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AB 540: TUITION WAIVER POLICY IN CALIFORNIA. HOW  
STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS INFLUENCE  
ACCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION

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Lynn Ji-Lin Wang

Dissertation Committee Approval:

Eugene Fujimoto, Chair  
Carol Lundberg, College of Education  
Expert Practitioner, Renée DeLong, Cerritos Community College

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## ABSTRACT

This study was an exploratory qualitative study examining the experiences of front-line student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers and their dilemmas in interpreting and implementing AB 540/AB 2000. Study participants shared their narratives on how they navigated through difficult conversations, irate students, institutional policies, and state legislation. Many times, front-line professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers are the first and only people who interact with undocumented students prior to the first day of class. Front-line professionals may be the make-it or break-it persons for undocumented students to realize their dreams of attaining post-secondary education. These professionals utilized their knowledge, resources, and networks to help students navigate the college-going process; however, campus policies and state and federal laws, departmental silos, lack of professional development, resources, guidance, personal experiences, and knowledge of the Dreamers population dictated the capacity to which they could help. With the delay in receiving guidance from management and institutions and the demand to serve a large number of students, front-line admissions and financial aid professionals found it difficult to exercise self-discretion, which resulted in diminished levels of care and attention.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
DEDICATION .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	2
Problem Statement.....	7
Purpose Statement.....	8
Research Questions .....	9
Significance .....	9
Scope of the Study .....	11
Assumptions of the Study .....	11
Study Delimitations .....	12
Study Limitations .....	12
Definitions of Key Terms .....	13
Organization of the Dissertation .....	15
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	16
Philosophical, Historical, and Theoretical Foundation.....	17
Philosophical Foundation.....	17
Historical Foundation .....	20
Theoretical Foundation .....	23
Review of the Empirical Literature.....	32
Conceptual Framework.....	33
Immigrant Youth in the U.S. and their Education Attainment .....	33
Acquired Factors that Influence Immigrants' Academic Success .....	35
Student Affairs Professionals and Academic Success .....	40
College Admissions and Undocumented Students.....	42
Financial Aid and Undocumented Students.....	45
Case Study .....	51
AB 540 Implementation in California .....	52

In-State Tuition Waiver Implementation Examples .....	57
Chapter Summary .....	60
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	62
Qualitative Research .....	64
Research Design .....	67
Research Methods .....	68
Setting.....	69
Sample.....	73
Data Collection and Management .....	75
Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	77
Chapter Summary .....	80
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....	81
Qualitative Methodology .....	81
Theme One.....	82
Theme Two.....	102
Theme Three .....	119
Chapter Summary .....	122
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	125
Summary and Interpretations .....	127
Implications.....	138
Implications for Theory .....	138
Implications for Policy .....	144
Implications for Practice.....	147
Recommendations.....	151
Create Equitable and Inclusive Policies.....	151
Prioritization on Staff Development .....	153
Prioritization on Departmental Collaboration .....	154
Prioritization on Dream Centers.....	155
Recommendations for Future Research.....	157
Summary of the Dissertation .....	158
REFERENCES.....	161
APPENDICES .....	180
A. RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	180
B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS .....	182
C. AB 540/AB 2000 FORM.....	188

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>Page</u>
1.	Description of Research Participants .....	85

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Theoretical foundation diagram.....	25

To my mom and dad for your sacrifices,

and

To my students and their families for their resiliency as immigrants.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Current research data indicate secondary education completion disparities among documented and undocumented immigrants and native-born students. The statistics are sobering. For example, “Forty-nine percent of undocumented students will drop out of high school as opposed to only 11% of native born students” (Golden Door Scholars, 2012, para 2). Without a high school diploma, it is challenging to pursue post-secondary education.

Undocumented students are not accessing higher education at the same rate as documented students and native born students (Abrego, 2006). Factors such as immigration status, race, ethnicity, family income, family structure, parent expectations, college/university policies, as well as federal and state level legislation impact the disparities between college students (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007; Contreras, 2009). Attempts by institutions to address the disparities led to creation of dream centers and professional staff tasked with supporting undocumented students. This study examined the experiences of these workers who are crucial players in working with undocumented students in a time of rapidly changing laws, public perception, and cultural context.

California law AB 540 was created with the intention of a fair tuition policy for all high school students entering college in California. A fair tuition policy

ensures college access to public, post-secondary institutions for all students with the intent of increasing the state's productivity and economic growth. AB 540 was intended to allow all persons, including, but not limited to, undocumented immigrant students who meet the requirements, to be exempt from paying nonresident tuition at California public postsecondary institutions (California Dream Act, 2001).

Education service workers in admissions, financial aid, and student affairs interact with undocumented students more frequently post-AB 540 because of the access to state level aid. Therefore, in the course of their job, these professionals exercise self-discretion in attempts to remain fair to all students while being aware of students' individual needs. Often times, student affairs professionals cope with changes in the student population and campus policies by developing practices and procedures to meet students' needs (Lipsky, 2010).

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the importance of obtaining higher education for immigrants and undocumented students and the role of service workers in education who interact with students in office of admissions, financial aid and Dream Resource Centers. Identifying the challenges facing immigrant and undocumented students provides an opportunity to review AB 540 and develop a lived understanding of the professionals responsible for implementing the policy.

### **Background of the Problem**

Immigrants can contribute to the growth of the United States' (U.S.) economy through education and vocational training. For the last two decades,

native-born workers have not been able to meet the rapid growth of the U.S. labor force. In order to meet this change, the U.S. will need to rely on the immigrant labor force to ensure its economic well being (Center for American Progress, 2014). Immigrants will play a large role in the growth of the economy in the near future. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), in the last few years immigrant workers are employed in the occupations with the fastest growth. In the U.S., foreign-born workers accounted for 17% of all employees in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010). Gonzales (2009) concluded that immigrants and their children would be responsible for the entire growth of the U.S. labor force between 2010 and 2030.

The ability to obtain higher education is important for economic advancement in the United States. According to the data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2014), the U.S. is falling behind in awarding undergraduate degrees. President Obama (2011) forecast a need for an additional 10 million college graduates by the year 2020.

Undocumented and immigrant students are a group that can help the nation meet that goal.

“On the larger level, everyone has the right to education. . . . Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit” (United Nations, 1948, Article 26). Human rights are fundamental rights for all human beings; they are not privileges for some. Therefore, higher education must be equally

accessible to all, regardless of their documentation status within a particular nation.

### **Undocumented Students**

An undocumented student is someone who entered the U.S. without proper immigration documents or someone who entered the country legally as a nonimmigrant, but later never exited the country (Internal Revenue Service, 2014). However, many undocumented students have lived in the U.S. for most of their lives and were brought to the U.S. by their parents at such a young age they had no say in the migration process. Most of these students have learned English, assimilated into the U.S. culture through schooling, and have attended secondary schools in the U.S. (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012).

The AB 540 law was created with the intention of establishing a fair tuition policy for all high school students in California. A fair tuition policy ensures college access to public post-secondary institutions and, therefore, increases the state's productivity and economic growth. Furthermore, AB 540 allows all persons, including, but not limited to, undocumented, immigrant students who meet the requirements to be exempted from paying nonresident tuition at California public post-secondary institutions (California Dream Act, 2001).

The AB 540 law introduced the concept of fair tuition for undocumented students; however, it did not prescribe campus policies and program procedures for student affairs professionals to assist undocumented students in admissions, financial aid, and student support services. Moreover, AB 540 does not provide a structure and outline of who to serve and how to serve them. Thus, education

service workers such as admissions officers, financial aid officers, and student affairs professionals make key decisions on how to implement AB 540.

### **Education Service Workers**

Education service workers serve as student affairs professionals and play an important role in undocumented students' academic success and access because these professionals can mediate some of institutional barriers by exercising self-discretion in providing access for undocumented students.

Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga (2010) explained that college professionals face difficulties serving undocumented students due to the lack of training, lack of streamlined methods to target specific population, and a lack of accessibility to undocumented students who may benefit from services and support. While these college professionals have every intention of servicing undocumented students, many face challenges in actually carry out services (Oseguera, Flores, & Burciaga, 2010).

For example, admission officers can either aid or inhibit undocumented students' access to higher education by their knowledge of campus-specific institutional policies and practices. Chen (2013) stated, "Psychological stress is exacerbated by campus personnel who are unfamiliar with policies regarding undocumented students" (p. 31). Admissions officers may not be acquainted with relevant policies that allow undocumented students to attend college with in-state tuition. Financial aid advisors may not know that undocumented students have access to state funded financial aid and may unintentionally turn students away because they lack a full understanding of current practices and events.

Education service workers serve as the front line in higher education. These front-line workers in education act as “street-level bureaucrats”, a term coined by Lipsky (2010, p. xii) because they implement legislation from the federal/state level to the general public. Gofen (2014) claimed,

Street-level bureaucrats play a key role in policy implementation and are often portrayed as policymakers rather than policy-takers: “The decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures effectively become the public policies they carry out,” argued by Lipsky, 1980 (as cited in Gofen, 2014, p. 473).

The disconnection between the intentions of legislators and the actuality of policy implementation on the street level is called street-level divergence (Gofen, 2014). Street-level divergence is related to how individual street-level workers process the information from their clients, their personal perceptions, emotions, attitudes, experiences, values, as well as to the perceptions and knowledge of other actors in their policy network (Jones, 2001, 2003; Keiser, 2010). Street-level divergence may create policy change. Related to AB 540, informal practices as adopted by education service workers may influence students’ access and success in institutions of higher education. Therefore, it is crucial to understand street-level practices that are related to AB 540 and to undocumented students because they can influence policy change for future undocumented students.

AB 540 was created to increase access to higher education for all California residents yet the law does not provide the necessary structure, information, and resources that are required for student affairs professionals to respond properly to individual cases. Analysis of AB 540 can be made by applying Lipsky's (1980) claim that policy implementation cannot be fully understood until one focuses on the street-level service providers. Lipsky argued that the street-level providers' individual decisions and discretion to choose become the adopted and implemented bureaucratic policies. Lipsky (2010) stated, "The decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressure, effectively become the public policies they carry out" (p. xiii). For undocumented immigrants seeking access to education, these decisions can define their experience.

### **Problem Statement**

According to The Urban Institute, only 5% to 10% of undocumented immigrants continue to pursue post-secondary education after high school graduation (Herrera, Garibay, Garcia, & Johnston, 2013). The reasons for this phenomena are multi-leveled.

Most of the current literature revealed economical, personal, and transitional challenges for undocumented college students (Albrecht, 2007; Aramburo & Bhavsar, 2013; Burkhardt et al., 2012). However, the passage of AB 540 influences the work of admissions, financial aid, and student affairs officers. This research examined the lived experiences of student affairs

professionals who were responsible for creating access for undocumented students in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers. Currently, knowledge of student affairs professionals' interactions with undocumented students is limited to what student affairs professionals are doing in order to implement the law. It is important to hear from student affairs professionals who have face-to-face, hands-on interactions with undocumented students while implementing campus policies based on AB 540. Evaluating the effectiveness of AB 540 requires understanding of how student affairs professionals cope with the changing student population and with campus policies and procedures post-AB 540.

Gaining the perspectives of student affairs professionals helps to evaluate the effectiveness of AB 540 because the informal practices adopted by street-level bureaucrats can eventually influence policy change (Gofen, 2014). Hence, this study focused on understanding the experiences, including possible challenges and policy implementation progresses, student affairs professionals undergo when carrying out AB 540 on their college campuses.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of student professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers since they interpret and implement AB 540 related campus policies as related to undocumented students. This study evaluated the effectiveness of AB 540 and the impact of the legislation on college campus policies and procedures from the viewpoint of student affairs professionals.

Under the theoretical framework of Lipsky in *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980; 2010), street-level bureaucrats/student affairs professionals are often faced with dilemmas. At times lacking resources and structures, student affairs professionals are expected to serve the entire undocumented population fairly and at the same time to be conscious of their individual needs.

### **Research Questions**

In order to accomplish this purpose, the following research questions framed this study:

1. How do current student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers describe their experiences in interpreting and implementing California Assembly Bill 540?
2. How are higher education departments in these areas currently interpreting and implementing AB 540 on their campuses?
3. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe how campus policies and procedures on AB 540 changed over time?
4. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe their management of the demands and changes of the interpretation and implementation of AB 540?

### **Significance**

This research study is significant because it provides information about undocumented immigrants' navigation into higher education through the lived experiences of student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and

Dream Resource Centers who are charged with interpreting and implementing AB 540 legislation/policies on college campuses. On the policy level, this study reviews potential policy changes through the informal practices of education service workers.

This study utilized individual interviews to understand how AB 540 law has affected college access for undocumented students from the viewpoints of student affairs professionals. In addition, this study provides recommendations to colleges and universities on policies and strategies to help dream center directors, admissions officers, financial aid officers, and university administrators develop best-practices and provide cost-efficient and effective services for undocumented students.

The research is important and can make a significant contribution to educational leadership because this research analyzed the interpretation and implementation of key legislation impacting undocumented immigrant students. This research will assist policy makers in gaining a better understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of AB 540 from those who interpret and implement the policy on a daily basis.

Furthermore, this study will assist college administrators create new policies and supportive programs for undocumented students. Furthermore, for those college campuses that already have AB 540 resource centers (Dream Centers), this study can uncover best practices when working with undocumented students with various needs based on income, gender, race/ethnicity, and other factors.

Finally, the results of this study will allow higher education institutions to be better prepared in addressing the needs of their undocumented students in admissions, financial aid, and student support services/programs. By knowing the needs of a diverse body of students, higher education institutions can make informed decisions on how to better prepare and support these students towards college completion.

### **Scope of the Study**

The current study focused on student affairs professionals who worked at either four-year public or two-year public post-secondary institutions. All participants worked with undocumented students regularly in admissions, financial aid, or at dream centers through hands-on, face-to-face interactions. This next section addresses the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Some assumptions for the study were that participants responded truthfully to the interview questions and that student affairs professionals would feel the need to share their experiences of working with undocumented students. Furthermore, it was assumed that these student affairs professionals had experienced dilemmas and exercised self-discretion when working with this student population through the theoretical framework of street-level bureaucracy as developed by Lipsky (1980). With this lens, the study was limited by the assumption that front-line student affairs professionals faced challenges every day due to the lack of structure when working with undocumented students.

Lastly, it was assumed that the responses from participants were a true reflection of their actual practices at their institution and not altered because they wanted to appear to be equitable to all students.

### **Study Delimitations**

This study focused on student affairs professionals who have front-line interaction with undocumented college students in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers at either four-year public universities or two-year community colleges. This study did not interview faculty and administrators because front-line public service workers are the ones who carry out policy by exercising self-discretion and adopting self-created coping strategies to ensure fairness and efficiency to the public (Lipsky, 2010). Also, this study only sampled student affairs professionals who work regularly with undocumented students through hands-on and face-to-face interactions; it did not interview undocumented students. It did not survey students outside of California because AB 540 was created solely for California residents.

### **Study Limitations**

The limitations of this study included that the interview data from colleges and universities that may not reflect the experiences of all student affairs professionals who work with undocumented students across the country. Another limitation was the time constraints on the data collection and interviewing process due to the time allotted for completion of dissertation research.

## Definitions of Key Terms

*Documented immigrants.* A documented immigrant is an alien admitted to the United States as a lawful permanent resident. Permanent residents are also commonly referred to as immigrants. Lawful permanent residents are legally accorded the privilege of residing permanently in the United States. They may be issued immigrant visas by the Department of State overseas or adjusted to permanent resident status by the Department of Homeland Security in the U.S. (Department of Homeland Security, 2012).

*Undocumented immigrants.* Undocumented immigrants are also known as undocumented aliens or illegal aliens. The terms refer to aliens who have entered the United States illegally and are deportable if apprehended, or aliens who entered the United States legally, but who has lost their rights to be in the United States and are deportable (Internal Revenue Service, 2014).

*Illegal aliens.* Illegal aliens are those who entered the United States without inspection (Department of Homeland Security, 2012). The Associated Press stopped using the term “illegal” because Hispanic media organizations argued the term criminalizes people rather than their actions and stigmatizes both immigrants and Hispanics, instead, “noncitizens” and “unauthorized immigration” are being used (Planas, 2013).

*Undocumented students.* Children born abroad who are not U.S. citizens or legal residents and who attend U.S. public schools are undocumented students. These children are guaranteed an education in U.S. public schools through grade 12, but may face legal and financial barriers to higher education.

Often times these students have no intention of returning to their birth country because the U.S. is the country where they grew up (College Board, 2015). As they reach adulthood, the day-to-day lives of these students become restricted. These students cannot legally work, vote, or drive in most states. Furthermore, they live under the psychological distress of being deported to countries of which they are not familiar (Gonzales, 2009).

