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by

Mosadi Porter

May 2013

THE EFFECT OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS ON THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCES OF  
UNDOCUMENTED LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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### Abstract

Much research has been undertaken to understand the relative influences of a variety of conditions and contexts on the success of college students in general.

Relatively less work has been done, however, to understand such influences for Latino students and even fewer empirical studies exist concentrating on the undocumented college student experience. What research does exist has largely centered on more traditionally acknowledged factors, but as Wentzel (2005) identifies, it is also "feasible that social competence with peers leads to academic accomplishments, either because interactions with peers facilitate intellectual development or because social or cultural norms communicated by peers define the nature of task competence" (pp. 285-286). As such, one understudied but necessary source of influence and support that could prove essential to the undocumented student's success and retention then is relationships with like-minded college peers (Dennis, Phinney, & Chauteco, 2005; Di, 2012).

This dissertation examined the type of relationships and the role of peer relationships in the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students. This qualitative case study of 4 undocumented students at a Research I University in the Southwest utilized data collected from semi-structured interviews to seek to understand how and in what ways peers contributed to their college experiences.

The literature explained that there are influences on students' college experiences, including peer relationships, but the effect on undocumented students is less well known. Coding analysis was used to identify themes. The themes were disappointment, support

and connection, disconnection, Astin's I-E-O model, home environment, family influence and generation in the United States, perceived status and privilege, ethnic identity, in-state tuition policies and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and peer relationships. Within peer relationships the identified themes were providing information, emotional support, access granting and helping relationships. Identification of those themes gave the basis for the hypothesis that positive peer relationships could be beneficial to undocumented Latino college students. Peer relationships had a connection that solidified the importance of this aspect of college student experiences to each theme.

Excluding the work of Perez and Cortes (2011), there is little to no literature that directly connects peer relationships, undocumented college students, and college experiences. Due to this oversight, this study sought to begin the discussion that may help to fill that gap. The findings of this study may help college administration to understand an aspect of undocumented Latino college student success that goes beyond the classroom. Instituting programs that intentionally facilitate more peer interaction may provide the necessary environment for positive peer relationships to be developed.

## Table of Contents

| Chapter  | Page |
|--|------|
| I. Introduction .....  | 1    |
| Significance of Study .....  | 4    |
| Definitions of Terms .....   | 5    |
| II. Review of Literature.....  | 8    |
| Related Theories of Involvement, Identity and Educational Experiences .....  | 8    |
| Astin's I-E-O Model and Theory of Involvement .....  | 9    |
| Torres's Situating Identity Theory.....  | 10   |
| Environment.....   | 10   |
| Family influence and generation in the United States. ....   | 11   |
| Self-perception of status in society.....  | 12   |
| Ethnic Identity and Educational Experiences. ....  | 13   |
| Externalizing Conditions for Undocumented Students.....  | 15   |
| The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act<br>(IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity<br>Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)..... | 16   |
| National DREAM Act.....  | 18   |
| Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).....   | 19   |
| In-State Tuition Policies. ....  | 19   |
| Texas House Bill 1403 and Senate Bill 1528. ....   | 20   |
| Institutional Contributions. ....  | 21   |
| Peer Relationships.....  | 22   |
| Definition of peer relationships. ....   | 23   |
| Relationships and social support.....  | 25   |
| Forms of social support.....   | 25   |
| Functions of social support. ....  | 28   |
| Influence of social support on social participation. ....  | 28   |
| Conclusion .....   | 30   |
| III. Introduction and Overview .....   | 32   |
| Methodology .....  | 33   |
| Method .....   | 34   |
| Background. ....   | 34   |
| Participants.....  | 35   |
| Procedures.....  | 36   |
| Instrumentation. ....  | 37   |
| Analysis and Interpretation. ....  | 38   |
| IV. Results.....   | 41   |
| Participants.....  | 41   |
| Sara. ....   | 41   |
| Francisco.....   | 47   |
| Diego.....   | 53   |
| Kim. ....  | 60   |
| Connecting Themes .....  | 65   |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Disappointment.....  | 65  |
| Support and connection.....  | 65  |
| Disconnection.....   | 66  |
| Astin’s I-E-O model.....   | 66  |
| Home environment.....  | 71  |
| Family influence and generation in the United States.....                              | 72  |
| Perceived status and privilege.....  | 73  |
| Ethnic identity.....   | 74  |
| In-State Tuition (IST) Policies and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)..... | 76  |
| Peer relationships.....  | 77  |
| Providing information.....   | 77  |
| Emotional support.....   | 78  |
| Access granting.....   | 79  |
| Helping relationships.....   | 79  |
| V. Discussion.....   | 81  |
| Discussion of findings.....  | 82  |
| Types of peer relationships.....   | 83  |
| Peer relationship contribution to college experiences.....                             | 87  |
| Limitations.....   | 90  |
| Implications for practice.....   | 91  |
| Implications for future research.....  | 93  |
| Conclusion.....  | 94  |
| References.....  | 95  |
| Appendix A Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Eligibility Criteria.....            | 106 |
| Appendix B Survey.....   | 109 |
| Appendix C Interview Questions.....  | 113 |
| Appendix D Identification of Potential Subjects.....                                   | 116 |
| Appendix E Consent.....  | 118 |



## List of Tables

| Table   | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Interactions of Undocumented Latino College Students with Teachers and Administrators, Family and Peers.....   | 71   |
| 2. Background of Undocumented Latino College Students.....  | 72   |
| 3. External Factors and Involvement that Affects College Experiences of Undocumented Latino College Students..... | 80   |

## List of Figures

| Figure  | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Peer Relationships and Positive College Experiences..... | 83   |

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Research helps us to settle the argument in American society that college is indeed worth it. “A well-educated, technically competent and civically informed and engaged citizenry is the foundation of a healthy society and economy. Such citizenry begets innovation, productivity, wealth and a social fabric to support it all” (Gehler, 2013, p. 1). In essence, without civically engaged, skilled and educated citizens, our society and economy will be weak. College has become the tie that pulls these three characteristics together.

Since 1967, the families remaining in the middle class (\$28,000 to \$81,000 per annum) or those passing it to move into the top 30 percent of family incomes are those that are spearheaded by a wage-earner who has a bachelor’s degree or higher (Hoffman et al, 2007). Heads of household who have an education level of high school or less and their families are moving to the bottom 20 percent of the middle class and are making below \$28,000 per year.

The American job market has shifted to a standard of college first. Without that, mobility is nearly unattainable. More than two-thirds of the participants in the American job market go on to postsecondary education training or education. Persistence in the middle-class (and definitely advancement to the upper-class) is now being determined by college attendance. College has also become the access point to the upper three income deciles and to jobs that offer benefits provided by the employer (Hoffman et al., 2007). During a recession, the jobless rate for college graduates is half that of high school graduates. A college degree used to have a wage advantage of 36 percent over a high

school diploma. That percentage has increased to 76 percent since the 1970s. This wage advantage equates to about one million dollars over a work life (Hoffman et al., 2007).

Those statistics make a college degree even more important in times of recession (Murray, 2011). With this startling statistic being the reality of our nation, it is imperative that our citizenry is college educated.

According to Fry (2011), in 1972, 13% of college students were young [Latinos]. That percentage rose to 27% in 2009 and 32% in 2010. Even though the rate is a record, this population still lags behind Asian (62%), white (43%), and black (38%) students. Completion rates of Bachelor's degrees show an even greater discrepancy. In 2010, only 13% of [Latino] 25- to 29-year-olds had completed at least a bachelor's degree, a small percentage when compared to other ethnic groups. More than half (53%) of non-[Latino] Asian young adults have at least a bachelor's degree, and nearly 39% of white young adults completed a four year degree. Among non-[Latino] black 25- to 29-year-olds, 19% have at least a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2011).

Moreover, citizenship status appears to also have a relationship to educational attainment. The Urban Institute estimates that of all races and ethnicities, 49% of undocumented youth of all ethnicities do not complete high school compared to 11% of native born students and 21% of their legal immigrant counterparts (Passel, 2005b). And among those eligible, only 5% of undocumented high school graduates attend college (Lee, 2006).

While undocumented youth are represented in many racial and ethnic groups, Latinos "(a) are the most likely to be undocumented, (b) comprise almost 85% of the total estimated undocumented population, (c) have historically lower citizenship rates than

immigrants of Asian origin, and (d) have lower educational attainment rates than immigrants of Asian and African origin in the United States” (Flores, 2010b, p. 243). The growth of the Latino population in Texas will result in a state where, if something is not done, the lowest ranks of educational attainment will be densely filled with the largest part of the state’s population (Hoffman et al, 2007). More broadly, Gonzales (2007) argues the economic importance of undocumented students’ access to higher education. Giving undocumented students, most of whom are [Latino], the opportunity to pursue a higher education and get on the career ladder would boost the economic potential of the [Latino] population as a whole, and thus the U.S. economy as well. Conversely, “denying this opportunity to undocumented students would send precisely the wrong message to [Latinos] about the value of a college education...at a time when raising the educational attainment of the [Latino] population is increasingly important to the nation’s economic health” (Gonzales, 2007, p.4-5).

Much research has been undertaken to understand the relative influences of a variety of conditions and contexts on the success of college students in general. Relatively less work has been done to understand such influences for Latino students and even fewer empirical studies exist concentrating on the undocumented college student experience. Existing research has largely centered on more traditionally acknowledged factors such as financial aid, cultural identity, and campus organization involvement. But as Wentzel (2005) identifies, it is also “feasible that social competence with peers leads to academic accomplishments, either because interactions with peers facilitate intellectual development or because social or cultural norms communicated by peers define the nature of task competence” (pp. 285-286). In fact, a necessary source of support that

could prove essential to their success and retention is relationships with like-minded college peers (Dennis, Phinney, & Chauteco, 2005; Di, 2012).

As such, investigation of undocumented Latino students and their experiences with peers in the U.S. system of higher education is critical. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions in order to have a more complete understanding of these students:

- What are the types of peer relationships undocumented Latino college students identify in their college experiences?
- How do peer relationships affect the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students at a Tier One research institution in the Southwest?

### **Significance of Study**

An educated individual typically contributes to the financial stability, global competitiveness, and overall function of society (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). The [Latino] population, more specifically the undocumented [Latino] population, is growing exponentially and it is important to understand this population as it relates to education (Gonzales, 2011). The wrong message about the value of a college education is being sent to [Latinos] by denying them the opportunity to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities (Gonzales, 2007). It is increasingly important to the nation's economic health to raise the educational attainment of the growing [Latino] population (Gonzales, 2007), particularly the undocumented segment of that population.

This study begins with a review of the relevant literature which investigates peer relationships – what they are and what role they play in the success of this group of

students in a postsecondary setting. It then presents a description of the proposed participants and the methodological and analytical approaches. The methodology that further dissects and intersects this information will be case study. The presentation of the results and an analysis of those results will conclude this study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

These definitions are presented in alphabetical order.

*Ethnic identity* refers to “seeing oneself as primarily from one's country of origin, from the United States (U.S.), or from both.” The social and personal development of immigrant children and adolescents is strongly related to their ethnic identity (Domanico, 1994, p. 197).

*In-state resident tuition* is the rate that a student who is a resident of a state is charged per credit hour for college classes. Some states grant undocumented students the ability to pay in-state resident tuition because of their graduation from a high school in that state and other residency requirements as defined by the state (Flores, 2010; McClure, 2011).

*Latino* is often used interchangeably with the term “Hispanic.” “Hispanic” was initiated by government officials in 1970 who were seeking to find a category for all who had parents from, or who had themselves come from, Spanish-speaking countries. This term is not typically used in those countries. The term “Latino” is a Spanish-language term that gained popularity since the designation of the term “Hispanic” (Gamboa & Vasquez, 2006, p. 321). The Pew Hispanic Center (2005) makes it clear that the Hispanic population is not a racial group and it does not have one language or culture. The connecting trait is their roots in Latin America. The Office of Management and

Budget (OMB) defines Hispanic or Latino as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” The new standard of using “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino” was used during the 2000 census and other federal programs had to adopt the standards no later than January 1, 2003 (Shrestha & Heisler, 2011). Throughout this study, “Latino” will be used for consistency. In areas where the research or participants used the term Hispanic, it is replaced with “Latino” in brackets.

The definition of *resident* or *residency* for college tuition billing purposes varies by state and institution. In this study, resident or residency is being used in the context of whether the student holds United States citizenship or permanent residency.

*Social networks* refer not only to the person(s) seen as being important in a social situation, but also to the interaction patterns and friendships with others (Snell & Janney, 2000). *Social support behaviors* are those social or emotional behaviors in which a person engages to aid another person. Friends, members of a social network or acquaintances can experience and give social support. Social support is not just within friendships. It can also be in a one-way teaching or helping relationship (Snell & Janney, 2000).

A *Tier 1 public institution* is an institution that has been given the designation of Research University/Very High (RU/VH). Institutions that grant doctorates were placed into one of three categories dependent on their level of research activity. The difference is not based on quality or importance but solely on level of research activity (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). An *undocumented immigrant* is a foreign national who: (1) entered the United States without inspection (or visa) or with fraudulent documents; or (2)



entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status (i.e. overstayed his/her visa) and remained in the United States without authorization, (3) is in the process of acquiring legal status and is authorized to stay in the United States but does not yet have permanent residency (National Immigration Law Center, 2010).

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

This review of literature will help to characterize the population of students that are of focus in the study by first assessing theories that speak to student identity and cultural development. The review then describes the findings of the literature focused specifically on one of the “non-academic” supports, peer relationships, and concludes with an investigation of external conditions such as legislation.

#### **Related Theories of Involvement, Identity and Educational Experiences**

While beyond the scope of this review in detail, in summary, a review of the literature of the last three decades identifies a substantial number of contributors to students’ college experiences leading toward likelihood of persistence, including social experiences while in college, demographic characteristics, family background, ethnic identity, prior academic achievement, and other conditions external to the students such as campus contributions (Braxton et al., 1997; Cabrera et al., 1993; Kuh et al., 2008; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1997). From this work, scholars understand that underrepresented or first generation college students who may not have had much exposure to college environments are most likely to persist with the support of family, peers, and a supportive campus environment.

In seeking to more closely understand the contributions of peers toward the college experiences of undocumented Latino students, one important area within these more broadly identified contributions is the role of culture. As such, the review of literature now turns to a discussion of related theories.

**Astin's I-E-O Model and Theory of Involvement .** In Astin's I-E-O Model, there are three sets of elements that define college outcomes. *Inputs* is the first set. This includes "the demographic characteristics, family backgrounds, and academic and social experiences that students bring to college" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 53). Peer relationships play into those academic and social experiences by connecting the students in a common environment. The next set of elements is *environment* that encompasses all things that a student encounters while in college such as the places, beliefs and values, and people. *Outcomes* are the third set that evaluates after-college beliefs, values, skills, and characteristics. This conceptual approach attempts to explain how student growth is affected by environmental influences while primarily focusing on factors that administrators and faculty have some control over (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As discussed in Torres' theory, all three of these elements affect students, but the students may be affected differently based on their acculturation and time in the U.S. Development or change is not merely the consequence of college's impact on a student but rather a function of the quality of student effort or involvement with the resources provided by the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Astin's I-E-O Model is central to understanding this study from the perspective of students in general. The Inputs set helps to contextualize the student experience based on their background and demographic characteristics. Ethnic identity, culture and resident status are the pieces of the students' background that will direct this study. The next set, Environment, directly affects the third set which is Outcomes. An examination of what the student encounters in college gives a well-rounded picture of these students. In the context of this study, the environment segment is focused on peer relationships and what

those relationships look like for those students. The quality of those peer relationships will ultimately have an effect on the college outcomes.

