recruit and added an element of anxiety that already exists among these students as discussed in the literature review. National, state, and local politics play a major role in the status of the undocumented population and should be considered when preparing future studies. Selectivity was also limited as it was difficult to recruit this particular population of students. I did not have a large pool of students who responded to my recruitment emails, especially when it came to gender.

### **Generalization**

This study took place on-site at a 4-year public research institution. The study could not be generalized if it is replicated. The experiences of the students who participated may be very different with undocumented Latinx transfer students in another state or at a different kind of institution. My recruitment email, flyer and interview protocol was unique to this study. Different approaches in data collection could provide different results from the participants.

The study used the 4-D analytical lens of Appreciative Inquiry. Each section and questions of the 4-D model were specifically designed to elicit detailed responses from the participants. There were both similarities and differences between each student's responses during various sections of the 4-D model interview protocol and generalizing their experiences to reflect those of all undocumented Latinx students during the transfer process is not appropriate.

## **Multiple Leakages in the Education Pipeline**

It is important to note that there are multiple leakages in the K-20 educational pipeline for undocumented students and this study focused solely on the leakages in the transfer process from a community college to a university. At this stage in the educational pipeline it is likely that thousands of students have already been lost and further study could address ways to decrease leakages across the educational spectrum. Further research is recommended not only in the transfer process, but also in all aspects of the K-20 pipeline.

## **Conclusion**

According to trends indicated in the most recent U.S. Census report, the Latinx population will continue to grow and is classified as the largest disenfranchised groups of people in the United States. This has and will continue to change the socio-economic and political landscapes resulting in new political and economic imperatives. As more undocumented children are growing up and are college bound, the visibility of these students has increased and solutions to many of the institutional barriers they encounter are becoming paramount. Research indicates that most Latinx (undocumented or otherwise) go directly to community college from high school. Further research is necessary to understand how undocumented Latinx students navigate the complex process of transferring from a community college to a 4-year research institution.

This study specifically looked into the just one aspect of the K-20 pipeline through the analytical lens of Appreciative Inquiry. The findings indicated in the study will add to the existing knowledge of undocumented students persisting into higher

education. It also demonstrates that the analytical lens of Appreciative Inquiry can be applied in expanding our knowledge of undocumented students in this specific aspect of the K-20 pipeline. This study may inform prospective students, current students, parents, higher education professionals, community leaders and a variety of stakeholders who wish to understand and improve the educational experiences of undocumented Latinx students. As rapidly changing demography continues to shape the needs and concerns of this underrepresented group of people, further scholarship is vital in providing pathways for success. It is one of the major social justice issues of our time that will have a lasting impact on generations to come.

Furthermore, acknowledging the historical and current political climate in the U.S. provides context for this study in understanding the barriers the undocumented encounter. From the *Leticia A. Order* (1985), AB-540 and DACA, both legislative and presidential executive orders provide insights into the urgency between the undocumented and higher education. Community colleges will continue to be the pathway into higher education for the undocumented and the renewal of the southern border wall policy construct will impact undocumented student agency and their ability to thrive. California community colleges specifically will be the front lines in this current climate and high levels of uncertainty will directly impact undocumented students persisting into higher education.

## **Appendix A: Recruitment Email to Participants**

Greetings! My name is Morgan Ponder and I am currently enrolled in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). I am currently seeking participants for my qualitative research on undocumented students in higher education. My research primarily focuses on the experiences undocumented Latino students encounter when transferring from a California Community College to a public 4-year research I institution. Coupled with the enactment of AB 540 in California and the current state of affairs in American politics, California has reached a critical threshold in terms of undocumented students being accepted to four year research I institutions with either only in-state tuition with no federal aid or neither. I am interested in hearing from undocumented Latino students about their experiences in the aforementioned transfer process.

My goal is to recruit at least 20-25 students to interview for an hour each individually with a protocol of questioning. As a result, I am hoping to collect information from you that will tell your story and have an impact for other undocumented students pursuing similar paths in education. If you are interested in participating in this project, please feel free to contact me at [mponder@gmail.com](mailto:mponder@gmail.com). After you email me we can set up a time for the interview and will provide you with information regarding my research and consent form.

Many thanks in advance and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Morgan Ponder

**Appendix B: University of California, San Diego, Consent to Act as a Research  
Subject**

**Coming out of the Shadows: Undocumented Latino Students Persisting into Higher  
Education through Appreciative Inquiry**

My name is Morgan Ponder and I'm currently completing the final year in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). I'm conducting a study examining the experiences undocumented Latino students encounter when transferring from a California Community College to a 4-year public research I institution. You were selected to participate as a student who successfully transferred from a California Community College to four-year public research institution. There will be approximately 20-25 students participating in the study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the educational pipeline through a positivist lens in an effort to better understand the experiences of undocumented students during the transfer process.

If you agree to be in this study, the following will happen to you:

- Once the recruitment email is returned, the participant receives the consent form to read and sign. After the consent form is signed, participants have seven days from receipt of the consent form to schedule an interview.

- The interview will entail 45 minutes - hour long of questioning conducted by myself.
- The primary investigator will review the signed consent form at the time of the interview.
- The primary investigator will record the interview using an audio-recorder.
- Each recording will be transcribed and the transcript from the interview can be provided to the participant.