*AB 540 students.* According to University of California Office of the President (2014), students classified as nonresidents, as well as undocumented students may be eligible for in-state tuition. However, students must meet all of the following requirements to be eligible for AB 540: (a) attend a California high school for three or more years, including the 9th grade; (b) graduate or will graduate from a high school in California or its equivalent; and (c) have signed the California Nonresident Exemption Request which states that students have met all the requirements to qualify for AB 540 status. AB 540 students do not have to be undocumented immigrants.

*Street-level bureaucrats.* This term refers to public service workers with whom citizens typically interact. These public service workers have discretion in exercising authority. In addition, they are restricted and limited by their work structure and, therefore, they cannot achieve ideal conceptions of the practice (Lipsky, 2010).

*Street-level divergence.* Street-level divergence occurs when implementation differs from its stated intention and is considered inevitable in the implementation of policy (Hill, 2006).

*Student affairs professionals.* Admissions, financial aid, and student affairs officers who work in Dream Resource Centers for undocumented students are student affairs professionals. These professionals can be either full-time or part-time employees.

*Allies.* Institutional allies are faculty, student affairs, and academic affairs administrators who have had a proven history of advocating for greater access and retention of undocumented students within their professional setting (Chen, 2013).

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 provided context regarding undocumented students and how student affairs professionals are instrumental in providing access to higher education. The background and foundation of this topic relies on understanding the socio-economic benefits of obtaining a college degree and the challenges faced by undocumented students. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature pertaining to the research questions. Chapter 3 contains the research design, including data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings, and in Chapter 5, conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations for policy and practice are presented in the context of the findings.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

According to The Urban Institute, only 5% to 10% of the undocumented immigrants in the U.S. continue to pursue post-secondary education after high school graduation (Herrera et al., 2013). Legislation designed to assist undocumented immigrants' access to higher education is influenced by actions and advice of education service professionals on university and community college campuses. Currently, information is limited on how student affairs professionals interpret and implement laws like AB 540. In order to understand the effectiveness of AB 540 and the influence of education service professionals on policy interpretation and implementation, this literature review focused on equality and equity issues in education framed by the influence of street level bureaucrats. Chapter 2 begins with a review of the philosophical, historical, and theoretical foundations of this study. This is followed by an extensive review of the empirical research related to the implementation of legislation intended to benefit undocumented immigrant students. This prior research on student affairs professionals, undocumented students, and policy implementation in public sectors sets the foundation for the conceptual framework. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key concepts addressed in this research.

## **Philosophical, Historical and Theoretical Foundation**

This research study addressed the role of student affairs professionals on educational policy interpretation and the implementation of AB 540 through campus level policies and procedures related to undocumented students' access and retention in higher education. To frame the study, this review of literature starts with the philosophical, historical, and theoretical foundation for the study.

### **Philosophical Foundation**

The philosophical foundation of this study is grounded in the concept of educational equality and an ethic of care within a society. Education is deeply intertwined into the society and influenced by economics, culture, and politics. Consequently, improving education is vital to the progression of a more equitable society. In order to guide our current education institutions into socially just institutions, Lynch and Baker (2005) and Noddings (2005) advised that a holistic and integrated approach is necessary. A holistic approach allows students to voice their opinions and share their experiences; thus, students feel listened to and appreciated when working with education service workers.

Inequities in power influence educational decision-making (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Power inequities occur when institutional policies and processes enforce exclusion, marginalization, and misrepresentation of their constituents. Across the world, schools and colleges continue to admit students in a hierarchically ordered way, based on perceptions of students' academic abilities, intelligence, and extra-curricular involvements (Lynch & Baker, 2005). As a result, many

students do not have the ability to be admitted to their institution of choice (Lynch & Baker, 2005).

Lynch and Baker's (2005) theory on equality in education served as the philosophical foundation for this study because student affairs professionals are critically involved in undocumented students' pursuit of education equality. Student affairs professionals influence undocumented students' ability to enter college, receive financial aid, pay in-state tuition, and receive other support services through dream centers. Lynch and Baker (2005) believed in equality of love, care, and solidarity. Solidarity is having concern for others. Lynch and Baker (2005) argued that empathy and solidarity is fundamental to the functioning of a democratic society. Therefore, it is important for student affairs professionals to understand and emphasize with the students on the challenges and the struggles of being undocumented.

**Equality in education.** Equality occurs when "in any given circumstances, people who are the same in those respects relevant to how they are treated in those circumstances should receive the same treatment" (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005, p. 55). In comparison to equality, equity is more focused on a specific group. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) asserted,

Equity takes into consideration the fact that this society has many groups in it who have not always been given equal treatment and/or have not had a level field on which to play. These groups have been frequently made to feel inferior to those in the mainstream and some have been oppressed.  
(pp. 103-104)

Lynch and Baker (2005) further suggested that “schools and colleges need to educate their staff and students about the equality-specific issues that arise related to social class, gender, color, nationality, ethnicity, ability, religion and other differences” (p. 147). Through education and the practice of inclusion and case-by-case procedures and processes, colleges can help challenge the inequalities faced among various groups of students. Moreover, a cooperative practice of those who have experiential knowledge of being oppressed by institutional policies and procedures and those who have professional knowledge working in the field of student affairs can create alliances for social change.

**Ethic of care.** Lynch and Baker (2005) highlighted the importance of promoting love, care, and solidarity when working with students. Furthermore, Noddings (2005) suggested that ethic of care is “future-oriented. Its work begins where an ethic of justice often ends” (p. 147). Student affairs professionals who work to meet students’ individual needs are conscious of teaching and helping students to grow emotionally. According to Noddings (2005), satisfying individual needs and interests is critical because “our interests instigate and help us form purposes” (p. 157). Lynch and Baker (2005) also urged institutions to create space or policies that allow the expression of emotions and feelings from students and staff. Lynch and Baker’s (2005) belief about love, care, and solidarity through educational interactions will be explored between undocumented students and student affairs professionals.

Additionally, emotional skills and personal intelligences are often overlooked by academic institutions (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Care, love, and

solidarity work often receives little attention in the formal school setting. The lack of concern for the development of personal intelligences in schools has deprived young people and those who work with students the opportunity to develop the skills needed to address their personal and social concerns. Similarly, Noddings (2005) suggested that educators can easily lose the opportunity to develop students' talents, intrinsic motivation, and the joys of learning by ignoring students' individual needs. The neglect of personal intelligences is often practiced in formal educational settings because of the false belief that being emotional can deter someone from being rational (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Student affairs professionals are compelled to believe that in order to be rational, they must remain emotionless, therefore, disconnecting from their students. In Western and Eastern cultures, being emotional is a sign of subordination and unprofessionalism because it is believed that emotions interfere with the ability to reason.

### **Historical Foundation**

Policies involving immigration in the U.S. have not always been favorable to immigrants in this country. In 2009, there were an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (Hanson, 2009). Some undocumented immigrants came to the U.S. with visitor visas and never left the country, while others crossed the Mexico border into the U.S. (Hanson, 2009). Undocumented immigrants mostly reside in California (24%), Texas (14%), Florida (9%), New York (7%), Arizona (5%), Illinois (4%), New Jersey (4%), and North Carolina

(3%) (Flores, 2010). It is estimated that California is home for over 2.7 million undocumented immigrants (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

Undocumented immigrants gained access to free K-12 education after the *Plyer v. Doe* ruling in 1982. The ruling stated that charging a fee to attend public schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; therefore, undocumented students under the age of 18 were allowed to attend school (Perez, 2009).

Undocumented students over age of 18 have little protection against high tuition. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) (1996) “prohibits states from providing undocumented immigrants with in-state tuition at public colleges or universities unless the same benefit is provided to all American citizens” (Erisman & Looney, 2007, p. 20). IIRIRA outlined that: (a) if public colleges offer in-state tuition to undocumented students, they must offer in-state tuition to all legal citizen students, and (b) the defining of state residency is the respective state’s obligation. IIRIRA did not provide a definition for what constitutes a resident; therefore, each state created its own definition of state residency. Some states argued that granting undocumented students an in-state tuition waiver and legal state residency is a violation of IIRIRA (Hyun & Newburn, 2010).

Currently, at least 20 states allow eligible undocumented students to enroll in public higher education institutions while paying in-state tuition. These states are: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York,

Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Washington (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). However, only five states allow eligible undocumented students to receive state financial aid. These states are: California, Minnesota, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015).

California is one of the most undocumented student friendly states. Aside from AB 540, AB 130, and AB 131, Governor Brown approved AB 2000, SB 1210, and SB 1159 (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). AB 2000 is an addendum to the AB 540 law. AB 2000 ensures that students who graduated high school in less than three years are not deemed ineligible for the AB 540 tuition waiver and state financial aid. In addition to tuition waivers and the Cal grant, SB 1210 allows eligible undocumented students to receive educational loans of up to \$4,000 per semester (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). Having the ability to borrow money is crucial for undocumented students because the loan allows them to close the gap between state financial aid and overall cost of attendance.

Lastly, SB 1159 eliminates the barriers for undocumented students and creates a pathway for them to pursue professional careers and licenses (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). Prior to SB 1159, undocumented students lacked access to careers that require a license or credential since they do not have social security cards or government issued identification cards. SB 1159 is in effect starting January 2016 and all 40 licensing boards in California will consider all applicants regardless of immigration status (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015).

The goal in California is to create a pathway for undocumented students to complete college, enter the workforce, and eventually pay taxes and contribute to

the state economy (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). In order to continue the effort of supporting the undocumented student body, Senator Lara introduced SB 247 on February 18, 2015. This bill encouraged all California public higher education systems to create Dream Centers to provide information and resources for undocumented students (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). This bill mandated California public institutions to support undocumented students with the college application and the enrollment process. The goal of Dream Resource Centers is to increase persistence and graduation rates among undocumented students (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015).

The challenges faced by undocumented students deserve urgent attention from administrators, front-liners, and policy makers. The AB 540 law created a sense of identity for undocumented students by labeling them as “Dreamers” (Abrego, 2008); therefore, undocumented students are increasingly becoming more open about their status and needs. As more undocumented students move through the college pipeline, it is realistic to assume that more undocumented students from high school will be inspired to attend college.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Although administrators and upper management may have the ultimate power when it comes to providing structure and creating policies, student affairs professionals who work as street-level bureaucrats and who exercise self-discretion can provide access for undocumented students as they pursue higher education. Higher education institutions are complex and ever evolving because of the diverse needs of their students. In order to cope with diverse student and

institutional needs, the student affairs profession has become more specialized. Lipsky's (1980; 2010) street-level bureaucracy, Gofen's (2014) street-level divergence, and Meyers and Vorsanger's (2003) coping strategies for street-level bureaucrats frame the understanding of how front-line student affairs professionals affect institutional policies.

Figure 1 displays how Lipsky's (1980; 2010), Meyers and Vorsanger's (2003) and Gofen's (2014) research and theories influence the theoretical foundation of this research. Formal policies such as AB 540 and AB 2000 are being passed down and implemented by front-line public service workers. Depending on the work conditions, front-line public service workers created and adapted coping mechanisms to make their job more manageable. In order to cope with the demands of their clients and the responsibilities of their jobs, front-line public service workers created their own routines and practices. These practices became the actual policies implemented to the public. The gap between formal policies and actual policies is referred as street-level divergence (Gofen, 2014).

**Street-level bureaucrats.** Lipsky (1980; 2010) developed a theoretical construct to address the dilemmas of individuals in public services. Street-level bureaucrats are public service workers who interact directly with people in the course of their jobs and exercise self-discretion in the execution of their work. Lipsky explained that street-level bureaucrats include teachers, police officers, law enforcement personnel, social workers, health workers, and many other public employees who grant access to government programs and services.

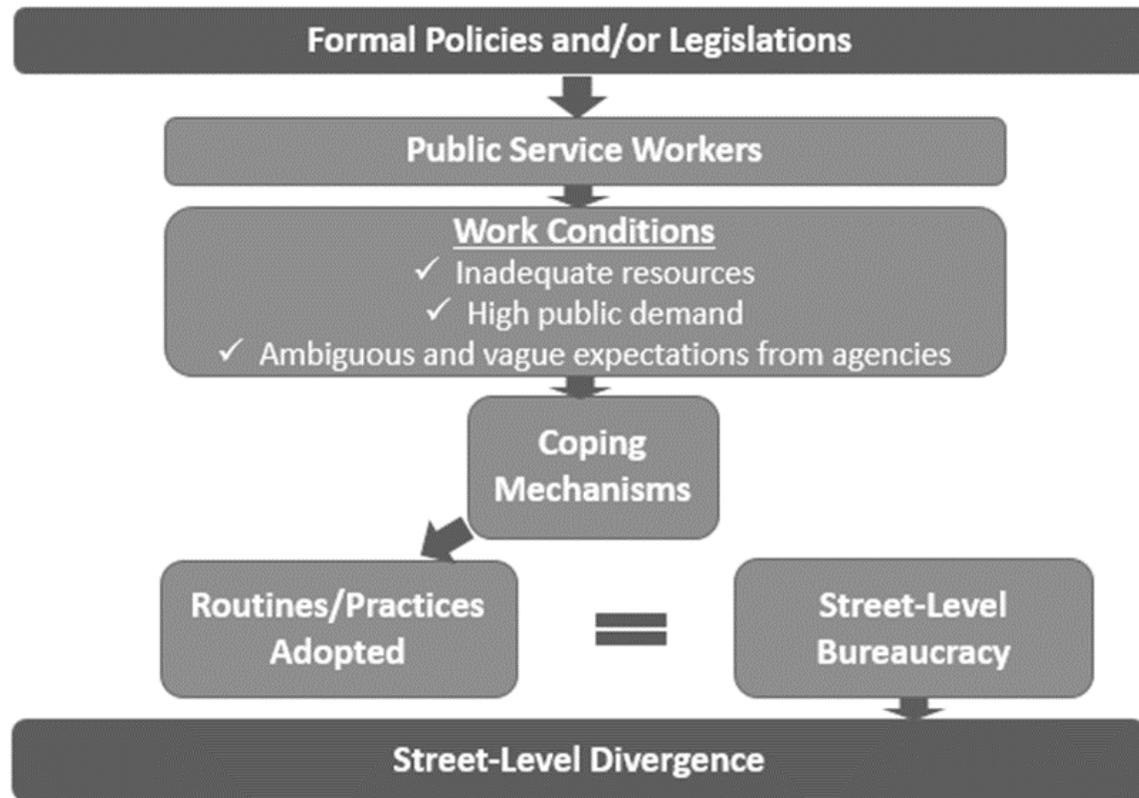


Figure 1. Theoretical foundation diagram.

Despite the nature of their jobs, Lipsky (1980) noted that, “people who work in these jobs tend to have much in common because they experience analytically similar work conditions” (pp. 3-4). Furthermore, Lipsky (1980) argued that street-level bureaucrats employ many of the same coping mechanisms to deal with the daily work conditions as public service workers.

Lipsky’s theory (1980) consists of three components. The first component describes the work conditions that characterize street-level bureaucracies. Public service workers have to work with the general population of people to deliver public goods, such as public education, social welfare, and so forth. The second component of the theory explains that these public service workers

develop a variety of coping mechanisms as they try to function under the demands of their work conditions. The last component describes the specifics of routines of work or patterns of practices these public service workers have adopted.

Work conditions of street level bureaucrats have the following characteristics: (a) resources are chronically inadequate to the tasks workers are being asked to perform; (b) the demand for public services tend to increase in order to meet the supply; and (c) the goals and expectations for the agencies in which they work tended to be ambiguous and vague (Lipsky, 1980). Because of these working conditions, performance and goal achievement seem to be impossible to measure (Lipsky, 1980; 2010). In addition, street-level bureaucrats are constantly battling their supervisors to gain control over their work because there is a need to be able to adapt to unanticipated events and complex situations that occur in their work while remaining flexible and sensitive to the human dimensions of services and the self-regard of the workers (Lipsky, 1980, p. 15).

**Street-level divergence.** As claimed by Gofen (2014),

Street-level bureaucrats play a key role in policy implementation and are often portrayed as policymakers rather than policytakers: “The decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures effectively become the public policies they carry out,” argued by Lipsky, 1980 (as cited in Gofen, 2014, p. 473).

The specialization makes responsibilities more manageable. The specialization of departments is referred to as the “silo structure” of higher education, which means professionals perceive the situation from the point of view of their own specialization and department (Orgera, 2007, p. 11). Although student affairs professional associations provide overarching competencies and ethical guides for the profession (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2010), student affairs professionals, similar to street level bureaucrats, are not prescribed with how to serve their clients with various individual needs. Rather, they are asked to use their judgment to best serve their clients by following institutional and departmental regulations and policies (Orgera, 2007). For example, student affairs professionals may develop coping strategies in order to work with a high volume of students. Professionals who withhold information from unengaged students or those who limit the amount of time spent directly with students are demonstrating forms of coping strategies developed because of their work environment.