**Torres's Situating Identity Theory.** While Astin speaks about environment, the discussion is continued as an aspect of Torres' Situating Identity Theory. The environment where a student grew up, family influence and generation in the United States, and self-perception of status in society are the dimensions that Torres uses to investigate the development of a Latino student's identity. In each dimension that is presented, she represents the perspective of both the undocumented student and that of the documented Latino counterpart. Torres's theory (2003) is focused on the different starting points of the identity development process and how the idea of cultural orientation is affected by those differences. Peer relationships are affected by each of these conditions. The stage each peer has reached in a particular dimension will dictate how they interact with those around them. If they have had positive relationships with parents, siblings, and other housemates, then they ideally would have positive relationships with their peers. Each of the conditions that Torres focuses on is discussed further in the subsequent sections.

***Environment.*** The demographics of the environment where the student grew up have an impact on how the student identifies themselves and their cultural orientation. Students from a diverse neighborhood, high school, and other surroundings typically have a strong sense of ethnicity and enjoy the diversity around them. Those from a more Latino-majority environment do not view themselves as a minority until they enroll in a predominately white institution. Rather than assimilation, the result is stronger ethnic identification. The students who have a primarily Anglo orientation tend to use their

geographic make-up as their definition of themselves. They mostly associate with the majority in college and see diversity as more conflicting and confusing than those students who do not share an Anglo orientation.

Perez and Cortes (2011) also provide support to this part of Torres' theory from the perspective of using geographic make-up to define themselves. They state that despite negative stereotypes from society, living in poor communities often inspires students to continue their education. These students have described feeling fortunate to have opportunities to get ahead and vowed not to make poor decisions in their life that might cause them to miss opportunities available to them, like many of their peers or classmates.

*Family influence and generation in the United States.* In the discussion of this dimension, Torres (2003) explores the components associated with the student and parents' level of acculturation and how this dimension operates within the context of the college environment. Students have a deeper ethnic identity based on the depth of involvement on the part of the parents in cultural activities, such as speaking Spanish at home and attending Latino social functions. The desire to learn more about the culture is a focal point for the students who live in a household where there is one non-Latino parent and one Latino parent.

The second dimension of Torres's Theory of Situating Identity is the generational status of the participants and their parents. Students who are the first generation of their family to be born in the United States do not know what to expect at college and they struggle with this unknown aspect. Undocumented students are called the 1.5 generation because they fit somewhere between the first and second generation Gonzales (2007).

They are born abroad yet brought at an early age to live in the United States by their parents. They, the first and 1.5 generation students, are often called upon to assist their parents in the processes of acculturation and adaptation. According to Torres, first generation Americans have to balance the expectations of their parents and those of college. Two consequences emerge from the effort to balance this acculturation. First, students who neglect their social life in order to meet the expectations of their parents may end up feeling alienated from their peers. They do not share the expectations of their parents with their peers so it seems that they are being antisocial. This perception could cause conflict and stress. The second consequence is on the other side of the students' relationships. In this instance the students keep issues, feelings and occurrences from their parents. The lack of understanding on the part of the parent of what students who are acculturated or mainstream take for granted leaves the first generation student feeling alienated. They do not feel that they fit rightly within either culture's expectations, traditions, and knowledge.

The students who straddle two cultures as second and third generation in the U.S. appear at the other end of the dimension. The conflict with parents tends to be less and they have less dissonance with their parents' role in how they identify. These students typically have no accent when speaking English and are accustomed to the ways of the United States and are highly acculturated. Similar to the first-generation students, however, their issues of acculturation to the majority culture are a result of their parents' differing views of freedom compared to their American counterparts.

*Self-perception of status in society.* Self-perception of status in society is defined as the person's perception that there is some type of benefit or privilege to their status

when compared with others. While Torres (2003) was conducting her research there tended to be a negative perception of Latinos when self-perception of status in society was discussed. Those in Torres' study (2003) who lived in a majority-focused environment believed the stereotypes about others, but did not believe they were included or seen that way. Involuntary minorities begin to see formal schooling as irrelevant because of the atmosphere of mutual distrust, discrimination, and intolerance. Suarez-Orozco (1991) provides further support for Torres' theory by positing that beyond the feeling of irrelevancy of formal schooling, the traditional education system becomes a threat to the student's sense of ethnic belonging. Flores-Gonzalez (2002) demonstrates that it is not necessarily intelligence that determines success nor is it simply that they do not speak English. She shows that the academic success of Latino students is above all attributable to the environment in the schools they attend and the nature of the relationships they have with their teachers and other students. Torres's theory is central to this study because it has the ability to speak comprehensively to various components of the group being addressed. It is the guiding theory for the questions posed and the study of the participants.

**Ethnic Identity and Educational Experiences.** Phinney (1990) defines ethnic identity as the psychological relationship of members of racial and ethnic groups with their own group. Understanding how ethnic identity is defined and what it means is essential to understanding the undocumented Latino student population. Whether the students identify with their culture strongly or very little may dictate how the students interact with their peers. It may also dictate how they interpret those peer interactions. Roehling, et al. (2010) describes the stages of ethnic identity. The first stage of ethnic

identity is termed the “unexplored” stage. This stage shows that the messages that the students have received from the community and their family about their ethnic group is evidenced by an identity that has no real definition. The second stage is where the development of a more examined and mature identity begins. The exploration, or “moratorium” stage, is where the students begin to explore what it means to be members of their ethnic group. This stage is believed to be triggered by some type of event such as discrimination. It helps the students to change their view and interpret their identity and condition differently. The final stage of ethnic identity is termed the “achieved” stage. Here students understand what their group membership means and feel a belonging to that group.

Schwartz, et al. (2009) suggests that a strong sense of identity can help protect against problem behaviors, depression, and anxiety and it can promote a positive sense of well-being. Schwartz goes on to say that identity is one of the key developmental tasks as one makes the transition into adulthood from adolescence. This sense of identity can direct the path their life may take and the decision they make as they move into adulthood and beyond.

An undocumented student’s comfort level or sense of belonging at school may be impacted significantly by their background and campus (Perez & Cortez, 2011). Having a sense of belonging to a group and being similar to the other members of that group are on the basis of fitting in. That notion of fitting in is extended to institutional fit wherein there are others who share the role of being a good student in a particular institution at a particular moment in time (Seidman, 2005). The neighborhood and family that these



students grow from have a huge impact on their ability to adjust and flourish in their years of schooling.

The campus where the students attend school will also help or hinder them in their ability to feel as if they belong here. Many students' success is not built on their academic or mental ability, but on whether they feel that they are at a place that can feel like home away from home. The personal identity of a student from an immigrant family is especially important because the more solid a student is in their identity, the more protected they may be from stressors stemming from cultural identity change and acculturation (Schwartz et al., 2009). Domanico (1994) places particular importance on the topic of ethnic identity and generational status. It holds strong implications for working effectively with young people from minority groups. It is theorized that significant intrapersonal stress for these young people is initiated by the process of seeking and attaining acculturation. Resistance to or participation in forms of acculturation has differing effects on these students. They are alienated from their families and others in their culture when they acculturate to the majority environment. Resistance to this acculturation separates them from the majority group and its reward system (Domanico, 1994). Those with a mono-cultural identity tend to have a lower self-esteem and appear to be less confident and have greater levels of unhappiness and anxiety (Domanico, 1994). Due to their lack of familiarity with the U.S. education system, undocumented students are less likely to know the requirements necessary or the process of applying to college (Perez & Cortes, 2011).

### **Externalizing Conditions for Undocumented Students**

Although undergraduate retention is one of the most studied topics in higher education (Seidman, 2005), there is relatively little work on the undocumented student population and the formally legislated or created conditions that shape their college access and experiences. In particular, several pieces of legislation – the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), the National DREAM Act, Texas Senate Bill 1528, and other in-state tuition policies – have great importance. Each is discussed in turn.

**The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).** Immigration in general is the overarching debate when discussing legal issues about undocumented students and higher education (Frum, 2007). In 1996, Congress weighed in on the matter of undocumented immigrants, passing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), both of which are relevant to the issue of undocumented students' access to postsecondary education (Frum, 2007).

Section 505 of the IIRIRA is relevant to this study. It states:

An alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a State ... for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such a benefit (in no less an amount, duration, and scope) without regard to whether the citizen or national is such a resident (8 U.S.C. § 1623).

The Act further states:

A State may provide that an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States is eligible for any State or local public benefit for which such alien would otherwise be ineligible ... through the enactment of a State law after August 22, 1996, which affirmatively provides for such eligibility (8 U.S.C. § 1621).

For its part, the PRWORA declared that:

An alien who is not a qualified alien is not eligible for any Federal public benefit [including] any retirement, welfare, health, disability, public or assisted housing, postsecondary education, food assistance, unemployment benefit, or any other similar benefit for which payments or assistance are provided to an individual, household, or family eligibility unit by an agency of the United States or by appropriated funds of the United States (8 U.S.C. §1611).

Neither the PRWORA nor the IIRIRA explicitly prohibits public postsecondary institutions from admitting undocumented students. Institutions are required to track foreign student and exchange visitors that are enrolled due to portions of the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, and the PATRIOT Act of 2001. These legislations combine to create the current system by which schools are required to track foreign student and exchange visitors enrolled in their institutions (Coleman, 2004). This requirement creates a feeling of fear among some undocumented students even though the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 generally prohibits universities from releasing any personally identifiable information from student educational records without the student's prior consent (Coleman, 2004). Under these

statutes, undocumented individuals are not eligible for public benefits that entail actual monetary assistance, such as federal financial aid programs that provide student loans or work study payments (Ruge & Iza, 2005). The federal statutes do not explicitly prohibit states from deciding whether or not to grant in-state tuition to undocumented students. These acts set the stage for the National DREAM Act (which has not been passed as of the date of this study) that has been at the forefront of undocumented student issues. The DREAM Act stands for the Development Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act.

**National DREAM Act.** The DREAM Act would legalize the status of many undocumented youth. The bill has been reintroduced each legislative session since it was introduced in 2001. To qualify for the DREAM Act an applicant must adhere to several very strict guidelines that include the following:

- entered the United States prior to their 16th birthday.
- been in the United States for at least 5 consecutive years prior to the bill passing.
- have good moral standing (no previous or current convictions).
- graduated from high school, obtained a GED or currently be enrolled in College, a trade school or another type of Institution for Higher Learning.
- currently be 30 and under at the time they are applying (adreamact.com, 2012).

It is estimated that 360,000 undocumented high-school graduates would be provided an avenue to legal means to work through the DREAM Act. The Act could also provide incentives to finish high school (in order to fulfill the Act's eligibility requirements) and pursue post-secondary education for another 715,000 youngsters between the ages of 5 and 17 (Gonzales, 2007).

According to an analysis by the Migration Policy Institute, about 2.15 million individuals, if the provisions of the DREAM Act bill were ever enacted, could attempt to become legal permanent residents. Of the 2.15 million, about 43% (or 934,000) of the potential beneficiaries are in elementary or secondary school (Bruno, 2012).

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).** On June 15, 2012, White House representatives announced a new policy that would allow people not to enter into removal proceedings or to be considered for relief from removal from the country (United Press, 2012) if they were younger than 16 when they were brought to the United States, are not a risk to public safety or national security, and meet other important criteria. There are 11 stipulations that must be met in order to be considered for DACA. These stipulations are outlined in Appendix A. A memorandum from Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Security, stated that deferred action for two years that is subject to renewal would be an option for these individuals and that they could apply for employment authorization (Bruno, 2012). DACA is similar to the DREAM Act but not exact. The difference is that a legal immigration status would not be granted to them through the deferred action process (Bruno, 2012).

**In-State Tuition Policies.** Most states do not specifically have legislation that bans the ability for undocumented students to pay in-state tuition but they do not provide the benefit. Arizona, Colorado, and Georgia specifically prohibit it. In addition to not allowing the payment of in-state resident tuition, South Carolina even bans admissions for undocumented students (Marklein, 2008). Oklahoma retracted its in-state tuition benefit policy in 2007 making them the first state to do so (Hebel, 2007). All public postsecondary institutions in the state of Virginia received a memo from the Attorney

General in 2002 stating that undocumented aliens should not be admitted (Kaplin & Lee, 2007) and encouraged higher education employees to report students who were suspected to be undocumented alien (Coleman, 2004).

Several states have sought to ameliorate the circumstance of undocumented students not being able to pay in-state tuition through legislation. Texas began to offer to undocumented students in-state resident tuition benefits in 2001 under the title of House Bill 1403 (now entitled Senate Bill 1528) and later that year California did the same (Drachman, 2006; Gilroy, 2009). Undocumented students can now pay in-state tuition in Texas, California, New York, Utah, Illinois, Washington, Nebraska, New Mexico, Maryland (community colleges), Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Kansas. States have flexibility to set their own policies on who receives in-state tuition (Ruge & Iza, 2005). In some states, the laws require undocumented students to sign a form pledging to seek legal status as soon as possible (Branch-Brioso, Powell, & Roach, 2008).

***Texas House Bill 1403 and Senate Bill 1528.*** Senate Bill 1528 (formerly entitled House Bill 1403) guarantees undocumented students who enroll in public colleges and universities in the state of Texas the ability to pay in-state tuition and gives them access to state financial aid (Gonzales, 2007) instead of paying international student tuition and fees. Three years after enacting its own in-state tuition legislation, House Bill (HB) 1403, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board conducted a study of the undocumented student population in 2001. The study showed a 10 fold increase from 2001 to 2004 of the postsecondary enrollment of undocumented students. Fall 2001 showed an enrollment of 300 of the 393 HB 1403 students who were attending public colleges in Texas were enrolled in community colleges. By fall 2004, that number had

increased to 3,792 HB 1403 students with 75 percent of those attending community college. Of the 1,054,586 students attending public colleges and universities in Texas, the total number of undocumented students paying in-state tuition under the new law amounted to only 0.36 percent (Gonzales, 2007). HB 1403 was replaced with the passage of SB 1528 in 2005.

Opponents of the act object to using tax resources to subsidize the tuition of those lacking legal residency and characterize the act as an incentive for illegal behavior. As discussed previously, however, if the largest population in the United States is not educated, then we are setting ourselves up for failure. “If the country is to retain its competitive edge, it must reverse the current policies that result in providing the lowest levels of taxpayer support to the institutions that enroll the highest percentage of low-income, nontraditional, and minority students -- the fastest-growing segments of the population” (Trowbridge, 2011, p. 1). The accessibility, affordability, and quality of higher education in Texas have been affected by recent changes in admissions criteria, tuition levels, and costs (Dickson, 2006).

Tuition benefit proponents counter that the provisions are aimed at those who entered the United States while they were too young to make decisions about illegal behavior for themselves. They also argue that investment in education saves money in the long run since higher educational attainment is correlated with lower crime rates and other benefits and also boosts people into higher tax brackets (Byrd, 2007).

**Institutional Contributions.** The benefits of the attainment of higher education by undocumented Latino college students prompts a necessity to have research, resources, and policies in place to help those who do decide to attend college to persist

and graduate. In order for the benefits of attaining higher education to be taken advantage of, support through legislation, administration, family/friends and resources must be present. Students must have a strong sense of trust in order to be motivated to take advantage of the support systems available to them as well as to use the resources of the institution they attend to help them reach their goals (Casazza & Bauer, 2006).

Whether those resources are human, financial, or capital, students must feel that they have an open door to utilize them.

Students must have support in order to navigate the challenging experiences that they will face in college. One of the supports that students need the most, considering the increasing cost of tuition and fees, is financial. The average tuition and fees that were listed for Texas public universities' during the 1990s have doubled (Dickson, 2006). Between the years 1999 and 2010, for example, tuition and fees saw a 120 percent increase in Texas' 10 largest universities (Trowbridge, 2011). For undocumented college goers, tuition and fees are particularly challenging given the absence of access to federal financial aid (College Board, Trends in Student Aid, 2005). The access to financial supports has an effect on the students' access to capital supports. If students do not have the money to pay for tuition and fees, they cannot have access to residence halls, buildings, labs, computers, etc. that they need to make academic pursuits successful.