As stated above, each participant will only have to participate one for the one on one interview. No participants will be needed for data analysis or any follow-ups.

Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include the following:

#### Risks

- Recalling uncomfortable, sad memories or current struggles that are deemed too difficult to articulate or share.
- May experience deeply rooted unexpected and unresolved feelings
- The discovery of undocumented status is a major research risk
- Personal information may be subject to being breached
- Potential risk for boredom

Under California law, we must report information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any investigator has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report such information to the appropriate authorities.

We may need to report information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any investigator has or is given such information, he or she may report such information to the appropriate authorities.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

The alternatives to participation in this study is not to participate in this study.

There may or may not be any direct benefit to you from participating this study. The investigator, however, may learn more about undocumented Latino students transferring from a California Community College to a four-year public research institution and society may benefit from this knowledge.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in an interview or on a questionnaire at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. And the principle investigator is also allowed to remove the participant from the study without the participant's consent. Compensation will still be provided. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you will be required to notify the Principle Investigator and all identifiable information and recordings will be destroyed.

You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

The PI may remove you from the study without your consent if the PI feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study. You may also be withdrawn from the study if you do not follow the instructions given you by the study personnel.

In compensation for your time and travel, you will receive \$25.00 American Express gift card for participating in this research. Compensation can be given before, during or after the interview. Compensation will also be provided even if a participant is unable to finish the interview.

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study

Morgan Ponder has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Morgan Ponder at 818-681-9537.

You may call the Human Research Protections Program Office at 858-246-HRPP (858-246-4777) to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

You have received a copy of this consent document and have agreed to participate in this study.

## Appendix C: Flyer for the Study

### Undocumented Latino Participants Needed for Study!!

- Participants will be interviewed from 45 minutes to an hour regarding their experiences transferring from a California Community College to a Research I public institution.
- All participants will be anonymous and assigned identification numbers to ensure privacy.
- Participants will receive a \$25.00 American Express Gift Card

About the researcher: My name is Morgan Ponder and I am currently enrolled in the Joint Doctoral Program at UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos in Educational Leadership. I am investigating the educational pipeline that exist for undocumented Latino students during the transfer process. My contact information is below. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to participate in the study.

Email: [mpponder@gmail.com](mailto:mpponder@gmail.com)

Tel: 818-681-9537



UC San Diego

**Appendix D: University of California, San Diego, Department of Education Studies,**

**Interview Protocol for Students**

Demographic questions and interview protocol are below:

Demographic Information

1. Gender: M F Other
2. Race/Ethnicity
  - A. Latino
    1. Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
    2. South American
    3. Central American
    4. Cuba
  - B. Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Country of Origin: \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of time in US (years) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Place of employment (if any):
  - a. Occupation/Job title: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Number of Years: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Hours spent at work per week: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Type of Residence:
  - a. Own
  - b. Rent
  - c. Live with family
6. Primary Language Spoken in Home:
  - a. Spanish
  - b. English
  - j. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the highest Level of Education for your Father?
  - a. Grade School or less
  - b. Some High School
  - c. High School Diploma or Equivalent
  - d. Business or Trade School
  - e. Some College

- f. Associate or two-year degree
- g. Bachelor's or four-year degree
- h. Graduate or professional degree

8. What is the highest Level of Education of your Mother?

- a. Grade School or less
- b. Some High School
- c. High School Diploma or Equivalent
- d. Business or Trade School
- e. Some College
- f. Associate or two-year degree
- g. Bachelor's or four-year degree
- h. Graduate or professional degree

9. What is your major in college?

10. \_\_\_\_\_  
What are you studying to become after college?

11. \_\_\_\_\_  
What is the highest level of education you would like to pursue?

- a. Bachelor's or four-year degree
- b. Graduate or professional degree

### **Interview Questions**

#### **DISCOVERY (The best of what is)**

- 12. Describe the best experiences about attending a California Community College.
- 13. Can you tell me about a time when you felt academically accomplished?
- 14. Who had the biggest impact on your decision at the community college to attend your current institution?  
Follow up: How did they impact you?
- 15. Were there other (undocumented or otherwise) Latino students at your community college that helped you navigate through the community college system?

#### **DREAM (Imagine what could be)**

- 16. Imagine that you are at your institutions graduation ceremony a few years from now. What do you hope your fondest memories of this place will be?
- 17. How will you look back on your time at the community college you transferred from?
- 18. What institutional support could better improve the transfer process you went through?

19. Do you think that community and family support is integral in strengthening the transfer process for undocumented students to a 4-year public institution?

**DESIGN (Determine what should be)**

20. How and when did you decide to transfer to a university?  
-Follow up: Were there any resources available at your community college campus to assist in the transfer?
21. What academic experiences and learning activities did you benefit from?
22. What learning behaviors did you need to ensure academic success and transfer to a Research I public 4-year institution?
23. What challenges did you have to overcome in terms of course selection?
24. What role did technology play in choosing the transfer program and university to attend?

**DESTINY (Create what will be)**

25. How could the transfer process be improved in the future?
26. What could the community college do better to help undocumented students seeking to transfer?
27. What could the university do to better welcome undocumented Latino transfer students to campus?
28. How do you envision utilizing the skills you acquired in transferring in future endeavors?
29. What advice do you have for future undocumented Latino students at the community college who wish to transfer to a public 4-year institution?



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