Street-level divergence is the disconnection between the intentions of policymakers and the actuality of policy implementation at the street level (Gofen, 2014). Street-level divergence is related to how individual street-level workers process the information from their clients. How they process information is based on their personal perceptions, emotions, attitudes, experiences, values, perceptions, and knowledge of other actors in their policy network (Jones, 2001, 2003; Keiser, 2010). In addition, street-level divergence is related to time constraints. Time constraints influence street-level bureaucrats’ decision-making

process by encouraging them to gather adequate information for producing quick and satisfying solutions rather than optimal or desirable ones (Keiser, 2010).

Street-level divergence can also contribute to policy change. Informal practices that are mostly likely to create policy change are collective in nature, transparent in practice, and other-serving by intent (Gofen, 2014).

Street-level bureaucracy and street-level divergence theories worked well for this study because the study focused on front-line student affairs professionals who interpreted and implemented post AB 540 campus policies in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers. These professionals work with a large population of students, faculty, staff, and administrators to provide services for undocumented students under the intention of AB 540. Due to the \$15 billion cut in public education in 2008 (Martinez, 2009), these professionals were forced to work with less staff and resources in order to meet the growing demand of undocumented students, allies, and advocates. However, adopting Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory produced questions about (a) whether current institutional policies support the needs of the undocumented student body and (b) whether the goals and expectations for student affairs professionals who work with undocumented students are so loosely defined they cannot be measured.

Street-level bureaucracy and street-level divergence are also prevalent in social welfare and other public service agencies. Adopting Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory, Ayon (2009) interviewed child welfare workers to assess the paths to services based on their clients' documentation status and

language abilities. Undocumented and non-English speaking families experienced additional barriers to services, which affected their compliance with court mandates. However, aside from the clients' documentation status and their language proficiency, frontline workers' "knowledge of the welfare system; available resources and their willingness to help families played a role in families' process of accessing services" (Ayon, 2009, p. 612). Consistent with Lipsky's (1980) findings, child welfare workers were selective in choosing the cases that they spent extra time on because of their large caseload and a lack of resources. Spanish speaking and undocumented families were often viewed as extra work; therefore, they were unlikely to be selected for additional support from welfare workers (Ayon, 2009). This study suggested that although child welfare workers wanted and intended to help every family, a lack of the proper resources needed to help non-English and undocumented clients made it less likely that child welfare workers would go above and beyond their duties with these clients.

**Coping strategies for street-level bureaucrats.** Meyers and Vorsanger (2003) suggested four sets of influences that affect street-level bureaucrats' coping and decision-making processes regarding policy implementation. First, street-level bureaucrats' decision-making process can be influenced by the political and administrative superiors' attitude about the importance of the policy. Second, the organizational structure, the ways of conducting business at the operational level, also influences street-level workers' decision-making processes. Third, the knowledge and attitudes of the street-level bureaucrats affects their decision-making process, and fourth, contextual factors concerning

workload, client mix, and other external pressures influence their actions and interactions with their clients.

While Lipsky's (1980) research emphasized the importance of street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation, Higgins and Endler's (1995) research focused on the choices people make in order to cope with stress and required tasks. Street-level workers make decisions based on their own rational, ethical, and professional choices (Brodkin, 2011). As a rational choice, street-level workers develop coping strategies that are either: (a) task-oriented, (b) emotion-orientated, and/or (c) avoidance-oriented (Higgins & Endler, 1995). The primary functions of coping strategies are to (a) manage the problem causing stress and (b) to govern emotions related to the stressors (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The task-oriented coping strategy is problem focused. To reduce the amount of stress created by a problem, one must take direct action to change the situation. In an emotion-oriented coping strategy, the amount of effort one puts in is directly related to the ability to alter the emotional responses to its stressors (Kariv & Heiman, 2005). One can attempt to reframe the problem so that the situation no longer creates a negative emotional response and thus reduce stress (Mattlin, 1990). An avoidance-oriented coping strategy involves avoiding the situation and/or denying that the situation exists. Eventually, one loses hope to improve the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Furthermore, it includes the use of strategies to distance oneself from the stressor or to engage in unrelated activities for the purpose of reducing the feelings of stress (Roth & Cohen, 1986).

Task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies require proactively changing the situation, while avoidance strategies do not attempt to alter the situation. Task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies are associated with better adjustment, while avoidance-oriented coping strategies lead to poor stress coping abilities (Billings & Moos, 1981; Causey & Dubow, 1993; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1993). Finally, Endler and Parker (1999) have suggested that in the long run, task-oriented coping strategies are the most effective strategies when faced with stressors.

**Critiques of street-level bureaucracy.** According to Evans (2011), Lipsky's work did not address the role of management in policy implementation. Lipsky gave insufficient attention to the role of professional status and professionalism and how these two factors affect structure and inform discretionary practices. Evans (2011) advised that, "Lipsky's view of managers as disinterested servants of policy, and street-level practices as the source of policy distortion, is problematic" (p. 373).

Evans (2011) concluded that Lipsky's work needs to be re-examined to include the perspectives of professionalism through the examination of managers. Evans (2011) believed that managers are more qualified to make decisions about legitimate and illegitimate discretion because managers always have the best interest of the organization. Furthermore, managers are pragmatic, and they encourage discretion where it works for the organization. Evans (2011) further stated that managers have the ability to interpret the spirit, rather than the letter, of policy, in contrast to street-level bureaucrats, whose

motivation is more self-interested. As explained by Lipsky (1980), “The role of the street-level bureaucrat is associated with client-processing goals and orientations directed toward maximizing goals” (p. 25).

### **Review of the Empirical Literature**

Current literature shows that barriers such as finances, K-12 academic preparation, college counseling, family familiarity with the college-going process, and inconsistent admission policies affect undocumented students’ pursuit of higher education (Gildersleeve, 2007). Field (2011) stated that over 70% of higher education institutions do not have an admissions policy that specifically denies undocumented students. However, only 36% of higher education institutions have a defined admissions policy used to admit undocumented students (Field, 2011). Undocumented students often cannot find accurate admissions policies online or through admissions representatives because there are limited defined practices adapted by higher education institutions (Oliverrez, 2006). For example, a student mentioned in Chen’s (2013) study shared that the student was told by an admissions officer: “You know, we’re a legal institution, but you’re not so there’s nothing we can do” (p. 91).

Unlike their documented peers, undocumented students choose their colleges based on economic, legal, and familial factors (Lopez & Lopez, 2010). Therefore, undocumented students are mostly going to attend an institution where they can receive in-state tuition, state financial aid, private scholarships, and specialized resources.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in three broad concepts. The first of these is research that addresses immigrant youths' educational attainment and their academic achievement. The second is research that examines how student affairs professionals affect student success and achievement. Finally, research is reviewed that examines the relationships of undocumented students and college admissions, financial aid, institutional resources, and research that addresses campus policies and tuition waivers.

### **Immigrant Youth in the U.S. and Their Education Attainment**

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) explained one of the myths in the immigration debate is that immigrants and their children are unable to assimilate into their host culture. In reality, among undocumented students, English is often the dominant language. In addition to the language, U.S.-born children of immigrants share similar traits with their White counterparts such as their achievement, motivation, and attitudes towards authority. However, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) failed to address undocumented immigrants who were born in a foreign country and arrived in the U.S. at an early age.

Much of the research on the migration and immigration experience focuses on the assimilation process of Caucasian and European immigrants (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). Only recently has research begun to examine how minority immigrant children successfully navigate the U.S. educational system. Ironically, only a few children from various racial and ethnic groups follow the

same trajectories to academic success. According to Kao and Tienda (1995), Asians are most likely to benefit academically from having parents who are non-natives. Meanwhile, Black immigrants perform best in their academics when they were born in a foreign country. On the other hand, Hispanics are least likely to perform well academically because their foreign born parents often have low incomes.

Between 1942 and 1964, there were an estimated 4.5 million border crossings of guest workers from Mexico. This large influx of Mexican migratory workers, essentially a non-assimilated minority group, helps explain the large number of Mexican undocumented immigrants in California (Nguyen, 2011). Other studies have used assimilation theory (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) to explain the experiences of undocumented students in the education system by using qualitative methods (De Leon, 2005). The Pew Research Center (2014) suggested that over 52% of the undocumented immigrants are Mexican; thus, there is a specific need to understand the uniqueness of Mexican undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented students are often first generation immigrants. They face similar challenges to documented first generation immigrants. These students often lack financial stability to provide for higher education, are ill prepared for college from their K-12 experiences, and lack the knowledge of the college-going process (Gildersleeve, 2007; Oliverez, 2006). However, their status as undocumented immigrants poses further threats to their admission to college, their receipt of financial aid, and their ability to work legally in the U.S. In fact, in

some states, such as South Carolina and Alabama, higher education institutions refuse admission to undocumented students (Olivas, 2009). Arriola and Murphy (2010) found that citizenship status limits the financial support for undocumented students, as they are not eligible for federal funds such as the Pell grant, work-study, and federal student loans. Moreover, undocumented students face social barriers as well. In most states undocumented students cannot receive a driver's license. They also cannot fly on an airplane, study abroad, or work on campus due to the lack of government issued identification (Arriola & Murphy, 2010).

### **Acquired Factors that Influence Immigrants' Academic Success**

Most of the literature on undocumented immigrants suggests low academic achievement because of a lack of social, academic, and financial resources (Chan, 2010). However, higher education institutions can create practices and policies to increase retention and persistence for undocumented students. Research suggests that feeling connected, safe, and having a sense of belongingness can counterbalance low socio-economic levels and the lack of resources (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

**College bound identity.** Oyserman and Destin (2010) suggested college expectations are directly related to children's visions of themselves in a future state, which they referred to as the "college bound identity" (p. 1018). Most children desire school success and imagine they will become college bound (Mello, 2009). Unfortunately, expectations are a better predictor of grades for socioeconomically advantaged than for socioeconomically disadvantaged children (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994). As research has shown,

almost 90% of the students in low-income urban schools expected they would attend college; however, only about 50% pursued post-secondary education (Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

Children from low-income communities aspire to perform highly in school and attend college; however, their actual college attainment lags behind their aspirations. Oyserman and Destin (2010) determined an aspiration-attainment gap for low-income, African American and Latino male children. Although children of low-income families desire to excel in school, in actuality, the attainment of a successful identity was difficult unless school, family, and friends supported their pursuits (Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

According to Altschul, Oyserman, and Bybee (2006), in order for immigrant and low-income children to create their college bound identity, they first need to set self-relevant goals about school. Second, these self-relevant goals must feel congruent with other important aspects of their identity, such as their racial, ethnic, gender, and social class identities. Additionally, students must see the challenges encountered along their educational journey as a means to achieve a school-focused future. If immigrant children view these challenges as doable, then the path to attaining a self-relevant goal remains open rather than closed.

**Sense of belongingness.** Sense of belonging is a term coined in the field of psychology and education for adolescents in high school (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). According to Goodenow and Grady (1993), a low sense of belonging to their school negatively influenced urban high school students'

school motivation. Urban adolescents expressed less personal and social connections to others in the school when compared to non-urban adolescents, which affected urban adolescents' school motivation, expectancy for academic success, and belief in their learning ability. For students from low-income areas where family or friends did not provide academic support, having a sense of personal connection with teachers and others were crucial for the development of academic motivation. Adolescents who attended schools that focused on community building and creating a sense of belonging demonstrated more academic success since the adolescents felt cared for and encouraged to participate (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Sense of belongingness means that students feel that they are a vital part of the class and the campus community. Similar to students in high school, students of color in college who actively participated in class and felt more connected to the campus were more likely to achieve academic success (Brooker, 2007). As explained by Osterman (2000), "Interpersonal, instructional and organizational strategies that support positive interaction among students and other members of the school community should enhance students' sense of community" (p. 360).

In addition to sense of belonging, Hougaard (2013) argued that institutions should re-conceptualize belongingness through cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) instead of trying to increase students' academic success through the theoretical idea of belongingness. CHAT offers a transformative activist point of view that utilizes practical educational practices beyond dialectical conversations

in the classroom. Through the lens of CHAT, students are not viewed by the teachers as having low motivation, rather, students have a different kind of motivation based on the students' life experiences and backgrounds. Haougaard (2013) posited, "The CHAT perspective offers an integrative theorization of how learning processes are never separate from the students' process of becoming a contributing person with a meaningful life agenda" (p. 32). Through CHAT, academic motivation stems from knowing that the pursuit of postsecondary education leads to more stable jobs and eventually financial stability. Aside from being financially stable, CHAT encourages students to be motivated because schooling can lead to personal satisfaction. Additionally, some students become motivated to obtain higher education knowing that education will enable them to help others (Hougaard, 2013).

Perez's (2009) work proved that resiliency can be built through a strong supportive network from the college. In spite of social and education barriers, students with support from educational professionals were able to bounce back from challenges and transfer from community colleges to four-year universities. One student named Julia stated, "The community college that I attended was like home. I had some of the best teachers that I've ever had. It was the advisers, teachers, and administrators that I networked with who were key in getting me transferred to a four-year university" (Perez, 2009, p. 103).

**Access to financial aid policy and information.** Tierney and Venegas (2009) concluded that low-income and first generation students often overestimated the cost for higher education. Researchers suggested the need to

address the low college attainment among low-income and first generation students from a cultural perspective. The issue with the lack of college attainment for low-income and first-generation college students is not because of the lack of dollars in federal and state financial aid. Rather, post-secondary attainment is based on how individuals maneuver the process of how to obtain financial aid. Low-income and first-generation college students and families do not have the proper resources to gain information on how to qualify and to apply for financial aid. Therefore, there is a disconnect between financial aid and access for low-income students and their families. Brooks (2005) suggested that low-income and first-generation college students do not apply for financial aid because they do not believe that there is aid available for them.

Tierney and Venegas (2009) urged policy makers to examine the lives of low-income, first-generation college students and their families in order to learn about the challenges of accessing financial aid and how financial aid influences access. Furthermore, researchers advised the importance of understanding how low-income, first-generation college students interpret various college-going messages and how these different messages influence ones' decision to attend college. Creating a systemic and longitudinal framework for information about financial aid is critical. Knowing the needs of the student population and providing access to knowledgeable adults to guide low-income and first-generation college students through the process can improve college access (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). "If financial aid access is to be improved, then messages must be crafted with their audience in mind" (Tierney & Venegas,

2009, p. 384). In order to understand college access and financial aid from a cultural perspective, it is crucial to understand how individuals interpret the phenomena of affording college and develop materials about financial aid that are culturally aware and user-friendly (Tierney & Venegas, 2009).

### **Student Affairs Professionals and Academic Success**

Student affairs divisions typically include enrollment management, financial aid, housing, counseling, student activities, student academic support, and more. Student affairs professionals have expanded their professional interests in student development and are making an attempt to be an integral part of the academic programs on campus (Sandeen, 2004). Student affairs professionals have frequent contacts with students; therefore, student affairs professionals should be expected to know and understand the diverse academic and personal backgrounds of their students so they can be effective when advocating for these students. Sandeen (2004) asserted that the understanding of the student population can improve student recruitment and retention.

According to the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (2003) entitled, *Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success*, students' graduation from college is based on (a) academic preparation for college, (b) graduation from high school, (c) enrollment in college, and (d) persistence in college to bachelor's degree completion (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Student affairs professionals provide college students with support and resources in order to achieve a positive and successful experience. It is the role of student affairs professionals to educate the whole student and integrate

student life with learning (NASPA, 2015). When institutions provide the necessary support and resources, students persist to graduation (Nerini, 2008).

Students and their institutional environments contribute to student success. In addition to improving teaching and learning inside the classroom, creating conditions where institutions motivate and inspire students in and outside the classroom can further assist with student success. Student success is achieved when there are partnerships between students, faculty, academic administrators, and others to help all levels of learning and personal development (American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 1996). Student affairs professionals assist students with talent development and they hone in on developing life skills and competencies that enable students to live a productive, satisfying life during and after college (ACPA, 1996).

Tinto (2002) argued that five conditions must be met in order to achieve persistence for college students: (a) expectations, (b) advice, (c) support, (d) involvement, and (e) learning. In addition, most first-year college students require some form of support. Support may be provided in structured forms such as in summer bridge programs, mentor programs, student clubs, or as support from everyday contacts with faculty and student affairs professionals (Tinto, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial to look at the quality of contact between undocumented students and front-line student affairs professionals. Moreover, students are more likely to succeed in a setting where students are treated as valued members of the institution (Astin, 1984, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), the frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and other students is an

independent predictor of persistence. Therefore, it is exciting for undocumented students to know that their institution values their success and existence by offering a dream resource center on campus where they can gain the support of student affairs professionals.