### **Peer Relationships**

Students who choose to attend college will face varying issues academically, financially and/or socially. These issues may be compounded if they are first-generation college students because they do not have a frame of reference to work from. Moreover, undocumented students face a separate set of unique challenges, and often a significant



toll is taken on those who are learning to live in the United States illegally (Gonzales, 2007). Important coping and college success skills developed through social relationships (Snell & Janney, 2000) can help these students navigate these issues. Casazza and Bauer (2006) state that student development and success are strongly tied to support systems that are comprehensive. These support systems can mean the difference between success and failure for these students. Said differently, interactions with other students who are dealing or have dealt with common issues can help them to navigate more successfully.

**Definition of peer relationships.** Native-born and immigrant students form networks and develop relationships of mutual support in specialized classes and school programs (Gonzales, 2011). Peer relationships provide help in solving problems, a source of entertainment and companionship, emotional support and validation, as well as a source for identity development (Wentzel, 2005). In the literature on peer relationships, Mueller and Cooper (1986) define these peer relationships in terms of what they call a “world hypotheses view.”

The world hypotheses view posits that there are four equally useful definitions of peer relationships – formists, mechanists, contextualists, and organicists. The formists view questions whether peer relations are a separate category from other types of relationships. It suggests that if there is such a thing as personality types, then there are potentially also peer relation types (Mueller & Cooper, 1986). The mechanists view states that peers elicit a sequence of responses from each other in peer relations (Mueller & Cooper, 1986). According to contextualists, a culture defines peer relations. Peer relations will indicate the purposes and shared beliefs that are useful to a culture

((Mueller & Cooper, 1986). Organicists would argue that the ideals of “democratic social institutions” (Mueller & Cooper, 1986, p. 21) and personal morals in working with others are developed in adults and children through peer relationships (Mueller & Cooper, 1986).

Relationships evolve out of the interactions of individuals, repeated or continued over time. Peer relations typically lead to further peer relations. These can develop into friendships or to the complementary statuses of leader and follower in a group (Mueller & Cooper, 1986). Students’ positive relationships with peers typically lead to experiencing levels of pro-social forms of behavior and social interaction that are more adaptive and stronger when compared to those without positive peer relationships. They also experience various beliefs about the self and emotional well-being (Wentzel, 2005). The influence of negative peer groups can sometimes lead immigrant children to engage in negative behavior (Ogbu, 1991).

Wentzel (2005) also argues that those “who enjoy positive relationships with peers also have a tendency to be engaged in and even excel at academic tasks more than those who have peer relationship problems” ( p. 279). This point is important to this study because it shows that the persistence of the students can be affected by peer relationships. Academic accomplishments have been identified in literature on peer relationships as a positive and significant correlate of peer acceptance and approval. The development of academic skills can be directly affected by peer relationships when students who are deemed competent teach strategies and standards for performance to less skilled peers (Wentzel, 2005). Issues of academic success take on a greater resonance when applied to undocumented immigrant students because they have greater

needs and are typically more vulnerable than their documented poor and minority peers (Gonzales, 2011).

It cannot be disputed that student development and success are strongly affected by comprehensive support systems (Casazza & Bauer, 2006). That effect is sometimes negative. Latinos who rely largely on family and friends in college choice appear to be left somewhat isolated at school (Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Acculturation to the norms of delinquent or low-performing peers is the route taken by some immigrant students, but others choose to integrate into environments where being an active participant in high achieving activities and clubs is given praise by teachers and school administrators (Gonzales, 2011).

**Relationships and social support.** Relationships and social support are important to the success and perseverance of students. In some instances the legal status of students has caused them to feel isolated, discouraged, or subject to increased incidents of discrimination. Provision of a welcoming environment is important (Soto, 2011). Social relationships are important both because they help develop skills needed in everyday life and because they enhance the quality of life (Snell & Janney, 2000). Social relationships also often motivate students to attend school, stay at a job, and make contributions that are beneficial. A positive relationship was also found between the presence of social competence and absence of negative behavior (Snell & Janney, 2000).

**Forms of social support.** Through relationships, school officials and high-achieving peers can help under-achieving students to gain access to important sources of social capital and mobilize resources necessary for school success (Suarez-Orozco et al, 2001). According to Snell and Janney (2000), social support takes several forms. The

first is that social supports provide notification about daily events. In the life of a college student, it is important not only to be informed about social events, but about the daily functioning of the university and programs across campus. Students connected to social networks will find out about events, deadlines, and special information that will help them to navigate the college experience. Perez and Cortes (2011) tell of how a friendship with other undocumented students was cited by one student as an important source of finding other financial aid, applying for scholarships, and support and information. That same student was motivated to continue because she personally knew an undocumented student that had earned a bachelor's degree and was pursuing graduate studies (Perez & Cortes, 2011).

The second form is that of emotional support during either a happy event or consolation during a crisis. Most friendships or lasting relationships continue because of the ability of those involved to share both the good and bad that occurs in the lives of those around them. Peers play a large role in assisting students in dealing with various challenges. Undocumented students who are more familiar with higher education and its processes are critical to supporting their peers (Perez & Cortes, 2011).

Granting access to other peers is the third form that social support takes (Perez & Cortes, 2011). On a peer level, granting access looks like introducing friends or associates in one circle to other friends/associates in other circles. In a helping relationship access granting may look like an advisor in the student's financial aid office introducing the student to an advisor in the student's major.

Assistance in the manner of lending books or helping someone move are examples of the fourth form of support. The ability for students to have the right tools or

be in a stable environment can make a difference in their academic success. Lastly, helping someone make daily decisions is a vital form that social support takes on.

Social relationships vary in that they can be uneven or balanced, modeling or mentoring, temporary or lasting, loving or hateful, or superficial or intimate (Snell & Janney, 2000). No two relationships can be replicated exactly or planned.

Undocumented students will have to be able to understand these varying relationship statuses in the midst of navigating their daily worlds. Mueller and Cooper (1986) say that peers are united by belonging to the same 'world.' This uniting world is not just one that is a setting and behavior or a world that was defined by those before them, but one where they perceive it similarly. Shared values among the students will make them more likely to fit in. The values they share could be academic (we're here to study), social (we're here to party), or activity (we're here to play basketball). The potential dichotomous and fluid nature of the world of peer relationships could be confusing to undocumented students.

The important thing is that the student feels that he or she belongs at the college or university (Seidman, 2005). In Seidman's study, that world included their home environment and the university that they attended. Some undocumented students found motivation by looking at their peers who had made bad life choices and comparing it to their potential futures. They also surveyed their world and compared their options with those who they viewed as less fortunate or who had more obstacles or challenges. Those who were in similar circumstances but still persevered and did great things provided a source of inspiration (Perez & Cortes, 2011). In one environment, students responded to

rejection by majority students by creating communities that reminded them of and reflected their communities at home (Soto, 2011).

**Functions of social support.** Social support varies in what its purpose is (function) and what it looks like (form), depending on the cultural group, gender, and age of the supported person (Snell & Janney, 2000). It is one way of providing a necessary environment for students. Two-way and reciprocal are characteristics of social support within friendships; however, support also can be one-way as in a helping or teaching relationship. Snell and Janney (2000) also speak of a “closeness continuum” that has friends at one end, peer group members in the middle, and acquaintances at the opposite end. The relationships that undocumented students experience are also stretched along this whole continuum. Their relationships may be helping relationships, such as the one mentioned earlier, or a reciprocated, mutual friendship. Academic achievement can be positively influenced when schools help structure students’ peer relationships (Gibson et al, 2004).

**Influence of social support on social participation.** Students’ social participation is influenced by the following six factors: opportunities, atmosphere, social support and motivation, social competence and interaction skills, academic achievement, and maintenance and generalization of relationships (Snell & Janney, 2000). In order for students to explore social participation the college or university must provide the opportunities and atmosphere. Students can meet and connect to others like them when the space is provided. Social support and motivation from their peers is important in a way that is different from that of adults or those in helping situations. Behavior is often replicated, so if a student sees a friend that is making positive choices and doing well,

they are likely to do the same. Development of social competence and interaction skills can occur in the classroom, student organizations, the home, etc. The greater the student's levels of ability to navigate the social scene in a way that is appropriate to and expected of that environment, the more likely they are to participate socially.

There is not a plethora of research that marries peer relationships, undocumented college students, and college experiences as is evidenced by the frequency of citing Perez and Cortes (2011) solely. This may be partially attributable to the social and financial era and the political climate in reference to immigration that we live in compared to the previous eras. There is research in educational, developmental, and psychological journals that explore these topics individually or possibly two of them may be paired together. For example, Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) focus on the role of motivation, parental support and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. This longitudinal study of 100 college students does not integrate the aspect of being undocumented, however. Tinto (1997) paired academic and social integration with persistence. He acknowledged how those two types of integration influence persistence in different ways for different students. He does not include culture or citizenship status in his research. While Nora's 1987 work speaks to culture by focusing on the determinants of retention among Chicano students, there is not a single mention of undocumented students. Generally, previous research is virtually silent on the cross-section of peer relationships, undocumented college students, and college experiences.

The fact that there is not much research that combines peer relationships, undocumented college students, and college experiences makes my study more

necessary. Understanding undocumented students is important considering the growth of that demographic in the United States, but the understanding is most beneficial if it is moved past generalities. The undocumented student population balances various issues in their daily lives. The discovery and maintenance of peer relationship and the effect those relationships have on undocumented students' college experiences requires exploration.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the literature explains how various aspects of students' experiences can have an effect on those students' outcomes. There is much published about the influences on students' college experiences including peer relationships. These influences can have an effect on their perceived level of support. The effect of those influences on undocumented students is less well known, however. Opportunities are provided through favorable school contexts to get past disadvantages of their past and to pursue postsecondary pathways more freely (Gonzales, 2011).

Torres' Situating Identity Theory explains several aspects of the students' make-up which allowed for a comparison of the undocumented Latino college students being studied within this paper. Analyzing their perception of their status in society, their family influence, generation in the U.S. and the environment where they grew up told a fairly comprehensive story that gives a starting point for the development of future studies.

Relevant legislation, as it pertains to financial aid and admissions, reveals information about extrinsic topics that can determine these students' success in college. Parts of the legislation could be viewed as barring certain segments of the students from



achieving their highest potential. Therefore, evaluation of those policies is important in understanding how these students can be aided in their success.

This study seeks to fill part of the gap that does not explain the intersection of the aforementioned theories and policies. One of those aspects by itself does not explain how or why a Latino student may excel or fail to succeed in college. This study may help to begin the conversation of what these parts mean to each other and ultimately to the students. Through the case studies that were conducted, we examined what kinds of effects peer relationships had on college success for undocumented Latino students, positive (encourage completion/persistence, social release, etc) or negative (distraction, discouragement, etc.).

## **Chapter III**

### **Introduction and Overview**

Undocumented Latino students face many legal, social and political issues creating a need for further research that helps those employed in higher education to better understand the growing undocumented student population. The following questions are proposed in order to have a more intimate understanding of these students:

- What are the kinds of peer relationships undocumented Latino college students identify in their college experiences?
- How do peer relationships affect the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students at a Tier One research institution in the Southwest?

This chapter outlines the methodology and method (including participants, procedures, instrumentation, and analysis). Chapter 4 will present the results and Chapter 5 will then go on to analyze the findings, explore limitations, and propose implications for practice and future research.

The approach used in this ethnographic study will be comparative case study method. Yin (2003) gives various scenarios for considering the use of a case study design. Case study design is appropriate in a study where contextual conditions are relevant to the phenomenon being studied, when the behavior of the participants cannot be manipulated, and/or the focus of the study is to provide answers for ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. This study fits all three of those scenarios. Flyvbjerg (2011) mentions the potential intensity of case studies and how case study is important to use due to its ability to offer a rich, complete and detailed unit of study.

Ethnographic techniques are appropriate for this type of study because they allow researchers to explore and examine social and cultural dynamics. It is particularly useful to study the behaviors, thoughts, and experiences of underrepresented populations since ethnography requires the ethnographer to have interaction, and a hands-on type of information collection must be employed. Spindler (1982) states that the most important requirements for an ethnographic approach is that behavior in situations must be explained from the native's point of view, and both the behavior and explanation must be recorded as carefully and systematically as possible. Fetterman (1989) says that ethnographic study allows multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data throughout the study. He says ethnography is about telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story. It gives voice to people in their own local context typically relying on verbatim quotations and a thick description of events.

### **Methodology**

Hypothetically the etic or external perspective of the findings would be different from the emic or native (Fetterman, 1989). The disadvantage of only possessing an etic perspective makes the possibility of having a non-judgmental orientation difficult. There was a concerted effort to remove preconceptions and biases about the culture and subculture being studied. It was also a goal to observe the intra-cultural diversity of the participants. The Latino participants were from differing nationalities. Being Latino does not automatically make them the same because culturally these students may be different depending on the region and country their family comes from. The students were born in the United States but their families may have brought varying practices,

opinions, and ideas with them from their home countries and passed these on to the students. In consideration of this variation, the diversity of the students' speech patterns, introductions, body language, etc. were observed in order to add richness to the description of the students in the report.

## **Method**

**Background.** I am a female, African-American first-generation college student raised in the Southwest and attended a similar type of institution as the participants. I come from a background that encouraged graduating from high school but did not mention college often. The only language I speak is English and I have never been outside of the U.S. I receive more family support now in my 30s than I have my whole life.

Due to the difference in cultural background from the participants, I could not fully understand the emic perspective of the students I was seeking to study. Therefore, I would have to take a different, non-traditional route to securing the participants for my study. I am not a member of the Latino community which automatically cast suspicion on my motives for asking those questions. In my role as a college administrator I was often asked if I had to report students who were undocumented. If they chose to reveal their status to me, it was typically not until they deemed me trustworthy. Due to time constraints, I was not able to develop those relationships so I asked someone who was a trusted member of and an advocate for that community to help provide entry into that community and select participants. The participants would be more willing to share information with me because of their relationship with the person who recruited them for the study.

**Participants.** There were 4 undocumented Latino college students in this study. The population (undocumented college students) was one that was not voluntarily easily identified because of the potential repercussions of exposing their citizenship status. Due to this issue, it was highly unlikely that a large sample could be collected for a quantitative study; therefore it was more reasonable to conduct a comparative case study. Also, because of the depth of the students' stories, there was rich qualitative information to be gathered. The ages of the participants were 18-22 as the focus was on traditional-aged students. The participants attended an urban, Tier one research institution in the Southwest. Their nationalities represented a variety of countries. The students were a cross-section of year in college, majors, socioeconomic statuses, and ages. They also came from a variety of experience with college in high school (information, visits, etc).

The students who were participating in the study were undocumented students. As described earlier, these were students who: (1) entered the United States without inspection (or visa) or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of their r status (i.e. overstayed their visa) and remained in the United States without authorization, or (3) are in the process of acquiring legal status and are authorized to stay in the United States but do not yet have permanent residency (National Immigration Law Center, 2010). Due to this status, these students were in a vulnerable state. In order to ensure that their participation in this study would cause them or their families no harm, there were no documents with their handwriting, names or identifying information on them. There were not any recordings of the interviews. This study was intended to help in understanding the undocumented student population, not to harm them, so every precaution was being taken to protect them.

**Procedures.** The participants were recruited by personal invitation through a university administrator that the students know and trust, as well as a student who self-identified as undocumented. The university administrator reached out to students who participate in a program campus that is geared toward high-achieving students. The undocumented student secured participants from her group of friends. There is an assumption that the students that were recruited by the university administrator are similar to each other, and that the students recruited by the student are similar to each other. The assumption is extended to argue that those two groups of student were different from each other because of the characteristics of the student recruiter.

Once identified, the participants began by answering a short questionnaire. This questionnaire collected demographic information that allowed for finding similarities and differences in the participants. The participants were given instructions to answer all questions on the questionnaire as honestly and thoroughly as possible on the computer provided. If they had any concerns or needed further instruction on how to operate the computer or format their answers, they were welcome to ask for instruction. The participants were informed that if any questions caused them discomfort, they were welcome to skip that question but to mark it so that I would know that it was not accidentally skipped. Once they completed the questionnaire, they were asked how they felt about the questionnaire and if they were ready to start the interview. Upon initiation of the interview, they were informed that they were free to leave the interview if they became too uncomfortable. The interviews contained the bulk of the information pertinent to this study as it consists of the questions that examine peer relationships and the effects they have on the students. They were also asked not to share the questions

outside of the chosen location so that the other participants would not come in with prepared answers.