Student affairs practitioners influence student success or failure. Practitioners play an important role in improving student success because they are knowledgeable in their field of expertise and they have the capacity to interact with students and make students feel valued, appreciated, and respected. Bensimon (2007) pointed out that current scholarship on student success often lacks the viewpoint from practitioners. More specifically, “Practitioners are only present indirectly and that we lack a theory of student success based on the characteristics of practitioners” (p. 463). Bensimon (2007) urged practitioners to become researchers and assist with the process as facilitators so that they can contribute to the scholarship on student success based on actual practice. Bensimon (2007) claimed it is impossible to achieve access and equity for students without examining the presumptions and knowledge that practitioners have about minority students.

### **College Admissions and Undocumented Students**

In 1982, *Plyer v. Doe* set the foundation for undocumented immigrants to receive access to free, public K-12 education. However, higher education institutions were not included in the *Plyer v. Doe* case. Salinas (2013) conducted a quantitative policy analysis of admissions policies among various state institutions and found that each state had the power to create personalized

admissions policies for its public colleges and universities. Unfortunately, these inconsistent policies create barriers for undocumented students in their pursuit of higher education. Some state colleges and universities deny undocumented students enrollment. Others charge undocumented students out-of-state or international tuition rates. Some states offer in-state financial aid, while other states bar access to financial aid (Burkhardt et al., 2012).

One of the major challenges undocumented students have to face during college admission is being labeled out-of-state students and, therefore, being required to pay higher tuition than in-state peers. Similarly, undocumented high school students cannot take advantage of concurrent enrollment benefits at community colleges due to cost. In California, high school students who are residents can take college courses for free. Tuition is waived for part-time high school students, and the nonresident tuition fee is charged for all students who were classified as nonresidents, including undocumented students who have not graduated from high school (East Los Angeles College, 2015).

Frum (2007) concluded that undocumented students face confusing public college and university admissions policies. Depending on the state where undocumented students wish to attend college, their undocumented status may pose different issues as admissions policy issues and tuition fees differ from one state to another. In 2011, only 36% of public colleges and universities had defined policies on admitting undocumented students (Field, 2011).

Salinas (2013) believed that the lack of consistent and universal admission practices for undocumented students fails undocumented students

who want to pursue higher education in two ways: (a) for those states that have clear admissions policies in place for undocumented students, institutions are not following their state's policy stance on undocumented students and admissions, and (b) some admissions individuals at these institutions are not well informed on their state and campus policies for undocumented students. Although some "states have a clear defined policy stance on admissions for undocumented students, there is a lack of consistency between state, institutions and individuals implementing the adopted policy" (Salinas, 2013, p. 96). Among those who implement institution policies, 15.4% of those who participated in Salinas' (2013) study were not aware that their institution had a policy specifically allowing undocumented students to enroll. Moreover, over 38% of the same participants did not know if their state had a policy regarding admissions for undocumented students. Therefore, there is a need to conduct qualitative interviews to seek an understanding of why those who interpret and implement institutional policies have little knowledge of the policies related to the undocumented student population.

Offices of admissions are responsible for the recruitment of students, review of applications, and admissions to the university. After the passage of House Bill (HB) 1079 by the Washington State Legislature, a tuition waiver for undocumented students in Washington prompted Western Washington University to change recruitment, admission, and tracking of eligible undocumented students. The application for admission had to be updated so the institution could track students who were not U.S. citizens or permanent

residents. The institution tracked undocumented students by comparing their high school or college transcripts indicating whether they had enrolled in a Washington public high school. Once students were identified, the office of admissions sent letters explaining HB 1079 and a copy of the affidavit to sign and return in order to qualify for the tuition waiver (Nerini, 2008). In comparison, currently within the California State University System (CSU), under California Assembly Bill (AB) 540, undocumented students are not tracked through admissions. Instead, the CSUs committed to protect the identity of students who qualify under this law. Therefore, undocumented students on CSU campuses have to self-identify and self-refer to related student support services. As a result, each CSU campus is not able to identify the number of CSU students who qualify for AB 540, nor can they identify those who qualify for exemption (Cal State Fullerton AB 540 & Undocumented Students Committee, 2008).

### **Financial Aid and Undocumented Students**

Multiple researches have confirmed that financial hardship is one of the biggest hindrances for undocumented students to complete college. Tuition cost is high for undocumented students, federal financial aid is unavailable, and because they do not have the legal right to work in the United States, they have little means to pay for their post-secondary education (Chen, 2013; Lizardy-Hajbi, 2011; Submission Stream, 2011). Many undocumented students are also racial and ethnic minorities; therefore, they tend to be the first in their families to attend college. Additionally, many come from low-income families because their

parents have limited education and they can only work for low-paying jobs that do not require a social security number (Submission Stream, 2011).

Local community college is the first stop for many undocumented students who are looking for opportunities to better themselves and better their families. It becomes a challenge to student service workers and faculty when there are competing policies and legislation for the undocumented student population. Therefore, finding financial aid for undocumented students is a major challenge (Pluviose, 2007). Only private dollars are available, and at Long Beach City College (LBCC), the LBCC foundation helps with the cost of books for undocumented students (Pluviose, 2007).

The implementation of in-state tuition waivers increased college enrollment of non-citizen Mexican adults by 31% in Texas (Kaushal, 2008). Allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition not only provided access to ethnic minorities to pursue education, it also increased revenue and enrollment for public colleges (Taborsak, 2012). Flores and Horn (2009) conducted a quantitative research study in Texas by comparing persistence rates between undocumented students who were eligible for the tuition waiver and documented/citizen Latino students. The researchers concluded that there was no difference in students' persistence based on citizenship status once undocumented students were given the opportunity for tuition benefit.

Nerini (2008) interviewed both undocumented students and higher education professionals on the impact of in-state tuition at one public institution in the state of Washington. The study showed that the institution had to re-examine

their policies and procedures on campus in order to align their campus practices to the state policy on providing state financial aid to undocumented students. As Nerini (2008)'s study suggested, college professionals found creative ways to provide private scholarship funds to undocumented students. Institution allies were able to make contacts with the university's foundation, which was a separate organization from the institution and gathered private donations for undocumented students. Rodriguez (2010) showcased another example of how financial aid policies can shape undocumented students' chances of attending college. He suggested that advocacy and self-discretion from college professionals can make a difference. Rodriguez and his colleagues from Pitzer College had been informing undocumented students that they would be labeled international students and that the college did not provide financial aid to international students. However, because of one undocumented student's stellar application, the president of Pitzer College authorized Rodriguez to offer a full-tuition scholarship for the student's four years at Pitzer. Since then, Pitzer awards four full-ride scholarships to select undocumented scholars on its campus (Rodriguez, 2010).

Both quantitative and qualitative research exists on how financial aid affects undocumented students' academic success. However, there is no information on what the California State Universities (CSUs) do to align their campus policies with the state's policy on providing financial aid for eligible undocumented students. Although the data from the University of California President's Office (2013) suggested that since the implementation of AB 540

college enrollment for undocumented students increased. However, there is no research on what financial aid officers are actually doing in order to meet the financial needs of undocumented students. Therefore, the experiences from financial aid officers, who administer, disburse, and gather funds for undocumented students on these CSU campuses would assist with the analysis of AB 540.

### **Institutional Allies and Undocumented Students**

Student affairs professionals intend to provide college students with support and resources in order for them to achieve a positive and successful experience. Student affairs professionals educate the whole student and integrate student life with learning (NASPA, 2015). When institutions provide the support and resources, students persist to graduation (Nerini, 2008). Student affairs professionals are slowly addressing the needs of undocumented students. For many years, student affairs professionals who worked closely with undocumented students endured the same secrecy about their role in providing access for undocumented students, as most of them assisted undocumented students beyond their professional responsibilities (Lopez & Lopez, 2010). Student affairs professionals who were supportive of undocumented students self-organized and built an extended network of alternative services so that the undocumented students had meaningful student experiences. This supportive network is often referred to as allies (Chen, 2013).

Institutional allies are often unrecognized as they are often volunteers from various departments. As volunteers, they are rarely rewarded for their

efforts and there is the lack of accountability to actually provide services to undocumented students since acting as allies is independent from their regular professional obligations. The ally network encompasses faculty, student affairs professionals, counselors, health care providers, community outreach, legal counsel, and so forth. These allies work collaboratively to offer services such as booking lending programs and meal coupons. They work to address the challenges undocumented students face as they often do not have the means to pay for tuition, housing, food, and health care (Chen, 2013).

Similar to institutional allies, Stanton-Salazar (2007) wrote about the importance of institutional agents who assist low status youths in overcoming odds. Institutional agents work in institutions, schools, organizations or other hierarchical positions within a society. Institutional agents often possess status and authority, have access to resources, and have the power to mobilize outcomes through their reputation. Institutional agents, like student affairs professionals, have the ability to influence low-status youth's achievement because of their (a) personal resources, the resources they directly possess and the institutional support they are able to directly provide; (b) positional resources, the resources attached to their position; and (c) the resources and support possessed by other actors whom the agents are able to mobilize on behalf of the youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2007).

Institutional agents can add tremendous value to low-status youth's empowerment; however, institutional agents are less effective when they encounter bureaucratic issues. "Budgetary pressures, accountability schemes,

personnel management and prestige-enhancing agendas may override whatever organized efforts to embed youth in a system of institutional and social support” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 18). Similar to Lipsky’s (1980) argument, because of the lack of resources and other external factors, frontline workers adjust their interaction and effectiveness when working with students. For example, the amount of time spent with each student is reduced due to the long-line and staff shortage.

Many undocumented students drop out of college because of the lack of financial aid (Oliveroz, 2006), the psychological distress from worrying about the possibility of deportation (Perez & Cortes, 2011), and the lack of institutional resources and support (Albrecht, 2007). Undocumented students on college campuses deserve an equitable educational experience, where they feel safe and supported. Knowing that there is a need for a resource center to foster academic success for undocumented students is one thing. The creation process, however, can be very political. According to Preciado and Jarnagin (2015), establishing a resource center required “dynamic and bold institutional leaders to provide a window of opportunity to create a center designed to serve our documented students” (p. 32). Many other public institutions in California are experiencing the same phenomenon, where student activists and allies are working together to bring attention to the need for legislative reform and equitable access on campus (Abrego & Gonzalez, 2010; Perez, 2009)

## Case Study

Chen's (2013) qualitative case study used ethnographical data through participant observation and interviews. Research showed that faculty members and administrators who were aware of the undocumented student body could rally and advocate on behalf of the student population on the institutional level. Similarly, Albrecht's (2007) study concluded that university administrators had limited knowledge on the undocumented student population. In fact, "seven out of the nine participants in the study suggested that they had not previously thought about undocumented students in their professional capacity" (p. 142). Albrecht (2007) advised that because of the incongruences between administrators and the undocumented student body, specialized student services for undocumented students, such as legal, housing, financial, and psychological services would be beneficial to undocumented students.

Furthermore, Chen (2013) displayed evidence that institutional allies need to centralize and institutionalize resources for undocumented students. Data showed that students often bounced back and forth between different departments because the front-line workers were unsure of how to address the needs of undocumented students. The institution that was the locale for Chen's research (2013) assigned a point person to address the needs of the undocumented student population. In order to service undocumented students proactively, this point person gathered information from the scholarship office, admissions, residential life, academic support, the mental health center, and outreach, and disseminated these resources to undocumented students in-

person and online. By having online forms and resources available, the university became transparent in its effort to provide access to the undocumented population; therefore, more undocumented students were able to receive these services because of the ease to access multiple support services by visiting one person.

Institutional commitment to provide resource centers for undocumented students is one of the strongest evidence that the institution is attempting to promote a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for undocumented students. Dream Resource Centers are new to California public institutions, as the first Dream Resource Centers opened their doors in 2014 and 2015 (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). The current literature does not address the efficiency of Dream Resource Centers on college campuses.

### **AB 540 Implementation in California**

California is one of the few states that offers both admission and state financial aid to undocumented students. Furthermore, with the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 247, Dream Resource Centers will be available to undocumented students across the California public education system (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015). Since the implementation of AB 540 in 2003-2004, there is very little research on how student affairs professionals interact with undocumented students. Some of the research questions the training and experience of front-line personnel.

**AB 540 and education service workers.** Most of the current research related to undocumented students addresses the challenges faced in accessing

and persisting in college (Abrego, 2006; Cortes, 2008). However, from these research findings on undocumented students it is suggested that there is a “general sense that ‘front-line personnel’ such as admission and financial aid counselors, and records officers are not trained to handle the unique issues undocumented students bring with them” (Oseguera, Flores, & Burciaga, 2010, p. 41). More importantly, these front-line professionals are not given the opportunity to understand the policy directives of their state or local institution (Cortes, 2008).

Although there is California legislation providing in-state tuition for undocumented students, there is confusion about the implementation directives of the state policy. In addition, clarification of policies often comes in the form of memos directed to higher-level student services administrators, not to front-line service workers. Improved communication from student services administrators to front-line service workers is necessary for these directives to be passed down to the street-level. Proper implementation of AB 540 requires that student affairs professionals are aware of the spirit of the policies in order to support undocumented students in a meaningful way (Oseguera, Flores, & Burciaga, 2010).

Abrego (2008) concluded that unintended constitutive functions of law could sometimes have more transformative effects on the daily lives of targeted subjects than the intended instrumental objectives of the law. AB 540's exemption from out-of-state tuition makes community colleges more accessible, yet AB 540 failed to make postsecondary education affordable for most

undocumented students. As explained by Abrego (2008), the law's constitutive power is relational and it leaves room for contestation. Therefore, the relational nature law allows the "potential for innovative actions to exploit law's possibilities and invoke its power and protection. In this way, law may be invoked and utilized in ways never intended by legislators" (Abrego, 2008, p, 731).

**AB 540 implementation at California State University.** Currently within the CSU system AB 540 and undocumented students are not tracked because of the sensitivity around the legality of AB 540 students' residency and the CSU's commitment to protect the identity of those students who are receiving the fee-waivers. Therefore, CSU campuses are not able to identify the number of CSU students who qualify for AB 540. Cal State students often rely on the informal network between faculty and staff that has existed for more than 20 years. In addition, undocumented students rely on student organizations that provide peer support, educational programming, and community activism to navigate their college journey (Cal State Fullerton AB 540 & Undocumented Students Committee, 2008). Within the last two years, Dream Centers opened on the campuses of California State University, Fullerton and California State University, Long Beach (Gamache, 2014). To better serve the undocumented population, a Dream Center is scheduled to open at California State University, Los Angeles using private funding (Rivera, 2015).

**AB 540 implementation at California Community Colleges.** Bleza's (2013) research on community colleges in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties indicated that the effort to create access for undocumented students

lacked uniformity across community college campuses. Individuals worked very differently on each of their campuses based on their campus culture. At one college, faculty and staff members did not receive training to work with AB 540 students. An institutional expert at another one of the colleges believed that many faculty and staff members outside the undocumented expert group would not be able to explain AB 540 if asked. However, at yet another community college, there was an AB 540 club on campus and all of the staff and faculty members who work with undocumented students attended a training session conducted by the AB 540 club (Bleza, 2013).

**AB 540 implementation at University of California.** According to the University of California Office of the President (2013), in 2011-2012, 20% of all potentially undocumented UC students did not receive the AB 540 exemption. These students were either ineligible for the exemption or they did not file for the exemption on time. Currently at the UCs, AB 540 exemptions are awarded without the bearing of students' financial need.

At the undergraduate level the number of new AB 540 recipients increased each year since 2003-2004 (University of California Office of the President [UCOP], 2013). The overall number of recipients more than tripled between 2002-2003 and 2011-2012, from 722 to 2,572. The AB 540 tuition exemption was intended to improve access for students who had attended and graduated from California high schools but who were subject to non-resident tuition. This group includes documented students who do not qualify for California residency and those students who cannot establish residency due to

the lack of documentation that permits legal presence in the country. The reasons for the increase were (a) a greater number of high school students who meet the eligibility criteria for AB 540 and admission to UC, and (b) greater awareness of the benefit that AB 540 provides, AB 130, and AB 131, resulting in more AB 540 eligible students to apply and enroll at UC (UCOP, 2013). With the passage of AB 540, AB 130, and AB 131, undocumented students can pay in-state tuition, receive state financial aid and private scholarships.

Examples of tuition exemptions waiver recipients include: (a) non-native or U.S.-born offspring of immigrant parents who chose to return to their native country but left their children in California, (b) students from other states attending boarding school in California, and (c) students who attended high school in California, left the state to attend college, and returned to California to pursue graduate studies. Furthermore, documented students have accounted for an average of 64% of AB 540 recipients (UCOP, 2013). The tuition exemption waiver provides a significant source of financial support for recipients. Although undocumented students cannot receive federal support, the exemptions provide relief from non-resident tuition. This does not address the need to fund other educational expenses though, including housing, food, books, fees, health insurance, and other personal expenses. Undocumented students may cover these expenses using private scholarships, family contributions, or institutional aid.