**Instrumentation.** The instruments used were a questionnaire, interview protocol, and observation notes. The survey and interview questions are attached as appendices A and B. There was no audio recording used for privacy and comfort reasons. In order to preserve the accuracy of their answers, I informed the participants that I would be typing throughout their interviews in order to collect exact quotes from them as they responded. Students typically do not reveal themselves as undocumented for legal reasons, and I wanted to ensure them the utmost level of comfort in answering the questions as openly as possible. Demographic and other information was collected from the questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to collect information about the background of the students who participated such as age, nationality, level of interaction with parents, peers and school faculty and administrators, and relationship between various involvements and their college experience. The strength of the questionnaire in this study was that information was collected that can be evaluated to show similarities and differences among the backgrounds of the participants. One of the weaknesses was that this information was self-reported so the accuracy or consistency of the information may be subjective. As they participated in the survey, I took the opportunity to take observation notes based on their initial entry and introductions. I paid attention to body language, facial expressions, and voice intonations. In my observation I attempted to avoid cultural biases. There were a couple of instances where certain terms or phrases were used and rather than insert my interpretation of what they meant, I asked clarifying questions.

The observation notes took into account appearance and mannerisms of the participants. I also observed the body language and voice inflections of the participants when entering the room, while responding to the questionnaire, and while answering the interview questions. The observation notes were useful in interpreting many of the unspoken messages from the participants, but despite my best efforts my own biases, perceptions, or cultural mores may cause a differential interpretation.

The interview protocol asked questions of participants attempting to understand their level of commitment to the university they all attend including their experiences at and connection to the university, the types of peer relationships they have, and their frequency and level of participation in those relationships. These interviews took approximately 2 hours each and examined their background beyond the responses on the questionnaire. The interview questions allowed the responses of the participants to provide the answers to the research question. This is where the depth of the study took shape. Some students were more open and/or more informative than others, therefore possibly providing an unbalanced amount of information in each case. Overall, the questions were tied back into the review of literature. The interview questions investigated their level of involvement in college, ethnic identity and educational experiences. The role that legislation (as it pertains to financial aid and admission to colleges and universities in the United States) has played in the students' lives drove a few of the questions. The majority of the questions delved into to the heart of the study – peer relationships and their influence.

**Analysis and Interpretation.** Analysis involves bringing order to the data through organizing the collected information into categories, basic descriptive pieces, and



patterns. Interpretation attaches significance and meaning to the categories, pieces and patterns by explaining them and looking for links and relationships among them (Patton, 1987). The first thing I did in the analysis of the data was to ascribe pseudonyms to the participants. After reviewing the information entered on each questionnaire, I coded it into appropriate categories. Coding was used because it helped to develop more honed-in focus on what information the responses provided. It helped to give shape to the data and connect the stories (Glesne, 2006). I made notes of areas where there appear to be recurring themes as well as items that seemed to be different from the other responses.

Structured interviews were used to attempt to glean the same types or categories of information from the participants. “Each category is...probed for subcategories and sub-subcategories until the interviewee’s categorization scheme is fully mapped” (Glesne, 2006, p. 158). The interview responses were analyzed for patterns and points of difference. Stories or answers that elicited some type of obvious emotion (i.e. anger, sadness, and disappointment) were specifically noted. The literature review was then coded to correlate the information found in the literature review to the participants’ responses. Lastly, the responses were reflected upon to find themes that compared and contrasted with the students’ experiences and reactions to those experiences to answer the research question.

Moving from organization to meaning (interpretation), coded responses were reviewed to interpret the areas where there appeared to be recurring themes. Interpretation will “[transcend] factual data and cautious analysis and [begin] to probe into what is to be made of them” (Glesne, 2006, p. 165). The responses were also looked at to see what responses seemed to be lacking or missing. The interviews were explored

to identify essential themes and the way the themes appear to interact. The literature review was revisited to see which of the participants' responses agreed or disagreed with the theories and information presented in order to answer the research question.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The sample size of 4 was chosen for this study to get a small cross-section of the population. The ages of the participants were 18-22 as the focus is on traditional aged students. Two females and two males participated. The socioeconomic range among them was less than \$20,000 up to \$60,000 for family income, with two of the students representing less than \$20,000. The participants attend a Tier One research institution in the Southwest and among them are one sophomore, two juniors, and one senior. Three students identified as Mexican and one as El Salvadoran. All participants came to the United States involuntarily. They were brought to the U.S. as children by their parents, and do not fit any of the other definitions of undocumented.

### **Participants**

The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire prior to responding to the interview questions (See Appendices A and B). The results were consistent among them but there were a few areas of discrepancy. Tables 1, 2 and 3 that are inserted within the narrative represent the information collected from the questionnaires.

**Sara.** The first participant was a 22 year old Hispanic female. She was small in stature and had dark, deep set eyes. She had dark hair as well, but her demeanor was not sullen as her appearance would suggest. When she walked in she smiled and we greeted each other with a hug since we had met before. Sara seemed slightly nervous as we walked to the room where the interview would take place. We walked into the room and she stood until I gave her the go-ahead to have a seat. As she sat, she let out a sigh. I proceeded with the instructions about the questionnaire and informed her that after the

questionnaire we would move on to the interview questions. As Sara completed the survey, I observed that she did not appear to be uncertain during that process.

Sara identified herself as a Mexican who was not born in the United States. She has been in the U.S. for 19 years. She was brought here by her parents when she was 3 years old. Sara's responses to the questionnaire and in the interview revealed very strong family ties, as well as strong relationships overall. The only area where she seemed to lack interaction was with administrators in college.

Her parents did not reveal her undocumented status to her. She found out when a paper arrived in the mail when she was in middle school to get fingerprinted for residency. "I just figured it out," she said. Sara was a junior criminal justice major in college and in high school was involved in Honors and AP classes. Socioeconomically her family fell into the \$40,000-60,000 range. Her mother had a lower secondary education and her father had a secondary education.

Sara worked off-campus in order to pay for college. Her responses to the questionnaire showed an average relationship (when given choices among none, weak, average and strong) between her receipt of financial aid and her ability to stay in college; however this relationship was an opposite connection when compared to the other participants because she was not able to take a full load of classes (12-18 hours) each semester because she did not receive financial aid. I asked Sara, "In what ways has being undocumented limited you?" She mentioned not being able to receive financial help, that she would like to finish school faster, and not getting to see her family in Mexico due to her inability to travel outside of the United States.

*“My grandfather passed away in Mexico and I cannot go visit. That really hurt...  
Seeing my other family going and I couldn't.”*

Sara attended a high school in the Aldine Independent School District located in Houston, Texas. She said that her high school teachers or counselors encouraged her to go to college. When asked in what way they encouraged her, Sara replied,

*“By pushing me to take classes that I would do okay in and that would help me go  
to school.”*

She said that not all of her teachers and counselors were aware of her undocumented status, but for those who were aware, they helped her by giving her the proper forms that she needed in order to go to college. Her support did not stop at her high school teachers and counselors; however, she did state that she has not received any support from college campus teachers or administrators because she never revealed her status and that it did not make a difference in her college experience. Her parents also encouraged her to go to college. Sara's mom grew up poor and wished she could have gone to college. That was her impetus for encouraging Sara to go to college. Sara's father had to drop out of school to help his father work. He did not want that same life for his daughter. Because of her parents' education level, Sara chose to go to college because she knew that they had struggled throughout the years and she did not want to struggle. She believed that college was the way to avoid that struggle. A question about whether interaction with peers in high school had anything to do with Sara's choice to go to college, she emphatically stated,

*“Oh yes, because we were all very active and we all pretty much motivated each  
other.”*

Those high school peer relationships had also positively affected her college experience. While Sara said she did not talk to everyone from high school, the people she did remain friends with were positive.

Taking dual credit courses in high school also helped Sara in deciding to go to college, even though there was not an overall college going culture in high school. She said there was a separation. It was more encouraged for the students who were in AP and honors to go to college.

*“The ones in regular classes... they weren’t pushed as much.”*

Her choice of major in college was a direct reflection of her citizenship status. Initially Sara wanted to be a teacher so she majored in education. She then changed her major to Spanish. She changed her major to criminal justice with the intention to go to law school to become an immigration attorney. In an attempt to gain an understanding about whether her culture has a certain perception of education and whether that perception has a differing perception dependent on the gender of the potential student, Sara was asked to give her opinion.

*“Yes. Things are changing but education is limited. By 21 or 22 you (a Mexican female) should already be married and trying to have kids.”*

She says that her parents do not feel that way though. They would not have liked for her to go away to school, but they would have supported her. When asked about the depth of her involvement in her culture (she was Mexican) she stated that she was heavily involved. Sara said that her family was very Mexican-oriented, celebrated Mexican holidays, and spoke mainly Spanish in their home. She said this connection to their culture brought them closer, especially considering there was more family in the U.S. at

the time of the interview than years before. Sara felt that the more entrenched in one's culture one is, the less it matters if another person is not a member of that same culture. In explaining how her connection to her culture affected how she interacted with others, she said,

*“By being deeply involved in your culture, it doesn't matter when people are different.”*

Sara identified that she believed that there was a difference between associates and friends. She stated that she had a balance of associates and friends. She had few “close, close” friends.

*“Friends are people that you know deeper than an associate and you share more with a friend.”*

Sara said that most of her friends were of the same culture as she and primarily were family members. Those who were college friends meet mostly on campus to study or to do assigned group activities. Involvement or understanding of her culture did not affect how she interacted with her friends. However, for those friends with whom she shared the same culture, it made them closer and she trusted them more than other friends. When asked why she felt that way, she said,

*“It's simply because they understand more without having to explain.”*

When asked if the friends who were from a different culture ever perceived things differently, she stated that she had an Asian friend who had different beliefs. She stated that sometimes they bumped heads but in general their relationship was okay. She was also asked if any of her friendships evolved out of being undocumented. She said yes because it was something that just came out.

*“You identify yourself with people who are in the same situation and going through the same thing you are.”*

Those were the friends that she went to dinner, movies, and road trips with. Sara said they interacted every other weekend, but her interactions with her associates were sporadic dependent on what was going on with school. She said what made her friendships strong relationships was the communication and being there for each other. They talked about private things often. Her friends and associates alike studied together, tutored each other, and shared academic information such as deadlines or campus resources with each other.

Sara got involved in high school with the Student Council, ESL peer tutoring, and the Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE). Sara identified an average relationship between her involvement in campus organizations and her college experience. Being involved helped her to learn some skills that she would not learn in the classroom. In her opinion, being involved got her off to a good start. She was not able to continue her involvement in high school as extensively into college because of her need to work in order to pay for school. The Scholars' Community, an organization for high-achieving students, was the primary organization she was involved in when she entered college. It was required by her advisor and it incorporated weekly meetings, maintenance of a certain GPA, and community service into its membership requirements. For her community service she volunteered at the women's shelter answering the hotline and watching children during the weekends when the residents at the shelter went to counseling. While Sara stated that there was no relationship between her involvement in community organizations and her college experience, she did not identify her work at the



women's shelter as community involvement because it was tied to a campus organization. Most of the friends that she met outside of the organization were largely through class. She did not speak of having any peer or friend relationships stemming from work.

**Francisco.** Participant 2, Francisco, came walking down the sidewalk toward the establishment where we were meeting. I noticed that he was average build with varying colors in his hair. When he walked in, he looked a little nervous as he tried to identify me. He was a little sweaty. I'm not sure if that was from the walk or from nervousness. I stood up to introduce myself and offered him a beverage from the coffee shop where we were meeting. He declined my offer, but as I walked to the counter to purchase myself a beverage, I noticed that Francisco was looking at my laptop which I had set up. When he noticed that I saw him, he hurriedly walked around to the other side of the table and took his seat. I walked back to the table as my coffee was being prepared and attempted to allay what I perceived to be some uncertainty on Francisco's part. I began by telling him a little bit about me, my educational background, and the purpose of my study. He looked at me attentively as if he were in the classroom and nodded along with each sentence. When asked if he was ready to begin, he half nodded and smirked. He then said that my contact had told him about me and that he hoped he would be able to help me with what I needed.

Francisco was a 22-year-old Mexican citizen who had been in the US since 1994. He was a senior majoring in economics maintaining a 3.5 GPA. He said his choice of major did not have anything to do with this culture or citizenship status, but his attitude was,

*“It’s not what I want to do but what I can do.”*

His family’s average income was less than \$20,000. His father had no formal education and the highest education level his mother completed was primary. Francisco received state financial aid through the Texas Application for Student Financial Aid (TASFA), as well as academic scholarships. He was involved in organizations on campus but not any in the community. The results of his questionnaire showed strong relationships with his mother, father, other family members, and students in his high school. His response to the items referring to interactions with teachers in high school and administrators in high school show little to no interaction. He did acknowledge better relationships with professors and administrators in college with little to some interaction. When asked about the amount of exposure to information about college that he received in high school, he replied “2” which indicates that a low amount of information was given.

Financial aid is absolutely essential in his ability to stay in college. He stated that if he did not receive financial aid he would not be able to stay in school. Francisco also indicated a strong relationship between his involvement in campus organizations and his college experience; however, there was no relationship between involvement in community organizations and his college experience. He said he had no community ties. His peer relationships were essential to his college experience. Francisco’s response on the questionnaire indicated that citizenship status had a strong effect on his college experience, but interestingly he indicated that culture had a weak relationship to his college experience. The seeming disconnection between community and culture became clearer during the interview.

About seven years prior to this interview, Francisco discovered that he was undocumented when he wanted to get a driver license. Not being able to get that license left him feeling alienated. The question he posed was.

*“What did I do to get into this position?”*

He could not get much information from his parents, and he did not share the information with his friends. Being undocumented limited his opportunities to work because of his lack of identification and not being able to drive. He said it affected the relationships he had because he could not do a lot of the things that his friends did.

Francisco graduated from high school in the Spring Independent School District. His high school teachers and counselors encouraged him to go to college. Initially he did not believe he was going to college because of his status and enrolled in classes to become an auto technician, but he had a counselor who persuaded him to go to college because she recognized his academic talent. He said that his counselors and teachers were aware of his status and that particular counselor tried to help him. They ran into a stumbling block when he tried to enroll in a dual credit class. The dual credit class was supposed to be paid for with a scholarship and that complicated things because he could not complete the same paperwork as the other students. He ended up having to enroll in that dual credit class during the second semester. When asked whether his parents encouraged him to go to college his reply was,

*“They’re not a big source of inspiration or motivation. They didn’t discourage me, but no one in my family went to college so it wasn’t something that was expected.”*

Francisco said that his relationship with family outside of his immediate family was weaker because they thought it is more important for him to be in a relationship.

*“They don’t ask me how school is going. They ask me if I have a girlfriend.”*

He said he believed that his parents’ education level had something to do with this choice to go to college because he knew he did not want the life they had. His interactions with peers in high school also had an effect on his choice to go to college. All of his friends were going to college. He also felt he had something to prove. He wanted to do better than those who he felt had a better life than he did.

*“I wanted to prove I could do better with less.”*

The kinds of classes he took in high school (AP and Honors) affected his decision to go to college. He had two levels of classes and seeing the difference in those classes *“made [him] decide which group [he] wanted to be in.”* His high school’s college going culture was prevalent in the Honors and AP classes, but not in general. The other students were not pushed to go to college, only to graduate, according to Francisco. He got involved in the high school newspaper, yearbook, Key Club, and Honor Society. He chose not to get involved in any community organizations.

As we began to investigate the type of peer relationships Francisco had he was very clear about the people in his life. Before I could even ask Francisco whether he believed there was a difference between associates and friends, he responded very directly in a way that illustrated that difference. He felt that he had to keep up two different personalities because he was very selective with who he was open with. He had a group of friends that he considered family.

*“I can’t connect to the family I have or some of the people I associate with.”*

He indicated that he may have interacted with his associates once every two weeks, but with his friends several times a week. The fact that he could be open with his

friends and they supported him no matter what is what made his friend relationships strong, according to Francisco. Another area where being undocumented affected him was that he often studied on his own instead of with his friends because geographically it took him a long time to get to the campus due to the fact that he had to ride the bus. He and his friends still shared academic information such as deadlines and campus resources with each other.

When asked about whether there were any negative peer relationships that may have affected his college experience, he shared information about a friend who had already dropped out of college. This person was his best friend from high school and already had a family. Francisco felt that the friend did not consider going to college a priority, which affected the relationship that they once had. In the past they would spend time together and talk about various things. That relationship faded into one where they barely spoke and no longer felt like they had anything in common.

Campus involvement was not one of the first things Francisco did when he got to college. When he ran into a financial aid issue, he went to the local community college and earned an associate's degree. While at the community college he got involved in the Honors Student Organization and the Hispanic student group. When he returned to the university he continued his involvement but not at the same level. Francisco met some people in campus organizations that he interacts with outside of those campus organizations. Some of them fall into his friend group and some fall into his associates group.

As we began to discuss culture, Francisco became very matter-of-fact in his tone. He said that for his friends, who were of a different culture, they may perceive things

slightly differently but they thought along the same lines so they typically came to the same conclusion especially if they discussed it. The relationships that he had with people from his culture evolved out of the common bond of being undocumented. He said the ones who were in the same position instantly had a bond and were more understanding of where he was coming from. He said that he made an attempt to participate in his culture, although typically his friends were not the same culture as his.

*“I find it difficult to make relationships with people from my culture. I am drawn to people who are intellectual and typically there are not a lot in my culture. At home, my family is not very Mexican. We tried to avoid stereotypes associated with being Mexican.”*

When I asked for clarification on what those stereotypes may have been, he responded,

*“...big social gatherings, spending a lot of time with extended family... We don't celebrate any holidays from Mexico, and my family has lost the influence from the Catholic Church.”*

Francisco went on to describe his ideas about the settlement of undocumented Mexicans in the city. He said that there were differences in where people from Mexico settled (in his words, the suburbs versus the inner city).

*“People who are from where I am from, central Mexico, tend to go to the north side of [the city]. People from north of Mexico tend to go to the south side.”*

He went on to say that he had not experienced an instance where his culture has a certain perception of education. *“It's hard to say because the people I am related to don't really have education available to them. I'm not really sure because education is not available so I don't know their attitudes.”*

When asked if the deferment policy had affected him, he said that it had given him a chance to get an ID card and potentially a driver license. That could drastically change the opportunities available to him and give him the option to work. He said prior to that, he did not know how it would go. I then gave Francisco an opportunity to tell me if he believed there were any other factors that may have had an effect on his college experience.

*“I definitely had a lack of resources. It all started when I was 17. I didn’t know what was available to me and my first semester went very badly because of that. I didn’t know how to handle the issues that came up and I didn’t know anyone who is been through it. I also did not know who I could go to.”*

When asked how he got those issues resolved, he stated,

*“I went everywhere I could trying to get an answer and found out I could get financial aid. I went to community college for two years and got an associates degree and learned more about how to get resources. I found out lots from different people. I also developed a relationship with a professor and found it easier to open up to them rather than another student. They felt more trustworthy. My immediate reaction was to go to someone with authority and experience.”*

**Diego.** Diego was a very mature looking 21-year-old college junior. His smile and exuberant personality did not reflect the gravity of the information that I would find out about him in the interview. One of the first things he said to me upon entering the room is *“I’m really nervous. But because I trust [name of person who introduced us is removed for privacy reasons], I will do it.”* He rehashed several questions that we had already talked about such as no recording, no names being used, and nothing that could

identify him. I assured him that there would be nothing connected directly to him. As we started the interview he sat toward the edge of his chair with his hands folded in his lap. He kept looking around even though we were in a fairly isolated area. As the interview went on, he began to sit back in his seat slightly and even laughed a couple of times to show the softer side of this person who had suffered greatly.

Diego was the participant who had the lowest GPA. His family income was less than \$20,000. The highest education level his father completed was lower secondary. Diego's story began with the fact that he does not know his mother. She abandoned the family when Diego was very young. He said his mother was a US citizen who birthed him while home in Mexico visiting family. He was brought back to the US but his mother left the family without ensuring that his United States citizenship was secured. There was anger shown when he relayed the story.

Diego received state financial aid and grants, as well as scholarships through the university. He was involved in campus and community organizations. He had some interaction with his father which he described as awkward. His interaction with his other family members did not exist. Diego indicated strong interactions otherwise. He described his interactions with students, teachers, and administrators in high school, as well as in college, as frequent. Diego reported that he received a low amount of exposure to information about college in high school. There was a strong relationship between his receipt of financial aid and his ability to stay in college. He also cited a strong relationship between his involvement in campus and community organizations and his college experience. Peer relationships, culture, and citizenship status also had a strong relationship to his college experience.



Diego said he knew he was undocumented since he was 10. He found out because his family was not able to go anywhere and not able to see anyone who did not live in the city. When asked how that situation made him feel, he responded,

*“Alone. Before discovering relationships with people like me, I felt very alone. I felt angry. Before deferred action and movement of immigration reform I felt a lot of anger. I felt different... Not normal. I always wanted to be someone else that I’m not. I wanted to be like other students. I didn’t want it to separate me from them.”*

Being undocumented limited him because there were several internships in college that he was more than qualified for and was accepted to, but he was not able to continue it because they could not pay him. There were also scholarships that he wanted to apply for that required United States citizenship.

Diego attended a school in Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District. He would not share, however, which high school in the district he attended. He stated that not every teacher or counselor in high school encouraged him to go to college.

*“I became close to a few teachers who made an effort. They were supportive once I was accepted but no one pushed me to go to college. I pushed myself. Well, my counselor tried a little.”*

When asked if his parents encouraged him to go to college, he reminded me that he did not know who his mom was. He said that his father did not encourage him at all. His father never said not to go to college, but the focus was just on finishing high school but not getting into college. He said that he can only remember one instance where they even talked about school. His parents’ education level did not have anything to do with his choice to go to college, nor did his interaction with peers in high school. None of his

friends in high school encouraged him to go to college, but the types of classes he took in high school did. He stated that his high school had a college-going culture to some degree, but *“it was my peers who had parents that went to college that really talked about it.”* While Diego was in high school he tutored elementary kids, joined the student government, and the Spanish club.

Diego said he had all kinds of relationships in college.

*“Once in college I found friends like me and they became my family throughout college. They are very supportive as far as education... They help me dream... We’re dreamers. We became very strong through those interactions. Always having that hope.”*

When asked if he had any negative peer relationships that would have affected his college experience he said yes. His first two years were very rough.

*“It was cultural shock for those from small towns. My freshman year most of the people that I saw were white and racism was always an issue. Once I was able to have friends like me the burden wasn’t as difficult.”*

Informing me about his involvement in organizations on campus or in the community caused him to pause. At this point in the interview he stuttered, and asked me to reassure him that this information was not going anywhere. Diego said that he was involved in church, tutoring elementary students, Latino organizations, and organizations that dealt with his major.

Diego definitely believed that there was a difference between associates and friends. Associates, in his definition, are people that did group projects but were not his friends. Associates are people like co-workers that you would not share your Facebook page with. He said there is more of a “professional mentality.” I interpreted this to mean

that he did not approach relationships with associates with a personal mindset, but with a mindset that was more professional. He said these are not people he would want to go out with. In his opinion, associates are people that you do work with for class-related things to accomplish a goal. With friends you go eat, go to each other's houses, watch movies, and spend more quality time.

*“A friend is someone who is willing to take off their own shirt for you. They are willing to do everything possible to be there for you.”*

Diego told me a story about a best friend that he had who would take him to his hometown whenever he needed a ride and drop him off at his house. There was one time when Diego had a medical emergency and this friend skipped class to take Diego to another city to see the doctor. Diego said he met many people within his organizations that he interacted with outside of those organizations. The strong relationships that Diego had were not as strong as they were before the interview due to some changes in his life that limited the amount of time he had. He and his friends studied together as much as they could but they had different majors so it made it sort of difficult. They shared lots of things with each other in reference to financial aid. That helped him a lot. When he was trying to find resources, he wanted others to have the same access. He also shared information in the movement for passage of the Dream Act.

The topic of involvement in culture prompted an in-depth answer from Diego. He said,

*“I tried to get involved in major holidays but not as much as other people. I have become acculturated into this ‘other culture’. I don’t even bother to follow other people in celebrating the holidays. I grew up with a different mentality... I grew up thinking with a*

*Chicano mentality that means a mixture of two different cultures and accepting that both cultures are very rich. For example, Thanksgiving. People who are Mexicans started celebrating that. Christmas wasn't about gifts. It was a day of Kings where kids were the only ones who got gifts but growing up here kids in college were talking about what did you get for Christmas? I started adding two cultures of holidays together. This is what made Martin Luther King Day important to me. If my life had gone a different way in Mexico, that holiday would not have meant anything to me but since I'm here it is an acknowledgment of minorities. And I'm a minority so it's important to me."*

Diego said that most of his friends were of the same culture as he. For his friends who were different, they sometimes perceived things differently.

*"White people don't always think about the implications of racism. I have some first-generation Mexican American friends and the issue of citizenship is not as important to them. They don't view it with the same intensity. One friend who knows my situation will say things like, "Let's go to Cancun for a few days" without taking into account those of us who can't go. They think the passage of the Dream Act is a good thing, but they don't really know why."*

His friendships that evolved out of being undocumented were the strongest because he said they understood each other. He stated that *"it is difficult to explain [himself] to those outside of the world that was created for [him]."*

Involvement in or understanding of Diego's culture affected how he interacted with his associates and friends because they sometimes made comments about people of other races. He said that offended him, and it affected how he looked at them and led him to have a very negative view of them. When asked whether sharing the same culture

made him closer to his friends or made him trust them more, he said that he struggled with cultures within his culture. It was hard for him to assimilate with someone even within the [Latino] culture. He felt more comfortable with those within the same subculture.

*“My uncle is a lot younger than my dad. My dad’s culture is a response to how he grew up... Rough, poor, didn’t have things many times. It was difficult to find food to feed everyone. I can see it in how my dad interacts with people. My uncle is more at ease and outgoing.”*

Diego’s response to the question about whether his culture had a certain perception of education was different from the previous two participants. He said that education was important to Latinos. Many Latinos, according to Diego, came to the United States because of social unrest and the priority of surviving. Generations have been suffering political and social unrest. When he was growing up, he believed education was very important because his teachers in Mexico said education was very important. Not all of the cities in Mexico had the same opportunities.

*“They made sure we perceived (even if we didn’t understand) that education is important. The types of people that migrate here are just trying to meet their needs. They don’t have the same social options so it’s not that it’s not important, it’s just not an issue they can deal with. My dad’s conversation wasn’t to do good in school, it was “you better not do bad in school”. It depends on the class of Hispanics.”*

Diego did not perceive that the perception of education was based on gender.

He said his choice of major did not have anything to do with his culture or citizenship status. He wanted a career that would allow him to take care of his family and

he needed to do it through education. He said that once the situation was fixed, it would be easier to do that. He said that the deferment had not yet tangibly affected him, but it had given him more hope that his life would not be the same.

*“One of the greatest things I hate is uncertainty, and that is what my life has been.”*

When asked if there were any other factors that may have an effect on his college experience, he gave another thoughtful and heartfelt response.

*“I think about how I will be seen by other kids. I used to tutor kids and there was this one Hispanic girl who was about eight or nine years old. I saw it in their eyes the hunger to be taught by someone like them. She went to the next grade but I tried to keep in touch. Kids will become the great ones that society wants them to be if you mold their minds in a way that helps the maturing and then helped their dream become a reality when I was a kid I wanted someone that was like me to tell me it was okay... To see they had made it. My kids will be the next generation of Americans and I want to provide for them through experiences, culturally. Thinking about them and how kids can learn from me by going to college and making it... Not only my kids but kids that I tutored and hope to meet one day.”*

**Kim.** Kim was a very petite, but boisterous young woman. She walked with a lilt in her step that caused her jet black hair to bounce. When she introduced herself her voice was almost sing-song. She waved as she walked into the room almost as if she was excited to talk to me. She smiled as she sat and maintained eye contact. Kim was a 19-year-old El Salvadoran who had been in the United States since she was two years old. Kim was the only participant who did not take honors or AP classes in high school and

she was a sophomore in college majoring in English with the hopes of becoming a teacher. Her family household income fell between \$20,000 and \$40,000. Both her mother and father had completed a lower secondary education. Kim received state financial aid and grants. She was not competitive enough to receive academic scholarships. She was not involved in any campus organizations at the time of the interview, but she was involved in her community. Kim reported some interaction with her mother, father, other family members, teachers and administrators in high school, as well as administrators in college. She reported frequent interaction with students in her high school. Her lowest level of interaction was with professors in college. Kim reported that she had a low exposure to information about college while in high school. Her relationship between receipt of financial aid and ability to stay in college was strong. She had no relation between her involvement in campus organizations and her college experience, while she cited an average relationship between her involvement in community organizations and her college experience. Her peer relationships and her college experience share strong relationship. Kim's culture shared an average relationship to their college experience, while her citizenship status showed a strong relationship with her college experience.

Kim's answers to the interview questions did not seem to align with her boisterous personality. They were very brief and to the point. When I attempted to delve a little deeper, she shrugged and gave me a look as if to say that's all she had to offer. I did not want to push or make her uncomfortable, so I took her answers as she gave them.

It was not until Kim attempted to get a driver license 3 or 4 years ago that she discovered her undocumented status. Because she did not have a driver license, she

could not go certain places with her friends. She graduated from a high school in the Fort Bend Independent School District. She said her high school teachers and counselors did not encourage her to go to college.

*“It seemed like they talked to the smarter kids more.”*

Kim only told her favorite teachers about her status. When asked if they helped her once they were made aware of her status, she said that she doesn't know if they knew how to help her. She believes they would have given her more information if they had it. I asked Kim if her parents encouraged her to go to college. She said,

*“I believe they would have if they really knew the value of it. They definitely want me to succeed. I just don't think they know how to encourage me.”*

Her parents' education level played a part in her choice to go to college only because they did not get a good education and she wanted to make sure that she did not do the same thing they did. She said even though it was not their fault, it is still the way of life for them and she wanted to make sure she had a better life for her, for them, and for her future family. She also felt like her interactions with peers in high school had an effect on her choice to go to college.

*“Not everyone that I went to high school with was motivated and that motivated me more.*

*Even though I wasn't in honors classes I still did well in the classes that I was in... At least better than my friends that I hung out with.”*

Kim said the classes that she took in high school affected her decision to go to college in a strange way. She believed that just because she was not in AP or honors classes, most people thought she could not do it. *“So I figured I would prove them wrong and still go to college anyway.”*



When asked what types of relationships she had, Kim stated that most of her peers were her friends that she grew up with. These were friends that she went to elementary, middle, and high school with. She said that the effects of her peers from high school on her college experience had been mostly good. If there were any negative experiences, they made her want to go out and do better. As far as negative peer relationships, some people tried to tell her she could not make it, but she wanted to make sure that she showed them that she could do better than them.

Kim decided not to get involved in organizations on campus because she was not really on campus that much. She said she went to class and then home for the most part. She said she did not get involved on campus but she was very active in her church. She was active with the little children at church. *“I like kids. That’s why I want to be a teacher,”* she said.

She agreed that there was a difference between associates and friends. She said associates were people who you might hang out with occasionally.

*“Friends are those people that when something is going on or not going good, they are the ones you want to call and share it with.”*

She mostly interacted with the people from her church because those were some of the same people that she spoke of earlier that she grew up with. She said that some of them were associates and some of them were friends.