## **In-State Tuition Waiver Implementation Examples**

States other than California also offers in-state tuition waiver for undocumented students. Similar to the California policy, AB 540, undocumented students from Washington and New York also are facing challenges in the offices of admissions and financial aid when enrolling in college.

**State of Washington.** In 2001, Governor Gary Locke from Washington signed HB 1079 into law. HB 1079, the *Student Residency Tuition Adjustment Act*, took into consideration an individual's domicile and high school attendance when determining residency for college tuition purposes. Although, HB 1079 allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, it did not adjust immigration status nor did it provide any federal and state financial aid (Nerini, 2008).

HB 1079 made it possible for students who graduated from a state high school, or earned a GED in the state of Washington and lived in the state for three years, to attend any public postsecondary institution and pay in-state tuition regardless of their immigration status. Students just needed to sign an affidavit promise to correct their legal immigration status as soon as they were able to (Nerini, 2008).

Nerini's (2008) study at Washington State University found that HB 1079 impacted undocumented students' immigration status, education, and family. Furthermore, implementation of HB 1079 affected the institution's enrollment, retention, and external affairs. The cost of attending college and financial aid were found to have an intersecting impact for both students and the institution

because undocumented students were not eligible for federal financial aid and state grants in Washington; therefore, it created obstacles for both the students and the institution. Undocumented students were not able to submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which created a rippled effect when applying or being considered for other scholarships.

Aside from financial aid, HB 1079 also had a huge impact on undocumented students' immigration status. Undocumented students had to share their immigration status, which had been a well-guarded secret with the institution. Institutions now required this information if these students wanted to take advantage of the instate tuition waiver. As Nerini (2008) recommended, recruitment, admission, and enrollment procedures had to be made by the university to accommodate these students.

**State of New York.** All New York City public school students who graduated with a B average or higher regardless of their immigration status are eligible to receive a \$1,000 scholarship per year towards tuition at City University of New York (CUNY). CUNY is an institution where citizenship has no bearing on admissions and students without Social Security numbers can pay in-state tuition if they sign an affidavit indicating that they are working toward legalizing their immigration status (DiMaria, 2014).

In New York City, CUNY is the most feasible option for low-income, undocumented students because it is the lowest in cost and Social Security numbers remain private. However, attending a state university does not work well for undocumented students because the cost of attendance is still very high

compared to attending a local community college. Although many undocumented students gain admission to the system, they are responsible for \$15,000 to \$20,000 tuition per year because New York does not grant state aid (DiMaria, 2014).

In a study by DiMaria (2014), an undocumented student, Hernandez, explained the bureaucratic challenges he faced when he attempted to register at CUNY. Technically, Hernandez was eligible to attend CUNY without documentation; however, when he attempted to enroll, he faced numerous challenges that forced him to enroll at a two-year community college. At CUNY, there is a system for assigning all students a student ID number so students do not have to provide their Social Security number (DiMaria, 2014). However, many front-line administrative staff who function as gatekeepers do not understand that they are not allowed to ask for student's Social Security number, which defeats the purpose for keeping undocumented student's identity a secret.

In addition, Hernandez faced another challenge at the financial aid office where he was asked to produce a record of his mother's income because she worked as a babysitter and had not paid taxes. Furthermore, in another office, Hernandez was given a complicated form that asked for his immunization records, including meningitis. Hernandez was never vaccinated for meningitis, but the clerk in this office failed to mention that Hernandez could have simply signed a waiver for the meningitis vaccine and submitted it with the health records he had brought. Campus policies, forms, and procedures can be very confusing and complicated for undocumented students (DiMaria, 2014). Prior to

registration and first day of class, undocumented students are confronted by policies that seems impossible to conquer, especially if student affair professionals and institutional allies do not use discretion to address the needs of undocumented students.

Examples from Washington and New York showed that although undocumented students have access to in-state tuition waivers, other policies in admissions and financial aid make it difficult for undocumented students to pursue higher education. As Nerini (2008) mentioned, universities are encouraged to evaluate their campus procedures to meet the needs of their undocumented students, eventually to increase accessibility and equality in higher education.

### **Chapter Summary**

Current literature shows there are disparities in immigrants' academic achievement and educational attainment. These disparities may be caused by race, ethnicity, nationality, family income, family structure, community, institutional policies, federal and state level legislations, and parent expectation (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Chavez, Soriano & Oliverez, 2007, Contreras, 2009). In particular, current literature on undocumented immigrants suggests that they face more financial, emotional, and structural (federal and state legislature) challenges than documented immigrants (Chen, 2013). Research literature focused on utilizing qualitative methods to highlight the challenges faced by undocumented students and how these students overcome their challenges. However, the literature is limited on the effectiveness of in-state

tuition policies. Little outcome data exist on how in-state tuition policies affect the education pipeline among undocumented students. Analysis of AB 540 through the lens of student affairs professionals and front-line workers who implement campus policies related to AB 540 will add to the body of knowledge on undocumented student college experiences.

Student affairs professionals who work in public institutions are faced with the increasing demand of the undocumented student population. However, with little or no training on serving this population, front-liners create their own coping mechanisms to address their needs. Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga (2010) explained that student affairs professionals face difficulties serving undocumented students due to the lack of training, lack of streamlined methods to target specific populations, and the lack of accessibility to undocumented students who may benefit from services and support.

Informal practices as adopted by street-level bureaucrats based on AB 540 can influence policy change on a larger level, as long as the divergence is collective in nature, transparent by practice, and other-serving by intent (Gofen, 2014). This study focused on understanding street-level practices related to AB 540 and undocumented students as they can influence policy change for future undocumented students.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Student affairs professionals are responsible for interpreting and implementing policies and regulations that govern and influence undocumented students' academic success. In California, AB 540 designated educational access for undocumented students. Most of the current literature on undocumented students revealed unique economical, personal, and transitional challenges for undocumented students (Albrecht, 2007; Aramburo & Bhavsar, 2013; Burkhardt et al., 2012). However, there is little information on how AB 540 as a policy influences the work of admissions officers, financial aid office staff and dream resource center student affairs professionals.

Student affairs professionals are slowly addressing the needs of the undocumented students. For many years, student affairs professionals who worked closely with undocumented students endured a level of secrecy about their role in providing access for undocumented students because there were no services and funding designated to help undocumented students (Lopez, 2010). Student affairs professionals who interact with undocumented students regularly may be crucial players in creating an undocumented student friendly campus. While significant research exists on undocumented students and their experiences (Badger & Yale-Loehr, 2002; Bleza, 2013; Gildersleeve, 2010; Oliverez, 2006; Ton, 2013), there is a gap in research on the experiences and

roles of student affairs professionals who implement policies and procedures related to AB 540 and whose role it is to provide resources and information for undocumented students. With the recent creation of Dream Centers on several California State University campuses (CSU) and California community colleges, many educators work tirelessly “to serve undocumented students with academic, emotional support, referrals to financial assistance, information on programs and services designed to improve retention and graduation rates, and a comforting environment where students can connect with one another” (Preciado & Jarnagin, 2015, p. 30).

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the experiences of student affairs professionals who work as front-line workers and implement policies and procedures related to AB 540 in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers for undocumented students. To address these issues, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do current student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers describe their experiences in interpreting and implementing California Assembly Bill 540?
2. How are higher education departments of admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers currently interpreting and implementing California Assembly Bill 540 on their campuses?
3. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe how campus policies and procedures on AB 540 changed over time?

4. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe their management of the demands and changes of the interpretation and implementation of AB 540?

This chapter presents the methodology for the study including a discussion of its philosophical foundations. Next, a description of the research design within the selected methodological approach is discussed. Following the research design, an overview of the specific research methods, including information about the setting, sample, data collection (instrumentation and procedure), and data analysis (trustworthiness and the role of the researcher) is provided. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is designed to explore social and human relations of a specific concentration by examining how individuals or a group of people experience the world. Qualitative methods are used to capture individuals or groups' thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of meanings. This method is often used in the field of education, sociology, anthropology, and other humanities and social sciences (Given, 2008). According to Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, and Ormston (2013), qualitative methods aim to provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world by learning about the way individuals make sense of their experiences, perspectives, and histories.

Qualitative data is detailed, rich, and complex. Data analysis for qualitative data respects the uniqueness of individuals as well as the reoccurring themes gathered from multiple individuals. The output data is detailed with

descriptions based on participants' perspectives. Ultimately, qualitative research employs a reflective approach, where the role and perspective of the researcher is acknowledged (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Qualitative research is based on the ontology of idealism and inductive reasoning. Idealism states that reality is "fundamentally mind-dependent: it is only knowledge through the human mind and through socially constructed meanings, and no reality exists independently of these" (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 5). In addition, qualitative research utilizes inductive reasoning. An inductive process involves using evidence from the bottom up through observations as the genesis of a conclusion. Evidence is collected first, and then knowledge and theories are built from the evidence. Blaikie (2007) critiqued the idea that qualitative research only uses inductive reasoning. He suggested that even though a hypothesis is not tested, the kind of data generated, the questions asked, and the analytical categories employed were influenced by the assumptions deductively derived from similar studies and research in the field.

Strengths of the qualitative research method include the following: (a) data is based on participants' own meaning; (b) data can provide individual case information; (c) data help to describe in detail the phenomena as they are situated and embedded in local contexts; (d) the researcher can study dynamic processes; (e) the researcher can determine how participants interpret constructs; (f) data are collected in naturalistic settings; (g) qualitative approaches are responsive to local situations, conditions, and stakeholders'

needs; and (h) qualitative data lend themselves to exploring how and why phenomena occur (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Qualitative research relies on the researcher's worldview, experience, and assumptions. A weakness for qualitative research is the level of bias and assumptions that the researcher brings to the study. The researcher is considered a research instrument; therefore, it is important for the researcher to recognize their assumptions and biases and deliberately address them in the study (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study for several reasons. This research and its research questions begin with “how” and “what”, which suggest the intention of exploring the topic, rather than seeking a cause and effect relationship in quantitative research (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the research questions were designed to gather rich and detailed responses in order to gain insight into the experiences of student affairs professionals who implement AB 540 on the street level and work as front-line admissions, financial aid, or dream resource center officers.

Another reason why a qualitative research method was chosen for this study is because this research addresses the lack of in-depth inquiry into the research literature on the complex behaviors and experiences of front-line student affairs professionals who implement the AB 540 law on the street-level. Qualitative data was collected in order to gain a detailed understanding of the work conditions and self-coping mechanisms created in order to serve the undocumented student population (Creswell, 2012). Through semi-structured

interviews, student affairs professionals were able to paint a picture of their meaning making processes through the stories they shared in the interviews. In-depth interviews using open-ended questions offered an opportunity for me to gain descriptions of experiences and sense-making techniques through the participants' lens (Seidman, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the student affairs professionals' experiences beyond the generalization of numerical data.

### **Research Design**

Exploratory design is used when researchers have little previous knowledge about the group, process, or the situation. Exploratory design is flexible in terms of what is defined as data and where to look for the data. This design provides an opportunity for researchers to gain insight into the participants' lived experiences related to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). According to Given (2008), the main goal of exploratory research, "is the production of inductively derived generalizations about the group, process, activity, or situation under study" (p. 4). The purpose of this research was to gain knowledge for the sake of knowledge (Patton, 2002). I aimed to understand the "how", "what", and "why" for student affairs professionals who work closely with undocumented students. Additionally, the exploratory design helped me gain an understanding of the group, the process, and the situation at the front-line when working with undocumented students.

In this case, an exploratory design was used to gain knowledge of student affairs professionals who work directly with undocumented students interpreting

and implementing policies and procedures related to AB 540. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to gain new knowledge of the experiences of student affairs professionals in the departments of admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers. An exploratory design was chosen due to the lack of research on the experiences of student affairs professionals who work as street-level bureaucrats in order to implement AB 540. When “few definitive hypotheses exist and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon, qualitative inquiry is a reasonable beginning point for research” (Patton, 2002, p. 193).

The intent of the study was to understand how participants make sense of their role as street-level bureaucrats when implementing campus policies and procedures related to AB 540 and how they cope with the complexity of work conditions and challenges on the street-level. The researcher worked as an instrument and constructed meaning from the data presented by the participants (Merriam, 2002). The goal of the study was to identify common themes from semi-structured interviews and transcripts. Exploratory design allowed flexibility and exploration, and therefore, I analyzed the data without pre-assumption.

### **Research Methods**

This section presents the specific research methods utilized in this qualitative exploratory design study. The following information delineates the setting, sample, data collection, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of data collection.

## **Setting**

The study was conducted at two California State University (CSU) campuses and one California community college located in Southern California. The CSU system is the largest public four-year school system in the nation, and provides more than half of all undergraduate degrees to underserved students, including Latino, African American, and Native American students (The California State University, 2012). Despite of the accessibility of the CSU, California community colleges remain the most cost efficient way for undocumented students to pursue higher education; therefore they have the largest undocumented student enrollment (Mendoza, 2009).

**California State Universities.** The primary function of the CSUs was to educate more undergraduate and graduate students in the liberal arts and sciences. Today, the CSU campuses include comprehensive and polytechnic universities. The CSU system has an estimated 447,000 students and about 45,000 faculty. The CSU system awards about 50% of the bachelor's degrees and one-third of the master's degrees granted in California. Since 1961 the CSU has awarded over 2.9 million bachelor's, master's, and joint doctoral degrees (The California State University, 2012).

**California community colleges.** In addition to the two CSU campuses, a California Community College system institution was selected as an additional research site. According to Erisman and Looney (2007), undocumented students are most likely to be enrolled at community colleges due to their low-cost and accessibility. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2014)

indicated that there were 1,563,472 students enrolled at local community colleges for the fall 2014 term. Of those 1,563,472 students, over 83% were U.S. citizens, 7% were permanent residents, and over 6% of the student population were labeled as other or unknown for their citizenship status. Three out of every ten Californians ages 18-24 are currently enrolled in a community college. Fifty-five percent of community college students are people of diverse ethnic backgrounds (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2015).

The California Community Colleges system educates more than 2.1 million students on 113 campuses, and is the largest system of higher education in the U.S. (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2016).

Community colleges offer associate degrees and short-term job training certificates in more than 175 fields. In addition, more than 100,000 individuals are trained each year in industry-specific workforce skills. The California Community Colleges system is the largest provider of workforce training in the state and nation. Attending or graduating from a community college doubles an individual's chance of finding a job compared to those who failed to complete high school. California community colleges remain the most cost-efficient option for undocumented students. Mendoza (2009) revealed that there are over 34,000 undocumented students enrolled in community colleges as oppose to 3,600 undocumented students enrolled in CSUs.

**Site selection.** Valley University, Metropolitan University, and Rocky College (pseudonyms) were selected for this research because these campuses have offices or departments of admissions, financial aid, and have Dream Center

services available to their students. Aside from having the specific offices in which the researcher was interested, Valley University was chosen because of its diverse student body. In 2015, the ethnic makeup for Valley University consisted of 36% Hispanics, 25% White, 21% of Asian and Pacific Islanders, 4% of multiple race, 4% unknown, and 2% Black. It is estimated that there were approximately 2.5%, or 900 undocumented students on campus. Although the number of undocumented student is small, the campus believed it was necessary to have a Dream Center to improve campus climate and address issues related to access and retention.

In contrast, Metropolitan University was chosen because of the large Hispanic student population on campus. In 2015, Metropolitan University listed that over 50% of its student body were Hispanic, while other ethnicities makeup the other half of the student population: 21% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 11% White, 9% Black and 9% unknown. The Dream Center on this campus was created in October of 2014 with funding from a local philanthropist. The donor believed it was essential to have a Dream Center on campus to provide assistance to undocumented students from the community with guidance and other legal processes to help them obtain a baccalaureate degree.

Lastly, Rocky College was chosen because it offered a Dream Center. Having a Dream Center to service hard-to-locate undocumented students on a community college campus is rare. Based on the Citizenship Status Summary Report from California Community Colleges' Chancellor Office (2015), over 3.5% to 12.89% of the Rocky College student body can be defined as undocumented

students. Over 4,500 students on the Rocky College campus possibly can identify as undocumented because of their citizenship status as “other” or “unknown;” however, there is no actual way of confirming this number as most of the California community colleges do not track this data.

This research focused on the office of admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers because these offices are an integral part of the college campuses in providing access to postsecondary education through financial and social support, especially for undocumented students. The office of admissions is responsible for determining residency status for tuition purposes at the CSUs and the California community colleges. As stated in the admissions handbook, “each campus’ Admission Office is responsible for determining the residency status of all new and returning students based on the Application for Admission, Residency Questionnaire, Reclassification Request Form, and, as necessary, other evidence furnished by the student” (The California State University, 2014, p. 27).

The office of financial aid is important to undocumented students’ educational attainment because the office is responsible for disbursing financial aid, advertising and administering scholarships, and setting up payment plans for students. As stated on the Valley University’s website, the Office of Financial Aid began administering the CA Dream Loan beginning fall of 2015 for students who met the AB 540 student status requirements.

Dream Centers at the CSUs are designed to provide undocumented students with academic and emotional support, referrals to financial assistance,

information on programs and services designed to improve retention and graduation rates, and a comforting environment where students can connect with one another. Services include connecting undocumented students with mentors, and providing ally training and workshops on how undocumented students can navigate graduate school. Although some are eligible for financial assistance, others are ineligible for benefits. The goal of the Valley University Dreamers Resource Center is to help address these concerns and facilitate the educational success of all undocumented students.

### **Sample**

Creswell (2012) suggested that qualitative research requires a purposeful selection of participants in order to best understand the phenomenon being studied. Purposeful sampling yields a wealth of detailed data about a small selected group of individuals. Patton (2002) advised that there are no set guidelines or rules for sample size in qualitative research. The determination of the number of participants is dependent on the purpose of the study, its feasibility, and the practicality of the investigation. This study included two admissions, two financial aid, and two dream center student affairs professionals from each campus. A total of six student affairs professionals were interviewed from each campus, including Valley University, Metropolitan University, and Rocky College. After interviewing 18 participants, the researcher determined that saturation was reached when repetitious codes appeared among the 18 interviews (Creswell, 2012).

Snowball sampling was utilized in this study. Participants were referred by the directors/administrators of admissions, financial aid, Dream Resource Centers via e-mail, phone, or in-person. Participants were front-line student affairs professionals who had face-to-face interactions with undocumented students. Front-line workers are defined as those who work at the counter or those who have first contact with students at their specific department (Oseguera, Flores, & Burciaga, 2010). These front-line student affairs professionals had at least six-months of experience working with undocumented students. My goal was to gather diverse data and responses. Participants were selected considering their employment status, either full-time or part-time; gender; ethnicity; and the number of years of experience in student affairs.

Front-line admissions, financial aid, and dream resource center student affairs professionals were selected because these individuals would be able to provide stories about their interactions with undocumented students and their interpretations of AB 540 and campus related policies. This study aimed to understand and honor the experiences of front-line student affairs professionals who work directly with undocumented students.

To ensure confidentiality, I masked the identities of the participants. I assigned pseudonyms to individuals and the institutions in which they worked. In addition, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was filed and approved by each research site (see Appendix A).

## Data Collection and Management

Once the list of participants was narrowed based on the above criteria, participants were given an informed consent form. Creswell (2014) explained that informed consent is crucial before conducting any type of study involving human beings. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with student affairs professionals who worked at the offices of admissions, financial aid, and the dream centers at Valley University, Metropolitan University, and Rocky College. Three sub-sections are introduced in this section including: (a) instrumentation, (b) procedures for data collection, and (c) data management strategies.

**Instrumentation.** Eighteen in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. In this study, open-ended questions were asked so the participants could voice their experiences. The advantage of conducting interviews is that interviews allow participants to describe detailed personal information. In addition, the interviewer also has better control over the types of information received due to the semi-structured format (Creswell, 2012). Some disadvantages of using interviews may be that the data could be deceptive and provide only the perspectives the interviewee wants the researcher to hear and sometimes the interviewees cannot provide a response that is articulate or clear in understanding (Creswell, 2012). I developed the interview protocols (see Appendix B) with the intention of addressing the four research questions guided by the theoretical framework, street-level bureaucracy, street-level divergence, and coping mechanisms for street-bureaucrats. Colleagues with working

knowledge as student affairs professionals reviewed the interview protocols. In addition to the review by fellow educators, mock interviews, as supported by Turner (2010), were conducted and beta-tested/pilot tested with admissions, financial aid, and dream center professionals at another community college to validate the instrument. Field notes were also generated following each interview.

**Procedures.** As previously mentioned, participants of the study were referred by directors/administrators from the offices of admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers and snowball sampling strategies were utilized. I reached out to all potential participants referred by directors/administrators and explained to them the goal of the research study. Furthermore, I made sure potential participants understood that their participation was purely voluntary and I gathered verbal consent prior to actual interviews. From the referrals, 18 individuals participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Two participants were selected from each office/department and college campus. Through the interview process, participants were recorded. The interviews lasted approximate 45-60 minutes per person. Interviews were then transcribed by the Oral History department at Cal State Fullerton. Once the transcriptions were done, the data were uploaded to Dedoose to look for themes and further analysis.

**Data management.** I created an individualized file for each participant in the study. The file included a completed informed consent form, and notes recorded from the interview. Qualitative interviews were stored on my computer,

my virtual DropBox, and in an encrypted USB drive. Likewise, audio files were stored through multiple media such as my laptop, my virtual DropBox, and an encrypted USB drive. Participants' true identities were not marked or labeled on the documents or in the titles of the files.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Once the interviews were transcribed, the data were uploaded to Dedoose for further data analysis and interpretation. This section addresses the following sub-sections pertaining to data analysis and interpretation: (a) analysis, (b) validity and/or trustworthiness, and (c) the role of the researcher.

**Data analysis.** I conducted qualitative analysis of the data immediately following each interview, and revised the interview protocol in light of the concepts that emerged from the analysis. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding drove the data analysis in this qualitative study. Coding involved breaking down data into smaller units, identifying concepts within these units, and reframing the data in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Open and axial coding took place during the early phases of data analysis, while selective coding was utilized for the more advanced stages of analysis. Finally, a detailed description of the process that characterizes each coding technique was documented. Open coding is the analytic process by which data are broken down into discrete parts and closely examined for concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Axial coding is the second coding technique used to analyze transcriptions. The process is "termed 'axial' because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions"

(Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 123). Selective coding is the third coding technique. Three key steps were employed during this final stage of analysis. It is worth noting that selective coding is not a linear process because I moved back and forth between these steps throughout the analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

**Procedures to ensure trustworthiness.** I employed member checking in order to establish trustworthiness for the qualitative data. Additionally, all participants were invited to read the transcripts after the interviews were completed to ensure authenticity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Moreover, peer review was utilized to check for researcher bias (Creswell, 2012). The review and advice of these colleagues served as a check for accuracy, clarity, and consistency throughout the coding process (Creswell, 2012). Peer reviews were conducted during each stage of the coding process. An initial peer review was conducted once open coding was completed. A peer read through the initial coding for accuracy. A second peer review was conducted after axial coding and the last peer review was completed after the selective coding process.

**Role of the researcher.** It is not uncommon for personal feelings and perspectives including biases and experiences related to the study to be experienced by the researcher. My motivation for this study was to find out if there is a gap between the AB 540 law and actual practices at the college-level. Furthermore, I desired to learn about the ways in which student affairs professionals and campus policies could have a positive effect on undocumented students' academic success. Patton (2002) explained that in qualitative research, the researcher is mutually a participant as well as a primary instrument

for data collection and data analysis. Therefore, qualitative researchers must identify biases, values, and personal interests that might have an influence on the study (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002). Consequently, the researcher must plan for frequent reflection on how personal and professional experiences shaped the study.

I spent six plus years working with low-income and first generation college students in Los Angeles. As a result, I have key awareness of the challenges undocumented students face. One scenario regarding a student's California residency status at a Cal State University was a key factor in my desire to develop this study. This particular student faced many challenges on her college campus including experiences with student affairs personnel from the Financial Aid Office and Admissions. Without the support and the assistance from the campus personnel, this student eventually dropped out from this CSU. This student's experiences demonstrated that student affairs professionals play an integral role in helping undocumented students become acquainted with the campus.

Knowing that a student's experience is highly influenced by the interaction between the student and the student affairs professional, I was also conscious of my interaction as a counselor at local California community college. As a community college counselor I have often assisted with students' academic, economic, and emotional challenges. I also have training in personal and social counseling from multiple counseling courses. However, I feel the least competent when working with students resolving personal and social needs,

because these needs can be so different from one student to the next. Personal and social counseling is challenging in an academic setting because of the time constraints placed by the institution and the fact that most counseling appointments last only 30 minutes. Therefore, addressing students' non-academic needs and academic needs in one sitting is difficult. Furthermore, as a financial aid counselor, I was aware of the difficulty of fairly implementing and following through with campus satisfactory academic progress and academic probation policies while being attuned to students' individual needs.

Students are faced with multiple challenges and hurdles, especially early on during their undergraduate experience. Front-line student affairs professionals are generally the first college representative new students meet on campus. Therefore, it is important to know how student affairs professionals prioritize tasks, exercise self-discretion, and develop coping strategies to meet the needs of undocumented students. Gaining insights on the experiences of student affairs professionals who work with undocumented students regularly on various CSU campuses and community colleges illuminates policy impact.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, a general overview of the study's methodology and research design was provided along with the rationale for selecting this approach. The sampling, data collection, instrumentation and data analysis procedures were also addressed. Finally, the chapter discussed strategies in attempt to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. In Chapter 4, the results of the study are presented.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the study's findings based on the research questions and emergent themes. The chapter begins with a summary of the methodology, which is followed by the research questions and the overarching themes in relation to the research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings. The findings presented in this chapter will set the stage for the discussion and implications discussed in Chapter 5.

#### **Qualitative Methodology**

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers whose responsibility it is to interpret and implement policies related to undocumented students. This includes policies such as AB 540, which allowed this population to qualify for in-state tuition for colleges and universities in California. Through 18 semi-structured interviews, I collected qualitative data that explored the reasons why student affairs professionals chose their profession and how they interact with undocumented students. Moreover, the interview questions were designed to learn about how they as individual service providers and their respective departments interpret and implement AB 540 as well as how they as front-line professionals managed the demands of their particular positions.

All of the participants completed semi-structured, individual interviews that were guided by the following research questions:

1. How do current student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers describe their experiences in interpreting and implementing California Assembly Bill 540?
2. How are higher education departments of admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers currently interpreting and implementing California Assembly Bill 540 on their campuses?
3. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe how campus policies and procedures on AB 540 changed over time?
4. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe their management of the demands and changes of the interpretation and implementation of AB 540?

The following themes were found as a result of the analysis of data from the 18 semi-structured interviews: (a) the front-line student affairs experience, (b) the nature of departmental tasks, and (c) coping mechanisms.

### **Theme One: The Front-Line Student Affairs Experience**

In order to contextualize how student affairs professionals managed their daily tasks and how they interacted with undocumented students, I wanted to understand why and how they chose their profession and what inspired them to stay in education as front-line professionals. Eighteen front-line student affairs professionals were interviewed individually, face-to-face. Of the 18 interviews,

only three interviewees were males, and they all worked at Dream Resource Centers. Two front-line admissions and records staff, two financial aid staff, and two dream resource center staff from each of the following campuses participated in this study: Rocky College, a public, two year community college and Metropolitan University and Valley University both of which are public, four year universities. The average years of experience in student affairs among the participants was over eight years. The range of experience included: Madison, who had the most experience with 33 years, and Penny, who had the least experience with 6 months in student affairs. Furthermore, 14 of the study participants were Latino/Latina and four of the participants were of Asian Pacific Islander descent. Table 1 provides further details on the 18 participants. The front-line student affairs experiences theme contained two distinct sub-themes: (a) journeys to serving undocumented students and (b) having difficult conversations.

Table 1

*Description of Research Participants*

Participant Name	Gender	School- Position	Years in Student Affairs	Ethnicity
Cecilia	Female	Rocky College- Financial Aid	6 years	Asian Pacific Islander
Diana	Female	Rocky College- Financial Aid	9 years	Latina
Madison	Female	Rocky College- Admissions	33 years	Latina
Vanessa	Female	Rocky College- Admissions	11 years	Latina
Eric	Male	Rocky College- Dream Center	4 years	Latino
Penny	Female	Rocky College- Dream Center	6 months	Latina
Gwen	Female	Metropolitan University- Financial Aid	11 years	Latina
Jenny	Female	Metropolitan University- Financial Aid	10 years	Latina
Lisa	Female	Metropolitan University- Admissions	8 years	Latina
Victoria	Female	Metropolitan University- Admissions	3 years	Latina
Lorena	Female	Metropolitan University- Dream Center	15 years	Latina
Rose	Female	Metropolitan University- Dream Center	1 year	Latina
Sherry	Female	Valley University- Admissions	9 years	Asian Pacific Islander
Yvette	Female	Valley University- Admissions	8 years	Latina
Mindy	Female	Valley University- Financial Aid	12 years	Latina
Tina	Female	Valley University- Financial Aid	8 years	Asian Pacific Islander
Henry	Male	Valley University- Dream Center	2 years	Latino
Mateo	Male	Valley University- Dream Center	2 years	Asian Pacific Islander

*Note:* Pseudonyms were used for participants. Ethnicity was based on visual identification.

## **Journeys to Serving Undocumented Students**

Current literature and research have minimally addressed the roles of front-line student affairs professionals and their work with undocumented students. In order to gain an understanding of the influences of front-line professionals, it is important to understand the narratives of these people. Therefore, participants were asked to talk about their personal experiences with career development and the journeys they have taken with the undocumented student population on their campuses. Many of them commented on similar experiences of (a) being a student worker while attending school, (b) feeling rewarded by interactions with students, (c) being undocumented themselves or personally knowing someone undocumented, and (d) intrinsically wanting to help undocumented students.

**Student workers.** Eight of the 18 participants shared that they used to be student workers or student assistants for the respective departments in which they now work. Eight of the 18 participants described how their roles have changed over the years at their respective departments and schools. Jenny (Female, Metropolitan University, 10 years, Latina), who used to be a student worker in Financial Aid, described why she stayed in Financial Aid,

It just happened because I was a student here, I was a work study student and then after I graduated, I was offered a temporary position. After the temporary position, I became permanent, so I kind of always liked office environment jobs. I always wanted a desk, computer to work on as a little girl, so it kind of happened.

Similarly, Vanessa (Female, Rocky College, Admissions & Records, 11 years, Latina) shared her journey about how she started working in Admissions & Records, “I started working there as a student worker. At first it was just the convenience coming to class and working on campus, but I really enjoyed the customer service aspect of it.” Therefore, 11 years later, Vanessa continues to work at Rocky College as a residency specialist.

Six of the participants started working in student affairs as part-time student workers and now they are working in student affairs as full-time professionals. Moreover, their roles and duties have increased over the years. Victoria (Female, Metropolitan University, Admissions & Records, 3 years, Latina) described how her role as a student worker shifted when she became a full-time professional. As a full-time professional, Victoria’s current line of work involves more interactions with students than when she was a student worker. She recalled,

My position was more like behind the scenes and it was a lot of, like, scanning, so I didn't really do any interaction with the students whatsoever, just processing. I moved to another department where I had a little bit more phone call interaction.

Many of these student workers took pride and joy in what they did despite the fact that most of the work was behind the scenes. Furthermore, Penny (Female, Rocky College, Dream Center, 6 months, Latina) explained her excitement of being a student worker on campus, “I feel really proud. Now that I have my job here, I tell my family members, ‘Oh, I work at school; I work helping

undocumented students.” Many student workers eventually become full-time front-line professionals because they enjoyed the student interaction and the job satisfaction.

**Feeling rewarded.** More than 66% of the participants shared how happy and empowered they felt after helping students. As a community college student affairs professional, Madison (Female, Rocky College, 33 years, Latina) who has worked in Admissions and Records for the last 33 years explained, “It’s been very rewarding seeing that some of those students have completed their degree and graduated, and even some of them have gone to UCs, CSUs, have come back and say thank you.” Many of the interviewees asserted that they felt rewarded by doing their job effectively. Moreover, most of them enjoyed the student interaction and the rapport they built with students. Vanessa (Female, Rocky College, 11 years, Admissions and Records, Latina) agreed that once she built a relationship with students, they remembered her and would come back and thank her for the services she provided them. One of the greatest rewards mentioned by the front-line staff is having the ability to witness graduation. Gwen, who has worked in Financial Aid for 11 years at Metropolitan University, explained how she felt when she saw her students in their caps and gowns on commencement day, “It’s like I’m participating—It’s as if your own child was graduating.”

Front-line financial aid officers explained their feelings of making a difference through their ability to provide funding toward students’ education. Mindy (Female, Valley University, 12 years, Latina) described how she is aware

of the fact that financial aid can be the make-it or break-it point for students. Therefore, she feels satisfaction in knowing that she played a role in students' educational attainment by securing financial aid for them. Cecilia, a financial aid front-line staff (Female, Rocky College, 6 years, Asian Pacific Islander), outlined that without federal aid, state aid, or scholarships, many students would have trouble completing school.

More specifically, front-line dream center professionals explained the personal connections they had with undocumented students. Henry, the coordinator of the Dream Center at Valley University (Male, 2 years, Latino), shared the powerful meaning behind his work with undocumented students,

It's so rewarding to see students thriving. To see them come into our space, come to speak to me, and be discombobulated, not know what's going on, and be really confused or uncertain, have something wrong at the university with paperwork or what not. And then once we talk and they give me a moment of their time and being able to break it down for them and be able to highlight what has been done before or what wasn't available before.