*“Of course in every group there are some people who are closer than others.”*

Kim met a few people outside of church that she considered associates or friends, but not a lot. These were people that she met in class or through other friends. With her associates, they may go hang out downtown or do something social. With her friends, she

said, they would actually go to each other's houses and they talked on the phone a lot. Depending on what was going on in the neighborhood or in the city would dictate how often she interacted with her associates. She interacted with her friends almost every day. She said her friendships were strong because

*"We've known each other for a really long time so we know how we will react to things, how we feel about things and people, in the end we're just a lot alike."*

They studied together and tutored each other. The classes that they had that were alike or the same put them together a lot. Whenever they saw something that they know another person may need, they were sure to get that information not just for themselves, but for their friends as well.

Kim said she was very involved in her culture, especially religious observances. Her whole family was very heavily involved in the Catholic church and she was there several times a week. She attended Spanish mass and her mother was a very devout Catholic.

*"Sometimes I feel like it's a bit much, but it is such an integral part of who I am. Maybe that's why me and my friends are so close... Our families are very similar...our beliefs are the same... We handle situations alike."*

Almost all of her friendships were with other undocumented people, but the friendships came out of time and involvement in church. When asked about whether being involved in her culture affects her relationships with others outside of that culture, she said,

*"Sometimes they make jokes about the Catholic church, or about illegals... It hurts my feelings but I don't always tell them it does."*

Kim believed her culture definitely had a certain perception of education and that the perception was very dependent on gender. She believed that education was not at the top of the priority list for people who were trying to figure out how to feed their families. She said the females were sometimes discouraged because they should have been home helping to take care of their families.

*“The daughters should stay home until they are married. Then they go from being controlled by their father, to being controlled by their husband.”*

She did not have any other issues that she believed affected her college experience.

### **Connecting Themes**

Several overarching themes emerged in the discussions with the students which connect the perceived support structures and their association with college experiences of the participants.

**Disappointment.** Disappointment was expressed by several participants but in different ways. Sara was disappointed with her financial situation and not being able to finish school in a reasonable amount of time because of having to work. His culture and his undocumented situation was a source of disappointment for Francisco. Francisco felt that the people in his culture were not as intellectual as he and therefore he did not connect with them. Also, being undocumented was a situation that caused him not to be able to pursue the professional opportunities that he would have liked. Diego was extremely disappointed with his mother and her choice to leave the family. He felt that she was the reason that he was in the situation he was in.

**Support and connection.** Feelings of support and connection were apparent as well. Sara experienced support seemingly in every area of her relationships. She was the

most connected across all types of relationships. Her family, friends, and high school teachers and counselors all supported her through her journey in higher education. Francisco's support came from his friends. He also had strong connections to those outside of his culture and gravitated towards those in authority. Friends from childhood were Kim's strongest connections. She also received support from certain people in her family. Diego's support and connections seemed to appear during college. His friends became his family and he connected strongly to college administrators.

**Disconnection.** Being distinct and set apart was another emergent theme. Francisco's feelings of being set apart showed the strongest in this theme. He felt completely disconnected from those in his culture. He did not believe they had the same goals or intellectual ability. Francisco even placed geographical separation between himself and other people of his culture. Kim's religion and participation in that religion set her apart from most of the people her age, according to her. Her friend base was primarily composed of those who also participated in that religion and its customs. Diego expressed that his undocumented status caused him to feel very set apart from others in a way that the other participants did not. These themes show the connections among these students. Examination of the theories and policies presented in the review of literature provides further connections and themes among the participants.

**Astin's I-E-O model.** Astin's I-E-O model speaks of three sets of elements that define college outcomes. *Inputs* refers to "the demographic characteristics, family backgrounds and academic and social experiences that students bring to college" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p.53). What a student encounters while in college is what he calls the *environment*. Beliefs, values, skills, and characteristics that a student has after

college are what Astin calls *outcomes*. These three sets of elements give insight to the before, during, and after phases of a college student's experience.

When considering *inputs*, ethnic identity, culture and resident status, in addition to academic and social experiences, are used to help to contextualize the student experience. In this study, the participants all identify as Latino and are undocumented. Their individual countries of origin vary a little, however. Three are Mexican, and one is El Salvadoran. Even within those cultures, there are several subcultures self-identified. How a student identifies will affect how they interact with their peers.

One of the inputs from Astin's model for this group is parents' education level. The education level of the parents of the participants ranges from none to secondary. These students have parents who not only did not go to college, but who primarily only finished lower secondary (or middle school). Sara has one parent who has a secondary education and Francisco has one parent who has no formal education at all. Kim's parents' education level played a part in her choice to go to college only because they did not get a good education and she wants to make sure that she does not do the same thing they did. She said even though it was not their fault, it is still the way of life for them and she wants to make sure she has a better life for her, for them, and for her future family. Students who are the first generation of their family to be born in the United States do not know what to expect at college and they struggle with this unknown aspect. When this uncertainty is coupled with an undocumented status, the struggle is no longer strictly academic.

The second dimension of Torres' (2003) theory speaks to this point as well. Torres (2003) states that students who are the first generation in the United States

generally do not know what to expect at college and this presents a struggle for them. First generation Americans have to balance the expectations of their parents and those of college. For some, the idea of what to expect in college is introduced in high school. Academically, Kim was the only student who did not participate in honors or AP classes in high school, but all four students experienced an academic environment in high school where there was a separation between those who were encouraged to go to college and those who were not. Kim's high school teachers and counselors did not encourage her to go to college. She said that she did not know if they knew how to help her. Even though three of the students did participate in advanced classes, they were not given large amounts of information about how to pursue a college education. When asked about the amount of exposure to information about college that Francisco received in high school, his reply indicated that a low amount of information was given. A couple of the counselors may have encouraged in word, but not necessarily in action. There did not appear to be a direct correlation between the level of encouragement received in high school and grade point average in college. Sara and Francisco stated that the types of classes taken in high school helped them decide to go to college.

An additional input, socioeconomic status, plays a large role in the analysis of these students. Socioeconomic status (\$20,000-\$40,000) and receipt of in-state tuition benefits coincide in this study. The one student, Sara, who did not receive in-state tuition benefits, was also the middle-income student who worked to pay for classes. Sara was also not involved on campus or in the community because of her need to work. In the beginning of the study it is mentioned that ability to earn is largely connected to educational attainment and that is evidenced in the sample. All four participants

identified the stress that accompanies the lack of resources. This lack of resources was something that was a driving factor in the participants' decisions to go to college. For example, Sara was encouraged to go to college because she does not want to struggle in the same manner as her parents.

The environment a student experiences on a college campus is another piece of Astin's model that helps to explain their outcomes. Sara showed a lack of interaction with administrators in college. She also stated she had not received any support from college campus teachers or administrators. She never revealed her status and believed that was why there was no support. Based on her lack of information about resources available to undocumented students, interactions with campus administrators could have made a difference in her experience. For example, she was not aware of the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA) and during her interview I informed her about it and printed an application for her. Francisco exhibited better relationships with professors and administrators in college with little to some interaction, but his strongest relationship was between his involvement in campus organizations and his college experience. Francisco spoke of having had a lack of resources. He did not know what was available to him and his first semester "went very badly because of that." After finding an ally in one of the professors on campus he was able to resolve his financial issue and continue his education. Interactions with campus faculty and staff can be turning points for a student's college experience. Providing information on how to secure resources, in these instances, can allow the students to focus on school and not worry about how to pay for it.

Involvement in campus organizations and in the community while in college contributes to the environment that a student experiences on campus (Komives & Woodard, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kim said there was no relation between her involvement in campus organizations and her college experience because she was not involved on campus. Her involvement was in her religious community and she cited an average relationship between her involvement in community organizations and her college experience. Sara was not involved either on campus or in the community and exhibited the greatest amount of disconnect from the college experience. Diego was the most involved and cited that involvement was one of the reasons for the great college experience that he enjoyed. Table 1 consolidates the information that pertains to external factors and involvement from the questionnaires and interviews. Based on this table, a majority of the participants received little information in high school about college, need financial aid to stay in college, and believe there is a strong relationship between campus involvement and college experience.



Table 1

*External Factors and Involvement that Affects College Experiences of Undocumented Latino College Students*

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Information received about college while in high school              | 3 out of 4 participants                            | Little information received                       |
| Receipt of financial aid and ability to stay in college <sup>a</sup> | 4 out of 4 participants                            | Strong relationship                               |
| Campus involvement and college experience                            | 3 out of 4 participants<br>1 out of 4 participants | Average to strong<br>No relationship              |
| Community involvement and college experience                         | 2 out of 4 participants<br>2 out of 4 participants | No relationship<br>Average to Strong relationship |

*Note:* <sup>a</sup> Rather than financial aid being the reason she could focus on school and not worry, one student was not receiving financial aid and therefore could only take a few classes at a time due to working.

**Home environment.** Torres' Situating Identity Theory (2003) states that the demographics of the environment where the student grows up has an impact on how they identify themselves and their cultural orientation. This is different from the environment mentioned previously that Astin theorizes. Astin's theory speaks of environment as what a student encounters while in college. Students from a diverse neighborhood, high school, and other surroundings had a strong sense of ethnicity and enjoyed the diversity around them. The student who grew up in a majority white community had little to no cultural connection. In fact, the student who lived in the suburbs, Francisco, mentioned how his family intentionally avoided "stereotypical Mexican behavior."

While the participants' high school environments may not have been consistently supportive scholastically, they had peers that encouraged them to choose to attend

college. Sara said of her peer group, “We were all very active and we all pretty much motivated each other.” Diego and Francisco did not experience encouragement at home. Both of them spoke about the lack of availability of education for their families. Sara and Kim’s experience was encouragement from their families because of that lack. Their families wanted them to do better than they had done and they used that desire to push them to pursue a college education. Table 2 reflects the components that make up the participants’ backgrounds. These items were self-reported by the participants during the questionnaire and interview.

Table 2

*Background of Undocumented Latino College Students*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Time in US                                  | 11 to 19 years  |
| Honors/AP classes in high school            | 3 out of 4  |
| GPA in college                              | 2.8 to 3.5  |
| Mother’s education levels <sup>a</sup>      | 1-primary<br>2- lower secondary<br>1- unknown         |
| Father’s education levels <sup>a</sup>      | 2- lower secondary<br>1- secondary<br>1- no education |
| State financial aid recipients <sup>b</sup> | 3 out of 4  |

Note: <sup>a</sup> Primary=elementary school; Lower secondary= middle school; Secondary – high school. <sup>b</sup> One of the students worked her way through school. The question of how the participant works to have money for school was not posed for privacy and comfort reasons.

**Family influence and generation in the United States.** Students have a deeper ethnic identity based on the depth of involvement on the part of the parents in cultural activities, such as speaking Spanish at home and attending Latino social functions, according to Torres (2003). Kim had family support but it was difficult for her to gain complete acceptance of her decision to go to college because of her gender. As mentioned earlier, the perception in her family was that females should be at home taking

care of the family. Diego had support from his family in theory, but it was never openly voiced. Being told “Don’t do bad in school” was his father’s form of encouragement. Sara’s support was expressed through sharing of stories and encouragement to do better than her family had done. Her father was the only one out of the four participants’ who had a secondary education. Francisco said that his relationship with family outside of his immediate family was weaker because they thought it was more important for him to be in a relationship. They asked him if he had a girlfriend but they did not ask him how school was going. He believed that his parents’ education level had something to do with this choice to go to college because he knew he did not want the life they had.

**Perceived status and privilege.** Torres (2003) also identifies that self-perception of status in society is defined as the person’s perception that there is some type of benefit or privilege when compared with others. In an attempt to gain an understanding about whether her culture has a certain perception of education and whether that perception is dependent on gender, Sara was asked to give her opinion. She said, “Yes. Things are changing but education is limited. By 21 or 22 [a Mexican female] should already be married and trying to have kids.” This statement suggests a perceived status of being less valuable than a man when it comes to education and their privilege to continue their educational journey.

Francisco’s perception of status and privilege was that there were people around him in high school that were better off than him. He said that he wanted to do better than those who had a better life than him; to prove that he could do better with less. In college, Francisco’s bottom-up perception continued into the intellectual realm by only choosing to consult a professor during his difficulty because it was someone with

authority and experience. He also had a top-down perception of intellectual status with people within his own culture. He said that he found it difficult to develop relationships with people from his culture because he was drawn to people who were intellectual and, in his words, “typically there [were] not a lot in [his] culture.” His ideas of status and privilege continued in a geographical aspect. Francisco described his ideas about the settlement of undocumented Mexicans in the city. He said that there were differences in where people from Mexico settled (in his words, the suburbs versus the hood).

Diego’s perception of status and privilege was centered on issues of race and citizenship status. He considered it a privilege for white people to not have to always think about the implications of racism. Involvement in or understanding of Diego’s culture affected how he interacted with his associates and friends because he said they sometimes made comments about people of other races and those comments offended him, affected how he looked at them, and led him to have a very negative view of them. Diego, like Francisco, did not feel that his culture’s perception of education was based on gender.

In addition, Kim’s status issues centered on types of classes she took in high school. She believed that because she was not in AP or honors classes, most people underestimated her ability to achieve academically.

**Ethnic identity.** Torres (2003) says that students have a deeper ethnic identity based on the depth of involvement on the part of the parents in cultural activities, such as speaking Spanish at home and attending Latino social functions. Roehling, et al. (2010) describes stages of ethnic identity - unexplored, exploration or moratorium, and achieved. Based on information gathered from the participants, Francisco appeared to be in the

unexplored stage. In this stage, the student has an identity that has no real definition. It shows the messages that are received from the community and their family about their ethnic group. Francisco's family's conscious effort to not live in an area or avoid holidays and gatherings that are common among their Mexican culture reflect an unexplored ethnic identity. He said that he made an attempt to participate in his culture, although typically his friends were not a member of his culture. Diego's embrace of what he defined as a Chicano culture placed him in the exploration stage where the student begins to explore what it means to be a member of their specific ethnic group. He said he grew up thinking with a Chicano mentality, which to him meant a mixture of two different cultures and accepting that both cultures are very rich. According to Roehling, et al. (2010), the exploration stage is believed to be triggered by some type of event such as discrimination. Diego exemplified someone in this stage when he talked about differences between himself and white people, but also between him and documented students. Lastly Kim and Sara reached the achieved stage. In this stage, students understand what their group membership means and have a sense of belonging to that group. Kim said she was very involved in her culture, especially religious observances. Her whole family was very heavily involved in the Catholic church (which she related as a cultural and not just religious thing), and she was there several times a week. She attends Spanish mass and her mother is a very devout Catholic. Sara's family was also very involved in their culture including speaking primarily Spanish at home, celebrating Mexican holidays, and believing old Mexican folklore.

**In-State Tuition (IST) Policies and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals**

**(DACA).** In the state of Texas, undocumented students are allowed to pay in-state resident tuition. While these students cannot qualify for federal financial aid, they do qualify for state grants and scholarships. For those undocumented students deciding to pursue higher education, this policy which allows them access to financial assistance, is significant to their persistence in institutions of higher education. On the questionnaire Sara reported an average relationship between her receipt of financial aid and her ability to stay in college, however this relationship was an adverse connection when compared to the other three participants because she was not able to take the traditional 12-15 hours per semester because she did not receive financial aid. Francisco, Diego, and Kim received state financial aid through the TASFA, as well as academic scholarships for Francisco and Diego, and all three said that financial aid was absolutely essential in their ability to stay in college. Francisco elaborated, saying that outside of not being able to take advantage of all financial opportunities, being undocumented limited him in his opportunities to work, prevented him from being able to secure identification until DACA was passed, and had not been able to drive. He often studied on his own instead of with his friends because geographically it took him a long time to get to the campus due to the fact that he had to ride the bus. He believed that with the new policy, however temporary, it would drastically change the opportunities available to him and give him the option to work.