Correspondingly, Penny (Female, Dream Center, 6 months, Latina), a student worker at Rocky College, mentioned the connection she has with undocumented students. Being undocumented herself, she understood the challenges and struggles these students face. Therefore, it is especially rewarding for her to provide support for others whose shoes she previously shared.

**Personally knowing someone who is undocumented.** Half of the participants shared their personal experience of having undocumented family members and friends or being undocumented themselves. Four out of the 18 participants used to be or are still undocumented. Their personal relationships with the undocumented student population influenced their work with this specific population on their campuses. Mateo (Male, 2 years, Asian Pacific Islander), a student intern at the Dream Center at Valley University, advised that his immigration status has made him:

more compassionate, and I can relate. Whenever they shared their struggles and their challenges, whether it's financially, personally, with family life, I can connect in different aspects. It's not to say that I understand completely, because they are complete individuals, but they have their own experiences. But in some aspects of it I can relate, too, and I think that opens doors to really seeing the person in front of you as a student and their other identities, not just being undocumented.

Being able to identify as undocumented has not only given Henry (Male, Valley University, Dream Center, 2 years, Latino) the ability to relate with students, but has given him a professional advantage when working with undocumented students because it has made rapport and trust building easier when working with undocumented students at the center.

Moreover, for those student affairs professionals who did not identify as undocumented, seven of them mentioned that they had close family and friends who were undocumented. Eric (Male, 4 years, Latino), who works passionately

with undocumented students as the Dream Center coordinator at Rocky College, shared that oftentimes undocumented students falsely assumed that he was also a Dreamer. Although he was not a Dreamer, Eric explained that,

I came here (U.S.) when I was 17, and so I had to learn English and quickly adapt. I really feel that I identify with my students for being an immigrant, going through the same similar struggles that they have gone through in a way; our families too. I still have some family that are still undocumented; friends are undocumented.

Vanessa (Female, Rocky College, 11 years, Latina) also revealed that she has shared her expertise in Admissions and Records with her friends and acquaintances who had little or no idea about how undocumented students can afford college.

Other participants have shared that their bilingual capabilities also influence their work with undocumented students and students' families.

Vanessa (Rocky College, Admissions and Records, 11 years) shared that being Latina and having the ability to speak Spanish with parents makes them feel more at ease and relatable.

**Intrinsically wanting to help undocumented students.** Many of the participants mentioned that their work with undocumented students happened organically—meaning that there was no direction from management or others instructing them to work with the undocumented student population. Multiple participants described that before AB 540, there was no program or financial aid available specifically for undocumented students. Prior to AB 540, AB 130, and

AB 131, undocumented students did not qualify for state financial aid, EOP/EOPS, or state funded student support services programs. Student affairs professionals often used their own money, time, and social networks to help undocumented students. Lorena (Female, Metropolitan University, 15 years), used to work as an EOPS advisor and she described her efforts in providing resources for undocumented students before AB 540,

With EOP, we are about access and we are about underserved communities and looking at first generation students. . . . Legally, they couldn't be in our program but we still helped them. So we would do things under the table like get them books and just go out of our way to do things for those students because they knew that there was no other support.

Helping educate undocumented students about available resources and support on their campus also was not limited to the school setting. Many of the interviewees have been advising community members before the development of Dream Centers. Madison (Rocky College, Admissions and Records, 33 years, Latina), Henry (Valley University, Dream Center, 2 years, Latino) and Gwen (Metropolitan University, Financial Aid, 11 years, Latina) detailed their informal involvement with community members outside of their campuses. These student affairs professionals voluntarily made presentations at local high schools, supermarkets, department stores, and other venues in order to reach students and families who did not have the access to information and resources necessary to help them attend college.

## Having Difficult Conversations

Aside from feeling rewarded and being inspired by their students, another prevalent theme for front-line student affairs professionals was the commonality of having difficult conversations. Front-line staff described the difficulties and their discomfort of (a) having to probe and ask multiple questions, (b) feeling caught in the middle, (c) having their hands tied, (d) offering other resources and alternatives, (e) not having all of the information and resources needed to help, and (f) dealing with irate students with little to no privacy. Twelve out of the 18 participants experienced situations where they had to inform undocumented students of their ineligibility for AB 540 because these students did not meet the AB 540 criterion or they had missed the document deadline. Although students and student affairs professionals do everything in their power, there are times that undocumented students are not able to receive state financial aid due to campus policies and state laws. Lorena (Female, 15 years, Latina), the coordinator of the Dream Center at Metropolitan University, advised that she despises having to be the person who has to break the unfortunate news to undocumented students,

I'm the front-line person, and I'm the one that has to look someone in the face and say, 'Oh, you went to adult school, guess what, you don't qualify for AB 540. Even though at Greenland College you were fine, at Sky C.C. you were cool, but here, guess what, we're going to close the door on you.' I've had to have that conversation a handful of times, and it's horrible.

Similar conversations occurred with front counter admissions and records staff. Not limited to informing undocumented students about their AB 540 status, admissions and records staff often had conversations with limited privacy regarding students' legal immigration status in order to determine residency status. Madison (Female, 33 years, Admissions & Records, 33 years, Latina) shared it was her responsibility to verify students' immigration documents. She explained that if she saw discrepancies between the paperwork that the student had turned in and the admissions application, she had to question the student and ask for further documentation to prove the student's immigration status.

Difficult conversations did not stop with the dream center and admissions and records staff. Occasionally, undocumented students who were eligible for in-state tuition through AB 540 were not eligible to receive state financial aid because there was not enough aid for everyone who had applied and qualified. Mindy (female, Valley University, 12 years, Latina) shared that "another hard answer we have to give is that, 'yeah, you did your part, but we ran out of funding.'" Mindy's colleague at Valley University, Tina (Female, 8 years, Asian Pacific Islander), also mentioned that although she wanted to help every student, she could not. She had to follow regulations, which resulted in having uncomfortable conversations at the Financial Aid front counter. Other difficult conversations also happened at Metropolitan University's Financial Aid office. Jenny (Female, 10 years, Latina) highlighted that she oftentimes had to tell AB 540 eligible students that they only had enough aid to cover tuition. If students

wanted to live on campus, she told them they would have to take out a loan, borrow money from relatives or secure a job.

**Probe and ask multiple questions.** Over 72% of the participants talked about the challenges of having to figure out the nature of students' visits. Especially for undocumented students, this investigative questioning process could be even more intimidating because they feared that the school might disclose their immigration status to immigration authorities. Although there has been an increase of undocumented students willing to self-disclose their immigration status post AB 540, it is still common for front-line student affairs professionals to have to ask a series of questions to narrow down what types of services and programs for which students may be eligible. Vanessa (Female, 11 years, Admissions and Records, Latina) from Rocky College provided a detailed description of how she worked with students who were not comfortable with disclosing their immigration status,

I do encounter a lot of different issues where sometimes students aren't comfortable saying they're undocumented, or sometimes they're not really sure what to put [on AB 540 affidavit] so sometimes they get confused and indicate that they're nonimmigrants. So I have to troubleshoot, I go over, well, what is your status, and try to figure it out with them, without telling them, because we're not supposed to lead them as to how to answer it. I do have to help them out quite a bit sometimes, so that way, they understand the process. Because one, it's either they don't understand, or

two, they're scared to say it. I do come across a lot of those students on a daily basis so I have quite a bit of experience working with them.

For students not comfortable publicly sharing their immigration status, the dream centers provided assistance. Henry (Valley University, 2 years, Latino) and Eric (Rocky College, 4 years, Latino) are coordinators for the Dream Resource Centers on their campuses. They shared that every student, every situation, and every conversation is different. Henry shared the importance of having the ability to “[probe] sensibly but [get] to the root of the issues and [understand] that not every student is going to just come out and say whatever it is.” Asking a lot of questions to elicit the right answers? is a part of their job because they want to make sure a Dream Center is the right place for the student; if not, they need to redirect them to a different department.

**Feeling caught in the middle.** Eight participants indicated that sometimes they felt caught in the middle between campus policies, regulations, and their will to help the student. Penny (Female, 6 months, Rocky College, Latina), a student worker who is also a Dreamer, explained that although she wanted to help a fellow student, the issue was beyond the control of her department, the Dream Center. Therefore, she felt sad that she could not offer further assistance. Sometimes issues are beyond the control of the Dream Center coordinators as well. Lorena (female, Metropolitan University, Dream Center, 15 years, Latina), a longtime ally for Dreamer students, felt ineffective and explained her frustration with the AB 540 policy on her campus. “Because of this policy, I have to turn around and deny access, and it's just terrible. It feels

counterproductive. It feels like I'm going against what I'm supposed to be doing, which is being an advocate. I think that's my number one role.”

Feeling caught in the middle is also happening in other departments. Mindy (Female, Valley University, 12 years, Latina) shared her experiences implementing policies in Financial Aid on her campus,

I find myself having to distance myself because it's hard to get personal with each of the students, because, again, we serve so many. And in order to do your job, sometimes there has to be a line where—I will help you as much as I can, but I'm still expected to follow regulations. So having to balance it; it gets tiring too.

Victoria (3 years, Latina), a current, full-time Admissions and Records professional at Metropolitan University and former Dreamer student, felt conflicted about not being able to help out fellow Dreamers as a front-line staff. “I see it both ways. I see it from the students’ points of view when they don't have another form of ID. . . . So I do see it both ways. Where I do understand the students’ points of view, but there's also our point of view.” Campus policies require front-line professionals need to see a government issued or a campus-issued photo identification.

**“Hands are tied”**. As mentioned earlier, many student affairs professionals intrinsically want to help undocumented students. However, due to their responsibilities and the need to follow regulations and policies, professionals have to distance themselves in order to help everyone equally. For admissions and records staff, in particular, this is true since they determine

students' AB 540 status. Although front-line admissions staff want to help students, Sherry (Valley University, 9 years, Asian Pacific Islander) explained that she could not look the other way, "I always state to these students, if they don't qualify for this because maybe they're missing a semester of high school, . . . it's a statutory law; I cannot make any changes to it." Similarly, at Metropolitan University, Lisa (Female, 8 years, Latina) who works in Admissions and Records stated that it is not up to her to decide if adult school qualifies as years of schooling needed to meet the in-state tuition exemption, it is up to their campus' legal counsel: "If they approve it, great, we can process. If not, it's not up to me to say, adult school is fine; adult school is not fine."

Financial aid and dream resource center staff shared the same sentiments about the unpredictability of being awarded with state aid. Rose (Female, 1 year, Latina), a student worker at the Metropolitan University, explained that she paid her first year tuition out of pocket as a Dreamer. She mentioned that she would "never rely on financial aid because things can go wrong, or they can take away your money." Similar frustrations were documented by Mindy's comment, "For FAFSA or Dream students, it's never guaranteed, you know. If we ran out of funding or federal regulations or whatever changes, our hands are tied." Although front-line professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers intrinsically wanted to help Dreamer students, their hands were tied due to the nature of their work.

**Offer other resources and alternatives.** Although front-line professionals may be limited in what they can do, due to policies and regulations,

many would refer students who did not qualify for their program and services to another department or person in order to seek out other supportive services. In the interviews, front-line admissions and records and financial aid staff talked about situations when Dreamer students were dropped from their classes due to non-payment. Yvette (Female, 8 years, Latina) from the admissions and records office at Valley University shared that she would email instructors and their departments on the students' behalf and recommended that students themselves email their instructors and their respective departments so they could get back into their classes. Unfortunately, there was nothing else Yvette could do within her own department.

Similarly, in Financial Aid, Mindy (Female, Valley University, 12 years) shared how she goes over options with the students if they did not have enough financial aid money to cover their tuition. Mindy explained the possibility of setting up a payment plan for the student with the cashier's office. Others in financial aid suggested that Dreamer students apply for scholarships in order to cover their unmet needs.

Although front-line staff have been referring their students to other departments, Penny (Female, Rocky College, Dream Center, 6 months), who works in the Dream Center, spoke about how many people, including counselors, on her campus were not aware that a dream center existed. She shared,

I would really love it if they send them to us where we can properly help them, whether it's an application, or school, [the Dream Center] offers a lot

of help for undocumented students, whether it's resources, whether it's scholarships, how to go about when transferring and stuff.

Dream center staff assist students with their financial aid, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, and other resources. They also help students discover inaccuracies on their paperwork so they can become eligible for programs and services.

**Lack of information and resources.** Another frustration shared by 50% of the participants was the lack of disseminated pertinent information needed in their roles. For instance, Victoria (Female, Admissions and Records, 3 years), who works at the front counter at Metropolitan University, suggested that if she knew how to process the AB 540 form, she would feel much more comfortable serving this student population. Of those who completed an interview, 50% of the financial aid front-line staff shared their lack of knowledge about information on the Dream Loan, where Dreamers may be eligible for state and campus based loans. Likewise, staff at Metropolitan University and Valley University talked about how they were asked to implement a new program without the proper guidance from their management and the California State Aid Commission. Tina (Female, Financial Aid, 8 years, Asian Pacific Islander) honestly commented,

The government passed the bill but never consult or ask feedback from the school. For example, the Dreamer loan staff have no idea that we are not fully informed. We are asked to do something without knowing the full picture. Students come in and ask us about it but we don't know the

details. Usually management has a game plan, but they have to rely on California Student Aid Commission's guidance.

These staff felt guilty and inadequate when they did not have the proper information to assist the students. Penny (Female, Dream Center, 6 months) and Tina (Female, Financial Aid, 8 years) shared that they felt like they did not do their job sufficiently. They felt incompetent because they were supposed to provide the students with the information but they could not.

**Dealing with irate students.** Without the proper tools and knowledge on programs and services available to students, students sometimes became impatient and upset at front-line staff. Eight out of the 18 participants mentioned the difficulty of working with irate students. Diana and Vanessa from Rocky College talked about the challenges of working with a limited number of staff during the peak season. Diana (Female, 9 years, Latina) mentioned that upset students who had not received their financial aid or were denied financial aid often took frustrations out on the front-line staff. Furthermore, Vanessa (Female, 11 years, Latina) in Admissions and Records talked about the reasons why students were upset at her. "There are a lot of students that get angry and upset and don't understand the process, especially since different schools have different documentation requirements" to determine residency and AB 540 eligibility.

Two out of the three Dream Center student workers who participated in the study shared their challenges with irate students. Rose (Female, Metropolitan University, 1 year, Latina) and Penny (Female, Rocky College, 6

months, Latina) discussed about how occasionally students were rude or would verbally attack them. Penny, who is also a Dreamer, talked about her experiences trying to help other fellow Dreamers on her campus,

I feel kind of like when you mistreat an animal, it bites back to you even though when you're trying to help them. I feel like it's the same thing for humans. Like sometimes, someone wants to help us but we're so used to getting always abused and getting taken advantage of that we want to bite the same hand that's lending a hand to us. I've had occasions where I want to help someone but that someone feels like, 'Oh no, you can't help me.' They feel like I'm somehow going to affect them or hurt them. I would say it's really hard for some students to kind of help them, because, I guess they don't know how to be helped because the situations they have been through.

Others also mentioned the process of referring these irate students to their supervisors in order to resolve the issue. They prefer referring these students to their supervisors because usually students were calmer and more accepting of a second person's decision.

Everyday front-line student affairs professionals had to have difficult conversations with students, specifically with undocumented students. For undocumented students who did not self-disclose their immigration status, front-line staff must probe and ask follow-up questions to narrow down the intention of their visit. Although sometimes these front-line staff may personally want to help Dreamer students, campus policies and state regulations often prevent them

from doing so. When front-line staff did not have a solution to offer students, they referred Dreamer students to other departments, specifically the Dream Center on their respective campuses.

### **Theme Two: Nature of their Departmental Tasks**

Admissions and records, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers are responsible for different aspects of Dreamer students' educational journeys. This theme described the responsibilities of front-line student affairs professionals in (a) admissions, (b) financial aid, and (c) Dream Resource Centers. Specifically, admissions and records determined students' AB 540 and AB 2000 statuses. Once their in-state tuition exemption status (AB 540 and AB 2000) was defined, financial aid then provided Dreamers with access to California based aid such as the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver, State University Grant, or the Cal Grant. Each Dream Center serves as a referral hub when front-line admissions and financial aid staff cannot meet the needs of the students.

#### **Admissions and Records**

Front-line professionals in admissions worked with undocumented students specifically to determine students' in-state tuition exemption statuses and to verify students' documentation reported on official applications and forms. Moreover, admissions professionals addressed their roles in interpreting and implementing campus policies and legal regulations.