Diego's limits in being undocumented came in the form of several paid internships and some scholarships that he was more than qualified for in his opinion, but because he was undocumented, did not have those to put on his resume. He was accepted

to the internships but was not able to continue in the process because they could not legally pay him. These participants illustrate the importance of in-state tuition and the DREAM Act. While the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is not the DREAM Act in its entirety, it gives a reprieve and some hope to those who find themselves in an undocumented, SB 1528 eligible situation. The in-state tuition policies allow the undocumented students who dare to dream to pursue one aspect of life through education. The DACA and DREAM Act (if passed) would allow them to live the rest of their lives without the fear or stress of being discovered. Failure to pass the DREAM Act or continue DACA will leave these students in a state of educated limbo. They will be able to pursue an education, but not have the ability to use the knowledge they have gained in a legal work environment.

**Peer relationships.** Social support takes on five forms according to Snell and Janney (2000). Providing information about daily events, emotional support, granting access to others, helping, and aiding in decision making are the forms that Snell and Janney (2000) define. Most peer relationships encompass two or more of these forms. No two relationships can be replicated exactly or planned. In the midst of navigating their daily worlds, undocumented students have to be able to understand these varying relationship statuses. Mueller and Cooper (1986) posit that peers are united by belonging to the same 'world'. Varying parts of this world are divided by Snell and Janney's forms. These forms are expounded upon in the following sections.

***Providing information.*** The daily functioning of the University and programs across campus is important in the life of a college student. Those students who are connected to social networks will find out about events, deadlines, and special

information that will help them to navigate the college experience. Sara, Diego, and Kim all stated that they studied with their peers, tutored each other, and shared academic information such as deadlines or campus resources with each other. Diego said he and his friends shared lots of things with each other in reference to financial aid. That helped him a lot when he was trying to find resources, and he wanted others to have the same access. He also shared information in the movement for passage of the DREAM Act. Kim said members of her peer group would see something that they knew another person may need, and they were sure to get that information for themselves and their friends as well.

*Emotional support.* Consolation during a crisis or support during a happy event can help to solidify a friendship. According to Perez and Cortes (2011), peers play a large role in assisting students in dealing with various challenges. Undocumented students who are more familiar with higher education and its processes are critical to supporting their peers. Diego had some experience with being an undocumented student on a college campus, so he found it important to help those students who were struggling with the position he was once in himself. The friends that Sara shared the same culture with were closest to her because she felt she could trust them more. Those friendships that evolved out of being undocumented were easier for her because, according to Sara, she could identify herself with people who were in the same situation and going through the same thing. She said that they could be there for each other and talk about private things often.

Francisco could be open with his friends and they supported him no matter and this support is what made his friendships strong. His relationships that he did have with people from his culture evolved out of the common bond of being undocumented. Diego



shared that he felt very alone before discovering relationships with people like him (undocumented college students). He said, “Once in college, I found students like me and they became my family throughout college. I was able to have friends like me and the burden wasn’t as difficult. A friend is someone who is willing to take off their own shirt for you. They are willing to do everything possible to be there for you.” Kim said her friendships were strong because of familiarity. “We’ve known each other for a really long time so we know how we will react to things, how we feel about things and people, in the end we’re just a lot alike.”

***Access granting.*** On a peer level, granting access involves introducing friends or associates in one circle to other friends and associates in another circle. Activities that all of the participants cited as things they do with their friends are access granting activities. Going to dinner, the movies, and going on road trips all promote the introduction of members of one circle to members of another. Even those that do not consider some their friends, but rather associates, participate in access granting activity when they form study groups or engage in outings with co-workers or other associates.

***Helping relationships.*** Introducing a student to an advisor and the financial aid office, lending a book, or helping someone move are examples of helping relationships. Diego spoke about a friend who would drive him to another city for doctor’s appointments even though the friend had class. Francisco exhibits better relationships with professors and administrators in college than he did in high school. The information and resources that they have allows him to be involved in a helping relationship with them.

Table 3 is a snapshot of the types and frequencies of interaction the participants reported during the questionnaire and interview.

Table 3

*Interactions of Undocumented Latino College Students with Teachers and Administrators, Family and Peers*

|  | Ratio                    | Frequency                          |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mother <sup>a</sup>                          | 3 out of 4               | Some to frequent                   |
| Father                                       | 4 out of 4               | Some to frequent                   |
| Other family members <sup>a</sup>            | 3 out of 4               | Some                               |
| Students in high school                      | 4 out of 4               | Frequent                           |
| Teachers and administrators in high school   | 3 out of 4               | Some to frequent                   |
| Students in college outside of the classroom | 4 out of 4               | Frequent                           |
| Professors in college                        | 4 out of 4               | Some                               |
| College administrators                       | 2 out of 4<br>2 out of 4 | Some to frequent<br>None to little |

*Note:* <sup>a</sup> The same participant that showed no interaction with his mother also reported no interaction with other family members.

Sara, Francisco, Kim, and Diego are 4 students out of the 5% of eligible undocumented high school graduates that make the choice to go to college, but their stories are representative of that demographic. They are the first in their family to grow up primarily in the United States, have parents that do not have advanced education, are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and have varying types and depths of peer relationships. These students are challenged to navigate a system that is foreign to their parents thereby taking away (in most instances) the ability for their parents to provide support in the form of knowledge about higher education in the United States.

Chapter 5 will delve deeper into the information presented in this chapter to give us a clearer picture of the experiences of the 4 participants and how it relates to the literature.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The financial stability, global competitiveness, and overall function of society are partially a result of the contributions of educated individuals (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). As mentioned in previous chapters, it is essential that the citizenry be educated in order for the society to thrive. As it pertains to education, it is important to understand the [Latino] population, more specifically the undocumented [Latino] population, because of that population's exponential growth (Gonzales, 2011). Latinos comprise almost 85% of the total estimated undocumented population (Flores, 2010b, p. 243). It stands to reason that if the Latino population is progressing toward becoming the largest population, then they must be educated in order for the nation to operate at its premium level. "Our supply of skilled labor is central to the vitality of the U.S. economy. It is no coincidence that the expansion of American higher education occurred as the nation was enjoying economic growth and global economic domination. "Education was a primary driver of that growth" (Carnevale & Rose, 2012, p. 13). It is increasingly important to the nation's economic health to raise the educational attainment of the [Latino] population (Gonzales, 2007).

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions in order to have a more intimate understanding of undocumented students:

- What are the types of peer relationships undocumented Latino college students identify in their college experiences?

- How do peer relationships affect the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students at a Tier One research institution in the Southwest?

This research study was completed to begin the investigation around a gap that does not explain the intersection of the theories and policies discussed herein. Through the case studies that were conducted, we were able to see what kinds of effects peer relationships have on college success for these undocumented Latino students, positive (encourage completion/persistence, social release, etc) or negative (distraction, discouragement, etc.).

### **Discussion of findings**

Several applicable theories and policies were found in the literature that shed light on the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students.

The quadrant hypothesis presented in Figure 1 is developed out of the peer relationship literature that posits that important coping and college success skills are developed through social relationships (Snell & Janney, 2000) and that student development and success are strongly tied to support systems that are comprehensive (Casazza & Bauer, 2006). Snell and Janney (2000) cite that a positive relationship was found between the presence of social competence and absence of negative behavior. Casazza and Bauer (2006) also mention the potential negative effect of peer relationships. These ideas are brought together to develop Figure 1.

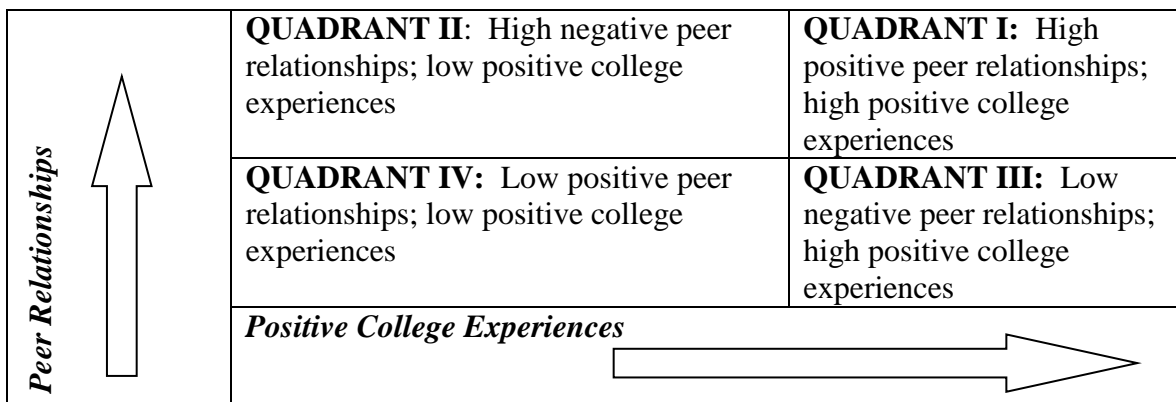
|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <br><i>Peer Relationships</i> | <b>QUADRANT II:</b> High negative peer relationships; low positive college experiences | <b>QUADRANT I:</b> High positive peer relationships; high positive college experiences  |
|   | <b>QUADRANT IV:</b> Low positive peer relationships; low positive college experiences  | <b>QUADRANT III:</b> Low negative peer relationships; high positive college experiences |
|   | <i>Positive College Experiences</i>  |   |

Figure 1. Peer Relationships and Positive College Experiences

**Types of peer relationships.** Before the discussion of how peer relationships affect college outcomes, there needs to be a common understanding of what types of peer relationships the students identified. The literature outlined several types of relationships and the responses from the participants aligned with the literature.

Involvement in campus organizations and in the community while in college contributes to the environment that a student experiences on campus, as well as the development of peer relationships. The organizations that the students chose to get involved in were primarily deliberate. By getting involved, they increased their chances of developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Komives & Woodard, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to the contextualists' world hypothesis view, a culture defines peer relations. Peer relations indicate the purposes and shared beliefs that are useful to a culture (Mueller & Cooper, 1986). Two of the participants spoke of how they developed peer groups because the type of organization they were involved in had a membership that was composed of people who cared about the same cause (i.e. the DREAM Act). These peer relationships were centered on common ideas and views. This can also mean

that the student is experiencing a peer relationship that is comfortable, giving the student a sense of belonging in that space.

The student who grew up in a majority white community and had little to no cultural connection fit into the aspect of Torres' (2003) theory about the demographics of the environment where a student grew up having an impact on how they identify themselves and their cultural orientation and Mueller and Cooper's (1986) mechanists' view which states that peers elicit a sequence of responses from each other in peer relations. His desire in developing peer relationships was to make intellectual connections evidenced by his wanting to converse and problem solve with his peers. He did not feel, however, that those in his culture could fulfill that desire. In fact, he mentioned how he found it difficult to develop relationships with those in his culture because he did not think they were intellectual enough. This intellectual type of peer relationship is valuable to this student, but unfortunately it comes at the cost of him devaluing the people who are like him culturally.

Students can meet and connect to others like them when the space is provided. Social support and motivation from their peers is important in a way that is different from that of adults or those in helping situations. Behavior is often replicated. If a student sees a friend that is making positive choices and doing well, that student is likely to do the same. According to Perez and Cortes (2011), students who were not in the best of circumstances but still persevered, made positive choices, and did well were sources of inspiration for other students. Development of social competence and interaction skills can occur in the classroom, student organizations, the home, etc. The greater the student's levels of ability to navigate the social scene in a way that is appropriate to and

expected of that environment, the more likely the student is to participate socially. All of the students indicated that they had healthy social relationships. One student was very connected to peers in her family, while another was heavily connected to peers from her church. These connections are positive because of the strong support they receive. However, Person and Rosenbaum (2006) point out that a student who does not have any prior contacts at college are more compelled to reach out and make friends as opposed to the students who tend to rely heavily on their already existing family and friends.

Information sharing is another type of relationship that was revealed. This relationship was discussed both within peer groups, as well as with teachers, counselors, and administrators. The responses from the participants and information provided in Person and Rosenbaum's 2006 study are in lockstep. The participants reported that a low amount of information was shared with them in high school about college. This same sentiment was expressed by the students in Person and Rosenbaum's (2006) study:

“students reported that high school counselors and advisers play only a minimal role in getting students prepared for college...Teachers encouraged them to attend college, although it is unclear how much information these teachers provided...Although these numbers are small, they indicate that college recruiters may be one of the few sources of college information available to students from families with low levels of education” (p.55).

Perez and Cortes (2011) identify that due to their lack of familiarity with the U.S. education system, undocumented students are less likely to know the requirements necessary or the process of applying to college.

This informing type of relationship takes slightly different shape when peer relationships are developed between incoming or new college students and those who have had the college experience (even if for a short time). The current, or older, students are able to share information, resources and experiences with the new students who have no idea how to navigate the college experience.

Emotional, supportive and helping relationships were the same with these participants. In various ways the participants spoke of how their family and friends supported (or did not support) them. One student who had little to no support at home found it difficult to reach out and develop relationships with people with similar characteristics. Another participant who experienced that same lack of support did the exact opposite by finding a source of support and family among his peers in college. Seidman (2005) believes it is important for the student to feel that he or she belongs at the university, a conclusion partially supported by this study). The other two maintained their emotional support by continuing their relationships, while adding only a few more, with their family and childhood friends. These students exhibited similar patterns with the relationships that aided them in decision making. The student who found it difficult to reach out to peers culturally similar to him sought aid in decision making from a professor as a result of his search for intellectual relationships and his perception of who possessed knowledge. The other three stated that they talked to their friends regularly about decisions. These regular conversations were also connected to the information they stated they sought out and shared with each other. This presents a picture of their willingness to help their peers be as successful as them in the college navigation process.



It is critical for undocumented students who are more familiar with higher education and its processes to support their peers (Perez & Cortes, 2011).

These are the varying types of relationships that the undocumented Latino college students in this study identified. Next, the contribution of these types of relationships to the students' college experiences will be investigated.

**Peer relationship contribution to college experiences.** Important coping and college success skills developed through social relationships (Snell & Janney, 2000) can help these students navigate the issues they face in college. Casazza and Bauer (2006) state that student development and success are strongly tied to support systems that are comprehensive. Wentzel (2005) also argues that those “who enjoy positive relationships with peers also have a tendency to be engaged in and even excel at academic tasks more than those who have peer relationship problems” ( p. 279). This point is important to this study because it shows that the persistence of the students can be affected by peer relationships. Academic accomplishments have been identified in literature on peer relationships as a positive and significant correlate of peer acceptance and approval. The literature supports this study's hypothesis that students with positive peer relationships will most likely have positive college outcomes.

The first participant developed great relationships in college. This is coupled with the fact that she had great relationships with her parents, other family members, and teachers and peers in high school. However, she was very unfamiliar with the Senate Bill 1528 subject and the financial aid process for undocumented students, despite her desire to become an immigration lawyer, which could lead one to believe her helping relationships were not very developed. Sara had positive relationships and had a positive

college experience. Any issue that she experienced that could be perceived as negative was her lack of financial aid.

One of the student's demographic characteristics, family background, and academic social experiences put him in a position where he did not want to develop peer relationships with students who were of the same culture as him. This was a result of the negative viewpoint that he has of people in his culture. Torres (2003) suggests that those who lived in a majority-focused environment believed the stereotypes about others, but did not believe they were included or seen that way. His focus was more on the academic social experiences, so he was drawn to people who were of similar academic stature as him. The other male participant was quite the opposite. He developed strong peer relationships with people who were the most like him because of his feeling of being alone. The second female participant did not develop many new relationships in college because her background placed her in a position where she was consistently around childhood friends. Her comfort with her long time group of friends stopped her from feeling that she needed to make more friends. All of the participants except Sara cited stories of how their positive peer relationships helped them to have a better college experience. This is in line with what Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) highlight in Astin's theory about the quality of peer relationships ultimately having an effect on the participant's college outcomes.

Another input to consider is the parents' education level. Lower secondary (middle school) was the most reported education level that the participant's parents completed. The education of Francisco's father stood out to me because I did not provide "none" as an option on the survey. There seems to be a connection between the lack of

parental education and his desire to form peer relationships with those who are intellectually connected combined with his disconnect from those in his culture. He fits into the mold of the student that Perez and Cortes (2011) speak of who mostly associate themselves with the majority in college and see diversity as more conflicting and confusing than those students who do not share an Anglo orientation. While his relationships are not culturally-based, Francisco's peer relationships are most beneficial for him academically. Sara, the student with the strongest relationships, also was the participant who had the parent with the highest education level.

The various areas of perceived support discussed here (peer relationships, family, financial, high school, culture, involvement) appear to have made a difference in these participants' outcomes of attitudes and success. Flores-Gonzalez (2002) shows that the relationship students have with their teachers and the environment of the schools they attend are attributable to the academic success of Latino students (p. ix). It is not only the internal aspects of students, but the external aspects as well, that dictate their success. The students have to balance two worlds and be bicultural. Domanico (1994) speaks of how bicultural students are alienated from their families and others in their culture when they acculturate (p. 199). This is most evidenced with Francisco. He has made a decision to be least like those in his culture and more like the majority culture.

Based on information provided by the participants, the hypothesis posited at the beginning of this chapter in Figure 1 was supported. Students who had mostly positive peer relationships also had positive college experiences. Figure 1 showed four quadrants and all of the students fall into Quadrants I and III. Quadrant I suggests that a student with high positive peer relationships would have high positive college experiences. Diego

and Francisco had the most peer relationships in college and also the most positive college experiences. Sara and Kim fit into Quadrant III which states that students with low negative peer relationships would have high positive college experiences. While they did not have a high quantity of peer relationships in college, they had low negative peer relationships. None of the participants fell into Quadrants II or IV. Quadrant II suggests that students with high negative peer relationships would have low positive college experiences. Quadrant IV suggests that students with low positive peer relationships would also have low positive college experiences.

### **Limitations**

While the number of students who participated is appropriate for a case study sample size, more students would have allowed for an expanded evaluation of the types of peer relationships and how those relationships shape the students' experiences. The students who responded gave in-depth information that was useful in answering the empirical questions, but a larger group would have given a richer volume of data from which to glean the analysis.

These students were being investigated in a context that is different from the typical kind of institution that most students attend. The research informs us that most Latino, and specifically undocumented, students attend 2-year, community colleges, not 4-year Tier One research institutions. This taken into consideration, these students' experiences may be slightly different from that of a community college student.

Another potential limitation is the informal manner in which the participants were recruited. There were two individuals who agreed to ask students to participate. One recruiter was an administrator at the university. She works in an environment where

high-achieving students are the norm. The other recruiter was a self-reported undocumented student who recruited participants from among her friend group. While the information was sent out to a wide group of students in the first instance, the second recruitment source was among a group of friends so there could possibly have been similarities between those recruited from this source.

### **Implications for practice**

The information collected in this study may help college administration to understand an aspect of Latino college student success that goes beyond the classroom. The administrator manipulates the environment in which the instructor operates and interacts with parents and students, therefore cultural awareness is particularly important for those administrators (Spindler, 1955). It is imperative for institutions to create environments that are welcoming and supportive to allow undocumented students to fully immerse themselves and integrate into campus life (Perez & Cortes, 2011). Immersion in campus life is an active impetus for development of peer relationships.

Instituting programs that intentionally facilitate more peer interaction may provide the necessary environment for positive peer relationships to be developed. These programs have the potential to expose students to other students who they may not have connected with otherwise. Differences in major, background, or even personality could separate populations of students that have potential to thrive because of the interactions with peers. Academic achievement can also be positively influenced when schools help structure students' peer relationships (Gibson et al, 2004). Study groups, tutoring, idea sharing, and encouragement as a result of peer relationships can help to move the students in a positive academic direction.

Contreras (2011) speaks of campus experiences that could include challenging experiences with school officials and isolation. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) also mention that “if the college environment is not receptive to the group, students may become isolated” (p. 52). Those campus experiences could also include interaction with supportive individuals in offices on campus that have a reputation of being welcoming in order to minimize this potential isolation. These are common experiences among underrepresented students, especially at large selective public institutions similar to the one where my study is conducted (Contreras, 2011). Degree attainment is ultimately harmed by the negative effect on educational aspirations and withdrawal behavior among Latino students because of these students’ perceptions of prejudice or discrimination on campus. Contreras (2011) goes on to say that the lack of legal status of undocumented students has the potential to heighten levels of isolation and discouragement as well as incidents of discrimination by individuals with anti-immigrant sentiments.

Human resources and supports by peers and administrators/faculty are critical to the success of the students. Institutions must allow other students, staff and faculty the liberty to support students in a way that makes sense to the student – within legal and moral confines, of course. Programs and centers that give students a place to be and to belong help give them something of which to be a part. Casazza and Bauer (2006) tell us these support systems cannot be created in vacuum, however. The support cannot stop at the doors of the academic disciplines but each institution must integrate it fully into their culture. Support for the students from their family, financial aid, and the community that they develop in campus and community organizations had an effect on their college success. Understanding this information will enable those administrators to look closely

at the policies, resources, and practices of their college or university and determine if they are providing a climate that is conducive to the success of the students. Student affairs professionals who are responsible for campus and community organizations could evaluate their involvement with the students in the organizations. Through this evaluation they could find out whether the organization is truly fulfilling its purpose and becoming a support system for the students who are participating in the organizations.

### **Implications for future research**

While this research has started the conversation, there is much room for future exploration. A larger pool of participants with varying generational, citizenship, and socioeconomic statuses would provide an expansive amount of information that would lead to a deeper analysis. A cross-comparison of these aspects could show what items have a direct effect on the others and what does not. This analysis will allow those with whom the power lies to make changes to do so in an informed manner. There also is the opportunity to examine other aspects of support outside of peers, family, financial aid, and involvement. Potentially a researcher could delve more deeply into high school curriculum (types and levels of classes), college-going culture of the participants' high school and home, college administrator involvement, or campus programming. The continuation of DACA or the passage of the DREAM Act would also add another dimension to this body of research. This dimension currently cannot be established because of the recent activation of DACA and current inability for DREAM Act to pass. The more information that is gathered about this population of college students, the greater the ability to aid them in their college success.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative comparative case study explored what types of peer relationships undocumented Latino students identified, and the effect those peer relationships had on their college experiences. The theoretical framework proposed that peer relationships were linked to one's cultural, social, high school, financial, and family backgrounds. The literature implied that external situations influenced college experiences. However, there was a lack of literature to inform how peer relationships affect college experiences. This study seeks to begin a discussion around that gap.

According to the 4 participants interviewed in this study, peer relationships did have an effect on their experience in college. While the position of the participants within certain themes varied, the underlying conclusion of the interview data in this research study is that peer relationships (coupled with cultural and other background inputs) have an effect on the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students. An opportunity for students to initiate and develop those relationships should be a priority for student affairs administrators with positive college experiences and successful college outcomes being their end goal. Their end goal brings this study back to the introductory idea of a college education being synonymous with an educated citizenry who is able to strengthen the economy and society in general.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Eligibility Criteria**

- Have been born on or after June 16, 1981.

Have come to the United States before your sixteenth birthday.

- Have continuously lived in the U.S. since June 15, 2007.
- Have been present in the U.S. on June 15, 2012, and on every day since August 15, 2012.
- Not have lawful immigration status. To meet this requirement (1) you must have entered the U.S. without papers before June 15, 2012, or, if you entered lawfully, your lawful immigration status must have expired as of June 15, 2012; and (2) you must not have lawful immigration status at the time of your application.
- Be at least 15 years old. If you are currently in deportation proceedings, have a voluntary departure order, or have a deportation order, and are not in immigration detention, you may request deferred action even if you are not yet 15 years old.
- Have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, be an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or U.S. armed forces, or “be in school” on the date that you submit your deferred action application. See below for more information about meeting the “be in school” requirement.
- Have not been convicted of a felony offense. A felony is a federal, state, or local criminal offense punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year.
- Have not been convicted of a significant misdemeanor offense or three or more misdemeanor offenses. See below for more information about offenses that may disqualify you.

Quoted directly from <http://www.nilc.org/FAQdeferredactionyouth.html>

- Not pose a threat to national security or public safety. (DHS has not defined what these terms mean but has indicated that they include gang membership, participation in criminal activities, or participation in activities that threaten the U.S.)
- Pass a background check.

## **Appendix B**

### **Survey**

### Instructions and Notifications

Thank you for voluntarily participating in this research. If at any point in this questionnaire you become uncomfortable answering the questions, you may make the informed decision to leave. Also, you are free to skip any questions that cause you discomfort while answering. If you choose to skip any questions, please highlight it to let me know that you saw the question but are choosing not to answer it. Also, feel free to ask for clarification. I will keep you informed of any new information that may affect your willingness to continue to participate.

### Privacy Statement

All information gathered on this questionnaire and in the interview will be kept strictly confidential. There will be no identifying information to tie you to your responses.

You are taking this questionnaire on a computer so that your handwriting cannot be identified. This will ensure greater anonymity. If you need any instruction on how to use any of the technology or have any concerns, please ask me and I will help you.



## Survey

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

Citizenship: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_

What types of classes did you take in high school? (*circle all that apply*)

Regular Honors AP/IB

Classification (*circle all that apply*): Fresh Soph Jr Sr

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

What career do you plan to pursue?: \_\_\_\_\_

Current cumulative GPA/GPR: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your family's average income? **Bold one**

Less than \$20,000

\$20,001-40,000

\$40,001-60,000

More than \$60,000

What is the highest education level your mother *completed*? **Bold one**

Primary

Lower secondary

Secondary

Post-secondary

Graduate Degree

What is the highest education level your father *completed*? **Bold one**

Primary

Lower secondary

Secondary

Post-secondary

Graduate Degree

1. Do you receive any type of financial aid? Yes No
2. If yes, what is the source (select all that apply)? State Federal  
Private/Foundation
3. If yes, what type (select all that apply)? Grants Loans Scholarships Work  
Study
4. Are you currently involved in any organizations on campus? Yes No
5. If no to item 4, were you ever involved in any organizations? Yes No
6. Are you currently involved in any organization in the community (including  
church or religious communities)? Yes No
7. If no to item 6, were you ever involved in any organizations? Yes No

This next section is going to use the following scale.

**Please use this scale for your answers.**

1=no interaction 2=little interaction 3=some interaction 4= frequent interaction

**Relationships** in this questionnaire refer to *family, friends, education administrators, or fellow student organization members. For example, I have interaction with my mother sometimes.*

8. I have \_\_\_\_\_ with my **mother** specifically. 1 2 3 4
9. I have \_\_\_\_\_ with my **father** specifically. 1 2 3 4
10. I have \_\_\_\_\_ with my **other family members**. 1 2 3 4
11. I had \_\_\_\_\_ with **students in my high school**. 1 2 3 4
12. I had \_\_\_\_\_ with my **teachers in high school**. 1 2 3 4
13. I had \_\_\_\_\_ with my **administrators in high school**. 1 2 3 4
14. I have \_\_\_\_\_ with **students in college outside of the classroom**. 1 2 3 4
15. I have \_\_\_\_\_ with my **professors in college**. 1 2 3 4
16. I have \_\_\_\_\_ with my **administrators in college**. 1 2 3 4

This next question is going to use the following scale.

**Please use this scale for your answers.**

1=none 2=low 3=medium 4=high

17. Rate the amount of exposure to **information about college** that you received in high school. 1 2 3 4

This next section is going to use the following scale.

**Please use this scale for your answers.**

1=no relationship 2=weak relationship 3=average relationship 4=strong relationship

18. Rate the relationship between your receipt of **financial aid** and your **ability to stay in college**.  
1 2 3 4
19. Rate the relationship between your **involvement in campus organizations** and your **college experience**.  
1 2 3 4
20. Rate the relationship between your **involvement in community organizations** and your **college experience**.  
1 2 3 4
21. Rate the relationship between your **peer relationships** and your **college experience**.  
1 2 3 4
22. Rate the relationship between your **culture/nationality** and your **college experience**. 1 2 3 4
23. Rate the relationship between your **citizenship** and your **college experience**. 1 2 3 4

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Questions**

## Interview Questions

1. I will ask clarifying questions dependent on answers on questionnaire.
2. Did your parents' education level have anything to do with your choice to go to college?
3. Did your interaction with peers in high school have anything to do with your choice to go to college?
4. Did your parents encourage you to go to college?
5. Did your friends in high school encourage you to go to college?
6. Did your high school teachers or high school counselors encourage you to go to college?
7. Did the kind of classes you took in high school effect your decision to go to college?
8. Did your school have a "college going culture"?
9. Did you get involved in organizations or do volunteer work in high school?
10. What has been the effect of peers in high school on your college experience?
11. Did you get involved in organizations on campus or in the community when you got to college?
12. If yes, what organizations and why did you get involved?
13. If no, why did you choose not to get involved?
14. Do you think there is a difference between associates and friends? If so, explain.
15. Did you meet any people that you interact with outside of those organizations?
16. Do you consider them associates or friends?
17. Have you met others outside of the organization that you consider associates or friends?
18. How did you meet them?
19. What types of activities do you and your associates do? Friends do?
20. How often do you interact with your associates? Friends?
21. Would you say your friendships are strong relationships?
22. What makes them strong or not?
23. Do you and your friends talk about private things? How often?
24. Do you and your friends study together or tutor each other? How often?
25. Do you and your friends share academic information such as deadlines or campus resources with each other?
26. How involved in your culture are you (do you participate in cultural observations, wear cultural dress, etc)?
27. Are your friends of the same culture as you?
28. Does involvement or understanding of your culture, affect how you interact with your associates/friends? In what way?
29. If they are, does sharing the same culture make you closer or make you trust them more?
30. Does your culture have a certain perception of education? Is that perception dependent on gender?
31. Does your choice of major have anything to do with your culture or citizenship status?

32. Have you received any support from campus teachers or administrators? What kind?
33. Has that support – or lack of – made a difference in your college experience?
34. Do you believe that there are any other factors that may have an effect on your college experience?

## **Appendix D**

### **Identification of Potential Subjects**

### Verbal Recruitment Script

The administrator /student recruiter who is recruiting students will be notifying potential participants of the following:

This project is to study the effects of peer relationships on the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students. The students will be asked to complete a session comprised of a questionnaire and interview. The total session should take approximately 2 hours or less. The session will occur at a mutually agreed upon place that allows for comfort and anonymity of the students. The student will be given a \$25 Wal-mart gift card for their participation upon completion of the total session.

They will be asked to determine the accuracy of the following information:

1. Age
2. Year and status (currently enrolled or not) in college
3. Undocumented status
4. Phone number and email address

The questions will be asked in this order so that they are not asked unnecessary information if they are disqualified early on.

Once the students have informed the administrator/student recruiter that they are willing to participate in the study, I will contact them based on the information provided. I will then confirm items 1-3 above.

## **Appendix E**

### **Consent**



## UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

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PROJECT TITLE: THE EFFECT OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS ON THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Mosadi Porter from the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Houston as a part of a dissertation study conducted under the supervision of Dr. Cathy Horn.

## NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which peer relationships contribute to the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students at a Tier One research institution in the Southwest? The study is 1 month in duration.

## PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 4 subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

This research will involve a set of qualitative case studies. This requires that several participants will participate in interviews that will allow for the collection of stories and information. The instruments used will be a survey/questionnaire, interview, and observation notes. There will be no audio recordings used for privacy and comfort reasons. Demographic information will be collected from the questionnaire. I will take the opportunity to write observation notes based on initial entry and introductions. I will note appearance, demeanor, accent, and anything that may occur during our time together. Every subject will receive the same version of the survey in the same format. Also, all subjects will be asked the exact same interview questions.

Each participant will be asked for 3 hours of their time. There is only a total time commitment as I do not intend to have subsequent sessions.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this project is confidential and your responses will remain anonymous.

### RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences.

### BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand the college experiences of undocumented Latino college students.

### ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

### INCENTIVES/REMUNERATION

The incentive for participation in this study will be a \$25 Wal-Mart gift card.

### PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

If you have any questions, you may contact Mosadi Porter at 713-454-1990. You may also contact Dr. Cathy Horn, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-5032.

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204).

Principal Investigator's Name: Mosadi Porter