**In-state tuition exemption status.** Front-line admissions and records staff have an array of knowledge of the in-state tuition exemption form. For many staff at the Rocky College, Valley University, and Metropolitan University, Sherry,

the residency specialist at Valley University (Female, 9 years, Asian Pacific Islander) summed up their reality saying, "They [staff] provide them [students] with the form. But if they have questions then that's when the front-line person will come in and call me. Then I will go up there. Because a lot of times they don't know which box to check." Similarly, Vanessa (Admissions and Records, 11 years, Latina) from Rocky College mentioned that a lot of the staff did not really understand the AB 540 form. They accepted the paperwork, and if there were any problems, Vanessa was responsible for following up with the student. Furthermore, Vanessa elaborated on the AB 540 policy, "The majority of the time, it's very confusing even for staff to keep up with all the different changes and everything." Therefore, there is only one person responsible for processing the AB 540 form at each of the three campuses. Most of the AB 540 knowledge lies with the residency specialist. If the residency specialist is unavailable, most of the Admissions front-line staff would have limited knowledge.

Yvette, who worked as a front-line Admissions staff for eight years at Valley College, shared that she did not receive training on AB 540, "We were told that students have some knowledge of the AB 540 form, and they know what they are looking for." The front-line work is further complicated by the technical language used on the AB 540 form (see Appendix C). All admissions staff explained the difficulties in explaining the technical language of the form in everyday language. Since the AB 540 form is an affidavit, front-line staff have to be cautious; they cannot instruct students on how to complete the form.

Another issue with the AB 540 form is that individual campuses can have their own interpretation of how one would be eligible for in-state tuition. Yvette (8 years, Latina) mentioned that she called other schools, and people said Valley University is more lenient in terms of the documentation that is needed to do the review. Unlike Valley University, Rocky College did not require students to submit a high school diploma and high school transcripts with the form to be eligible for AB 540, since the AB 540 form is an affidavit, and having the affidavit is enough to determine eligibility. It is uncommon for community colleges to ask their students to turn in a copy of their high school transcript, since it is not mandatory for students to have graduated from a high school. The variance between colleges creates some issues for transfer students. Sherry talked about how student who used to be AB 540 eligible at their community college would no longer be AB 540 eligible at Valley University,

I have had some students from the CCCs who were approved AB 540, but they shouldn't have been. So I don't know what the CCCs are looking at. For instance, we're not allowed to accept adult schools, they have to be high schools. They can't attend adult schools. And I think some CCCs will accept the adult schools. So when the student transfers, you know, that's an issue there.

Lisa (Admissions and Records, 8 years, Latina) at Metropolitan University The same challenge.

The complication related to adult school became an issue soon after AB 2000 was passed. Prior to AB 2000, undocumented students had to attend a

California high school for at least three years and have a California high school diploma or its equivalent in order to be eligible for in-state tuition. With the passage of AB 2000, undocumented students can use elementary and middle school to supplement the three years needed in high school; however, students still need to have a high school diploma or its equivalent, such as the General Educational Development (GED) test or the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) (CSAC, 2015). Sherry (Female, Valley University, 9 years) shared the following about a student whom she would never forget:

[The student] did two and a half years of high school; she graduated early from high school, she took her exit exam, and she had great grades. She was undocumented and we couldn't approve her AB 540, so she would have to pay the nonresident tuition.

Students who graduate high school early due to academic advancement did not benefit from AB 540; therefore, AB 2000 was passed.

Although AB 2000 appeared to be more inclusive, front-line staff felt differently about the policy. Lisa (Female, Metropolitan University, Admissions and Records, 8 years, Latina) described the policy as “a whole other level of hot mess.” AB 2000 was a brand new policy, which confused front-line staff due to their inexperience and lack of training with it. Front-line admissions staff had trouble explaining the policy to students because they had not received guidance on whether adult school years would meet the qualifications. Lisa, a front-line admissions staff member added, “It's devastating to understand the difference that, due to what is being interpreted by our legal counsel, we cannot proceed on

with applying adult school.” This frustration was shared by Lisa (Female, Metropolitan University, 8 years) since she knew other universities and colleges were accepting adult school years in order to qualify undocumented students for in-state tuition under AB 2000.

**Verification of documents.** Aside from processing their AB 540 and AB 2000 forms, undocumented students had other interactions with admissions staff. Lisa and Vanessa both spoke about working with undocumented students to correct and update their personal records. Undocumented students sometimes report incorrect social security information on their college applications. Therefore, “they come scared to our front office and fear that this information will be distributed to a third party and they'll come and get them or something, and that's always the fear,” explained Lisa. Students reported incorrect information because they were not really sure what to put forms. According to Vanessa (Female, Rocky College, 11 years, Latina),

There isn't an option for DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals], so they don't realize that they should put “other.” So they put “temporary resident,” which to us means, do you have a visa? In those cases we would ask for the documentation. A lot of times they don't keep the documentation. It's kind of hard to remedy that situation, so sometimes, we'll have to be like, you know, maybe contact the lawyer that helped you fill out the paperwork, maybe they have the copies of it and you can bring in a copy. When we do require documentation because of a discrepancy, they aren't familiar with what we're asking for because they know that they

have—Dream Act, when really it's Deferred Action. They get the two things confused, and then they're not really sure about the documentation itself. A lot of times they have someone who helped them, and they just know that they have a status, but they're not really sure what status it is. When students made mistakes on their documents, it created discrepancies. When there were discrepancies, admissions personnel ask students to bring in original documentation to address the mistake.

**Role in AB 540 and AB 2000 implementation and interpretation.** Over 66% of the admissions and record participants interpreted their role as being important, while the other 34% of the participants did not think they had a role in interpreting and implementing policies. According to Yvette (8 years, Valley University, Latina), a front-line admissions supervisor, “We don’t have to deal with anything else, we just give out the form [AB 540 affidavit].” Yvette did not perceive her role as being influential for the AB 540 implementation on her campus. However, Victoria (Metropolitan University, 3 years) described how her role is special, “I think we play a very important role because we're in the front-line and the students always come in asking a million questions.” Furthermore, Vanessa (Female, 11 years, Latina) communicated how without the help from admissions staff, undocumented students would not to come to Rocky College. “Our role is very important to make sure that they do actually complete their education and hope for a better life for them.”

At the same institution, Madison (Female, 33 years, Latina), who also worked in Admissions and Records, explained that her role is to do what she was

instructed to do, what she read, and what she understood. She elaborated that she goes by the legal rules. However, at the same time, she also encourages students to challenge her decision by going to her supervisors if the students were dissatisfied with her decisions. Contrasting with what is what Madison mentioned about following the legal rules. Yvette (Female, Valley University, 8 years) shared that sometimes front-line professionals' personal beliefs can influence students' AB 540 statuses,

Two years ago a student was denied AB 540 exemption. The student and his parent were not working. The student said, "How could this be possible?" The person who was in charge of residency was not friendly. I called the residency specialist, who was white. She said on the phone, "Why should I come out and talk to them. My children don't qualify for financial aid. Why should I help AB 540 students? They are not white. Why should I?" The person was upset at me for bothering her and asking her to come out.

Evidently, admissions professionals play a critical role in determining whether or not students qualify for in-state tuition.

### **Financial Aid**

Once students' AB 540 or AB 2000 statuses are determined, financial aid staff then can process students' financial aid files. Without the AB 540 status indication on file, students faced delay in receiving their financial aid. Financial aid front-line professionals worked with undocumented students to explore various topics such as (a) inability to receive aid, (b) state-level aid, (c) Selective

Service registration, and they provided the students with (d) technical support to complete the financial aid application. Furthermore, financial aid staff addressed their (e) collaboration with other departments and (f) role in interpreting and implementing policies related to undocumented students.

**Inability to receive aid.** Prior to AB 130 and AB 131, undocumented students rarely visited the Financial Aid office. Diana (Female, Rocky College, 9 years) remembered,

At that time, there was no financial aid available for undocumented students. It was difficult for students. Most of them had to pay out-of-state tuition fees. So it was really difficult for these students to attend college without having to pay high expenses.

It was not until four years ago that financial aid staff started to have more interaction with the undocumented student population. With the passage of AB 130 and AB 131, more students come to the office to ask about the application process and the criteria to receive state funded financial aid.

**State-level aid.** All of the financial aid staff who participated in the study addressed the main reason why undocumented students visited their offices. One hundred percent of the participants talked about how Dreamers would visit their offices primarily to check on the status of their California Dream Act applications. At the community college level, undocumented students can be eligible for the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver (BOG). Cecilia (Female, 6 years, Asian Pacific Islander), who works at the financial aid office at Rocky College, explained that she would recommend students complete the Dream Act

application “because they never know if they’ll be eligible for anything in addition to the BOG. But with the Dream Act, depending on when they submit it, they could be eligible for a Cal Grant, scholarships as well.” Although it seemed like undocumented students had access to state-level aid, Tina (Valley University, 8 years, Asian Pacific Islander) shared that those who did not meet the requirements for Cal Grant may be eligible for the State University Grant (SUG). Tina talked about how competitive it is to receive the SUG. “There is a specific amount of money funded by the State of California and administered by the university. It’s the same pool of money and now we have more students with more need but we have not increased funding.”

**Selective Service registration.** Ability to access financial aid was also complicated by Selective Service for males. According to current laws, immigrant men, documented or undocumented, living in the United States, age 18 through 25, are required to register for Selective Service. As stated by the Selective Service System (2016), “In a crisis requiring a draft, men would be called in a sequence determined by random lottery number and year of birth.” Being registered with Selective Service is not the same as being signed up for military services. However, eligible men may be denied benefits or jobs if they have not registered for Selective Service. Therefore, without the physical proof of registration, students’ financial aid is detained. Prior to Selective Service registration being linked to the Dream Act application, undocumented students filed on paper and mailed in the registration. Selective Service used to take more than six weeks to process, which meant that financial aid could run out by the

time the proof registration was submitted. Tina (Valley University, 8 years, Asian Pacific Islander) talked about how she used to struggle with the conversation,

You don't want to tell them they probably won't make it. But you also don't want to give the student false hope. I will tell the student to be prepared down the line, "We may not have funding for you. There is a tiny chance, but there is a chance for you to receive some funding." So I encourage them to apply. It's a one-time struggle. The following year students don't have to apply to Selective Service again.

**Technical support.** Aside from checking if students qualify for financial aid, front-line financial aid staff also answer technical questions and provide technical support. For instance, questions such as "How do I fill out this section? My parents never filed taxes. How do I report my income? I worked under the table. How do I complete it?" Front-line financial aid staff review the Dream Act application with students if requested to do so. Another technical support financial aid staff provided was helping students update their name on the Dream Act application so their data with the school and California Student Aid Commission matched. This gave students the possibility of receiving aid.

**Collaboration with others.** Five out of the six financial aid professionals mentioned collaboration with other departments to promote and share information on the California Dream Act. Specifically, the financial aid office worked with high school outreach to assist undocumented students with their Dream Act applications. In addition to the work with high school outreach, financial aid staff also worked with admissions and records to notify students who

had not completed the AB 540 affidavit. Financial Aid staff at Metropolitan University took a proactive approach and emailed students who had a Dream Act application on file without the AB 540 marker on their database so these students were aware of the documentation deadlines. The collaboration continued beyond these two offices. Valley University and Metropolitan University's financial aid departments also collaborated with the Dream Centers and student clubs on their campuses to make connections with Dreamers.

**Role in policy interpretation and implementation.** Four out of six participants from financial aid departments shared opinions on their roles with AB 540 policy implementation. The majority of the participants did not feel that they played a role in AB 540 policy implementation, or the implementation of AB 130 and AB 131. Gwen (Metropolitan University, 11 years, Latina) and Jenny (Metropolitan University, 10 years) talked about how their roles were to follow the policies that were given to them. Their respective directors and management made the policy interpretations and decisions. Likewise, Mindy (Female, 12 years, Valley University) shared that AB 540 implementation is “not our jurisdiction. We don't really implement that. Our part comes in with the Dream Act application and financial aid for AB 540 students.” Financial aid front-line professionals shared a different view of their roles as opposed to the views of admissions front-line professionals who believed they have direct influences on students' AB 540 affidavit forms.

## **Dream Centers**

Dream Centers on these three campuses have served as the one-stop shop for Dreamers. Aside from being the central hub for undocumented students on their campuses, other sub themes were also found: the front-line professionals at these centers had also heard of and experienced the inconsistencies of AB 540 and AB 2000 practices. Moreover, another goal for the Dream Resource Centers was also to educate Dreamers about their rights, so they could educate others in their communities. Lastly, dream center staff functioned as advocates and assisted undocumented students with AB 540 policy change through collaboration with other Dream Resource Centers.

**One-stop shop.** Dream centers are spaces for undocumented students to gather and address their concerns. Dream center staff assist students with admissions and financial aid issues, and they also provide students with legal and mental health referrals. Lorena (Female, 15 years, Latina), who is the coordinator of the Dream Center at Metropolitan University, talked about her appreciation for the space, “It's that feeling of home. This is like our little home right here. I love to be able to get up from my desk and just walk right over here and talk to the students.” Having a space on campus for Dreamers has given Dreamers the ability to connect with others on a personal level. For instance, the Dream Center at Valley University hosted an event titled, Undocumented and Unafraid. Campus allies and Dreamers gathered in the same space to talk about different issues faced by undocumented students. This event allowed Dreamer students and allies to establish a larger sense of community. In addition to

building a sense of community for the students, dream center staff also provided similar services to those traditionally provided by admissions and financial aid.

Penny (Rocky College, 6 months, Latina), a student worker, spoke about her duties and her goal of always going above and beyond,

I feel like we go above it versus people who are next to us in admissions.

I don't really see them go outside and helping them or guiding them versus if a student comes to us. We actually walk them through the process.

Like I said, they're really confused; they don't know. When a student comes to us and they tell us their story, 'Hey, I don't know what my status is. Can you tell help me [figure out my status]?' versus if they go to admissions or financial aid, like, 'Well, I don't know; you should know.' . . .

We can properly help them whether it's an application, whether it's what—school offers a lot of help for undocumented students, whether it's resources, whether it's scholarships, how to go about when transferring and stuff.

Unlike the admissions and financial aid departments, whose responsibilities have been segmented, dream centers staff work with undocumented students holistically.

**Educate the community.** In order to serve the Dreamer community holistically, half of the participants talked about educating other students, so they could help someone else. Rose (Metropolitan University, 1 year, Latina) shared,

I will need to graduate, and I tell them, you know, I'm not going to be here long, I need you to take my job, you know. I need you to know this

information so you can tell your brother, your cousin, your friend, you know. They're going to need this information. So that's what I love to do. And I tell them, like, it's not for me, it's for you so you can go on and help others.

As a student leader on campus, Rose added how she saw her role as a student leader for the Dreamer community. "A leader to be able to be in the front line to educate the upcoming Dreamers' next generation and so forth." Furthermore, dream center staff also worked with parents to educate them about the college-going process. Henry (Valley University, 2 years, Latino) added,

I make them aware that being in college is not a right. *Plyer v Doe* states that K through 12 is a right for every child in America, regardless of citizenship status, but then after the 12th grade, this is not a right. It's a privilege.

He strived to explain to students and parents why these policies exist and how to navigate the college-going process.

**Politics.** Working at the dream center can be challenging. Penny (Rocky College, 6 months, Latina) shared her feelings about interacting with others who may not politically agree with the mission of the Dream Center,

Sometimes when I'm there—I guess for other people's political views, you feel like—you right away feel like they're staring at you wrong. Or when you're giving someone information, someone around you is looking at you, like, you're doing something wrong. To me, it makes me feel bad, like, why are you viewing me wrong. I think I deserve this chance just as much

as anybody else could deserve this chance. I would mostly say, just, I guess all the politics that are going on around us. I feel like sometimes people do not agree with us having a Dream Center, and it gets to us eventually.

Dream Center coordinators are most affected by politics. Politics is defined by the compromises dream center coordinators have to make in order to push forward their agenda. Two out of the three coordinators talked about how politics made their job challenging. Lorena (Metropolitan University, 15 years, Latina) spoke about the difficulty of pleasing her supervisors while remaining accountable to her students,

The other thing is your job is like nobody else. There's nobody else that is doing what we're doing on this campus. So you're kind of like an island in a way, you know, that could be tricky, I think, for a front-line staff. . . you got to please your director, the person you report to, but if you're too much trying to hold the line for administration, the students are going to see right through that, and you just lost all their respect. At the same time, if administration sees that you're just, you know, taking the side of students all the time and going up against them, that's not going to be good for you either because that means you don't have a professional skill, you know what I'm saying? So I think that part is difficult too.

More often than not working with the inherent politics of the student affairs position meant having to compromise. Eric (Rocky College, 4 years, Latino) commented about his willingness to compromise so that administration and

students both can be satisfied. Eric believed politics is essential in order for the center to flourish as a program.

**Inconsistent AB 540 and AB 2000 practices.** Dream center staff dealt with politics frequently. Lorena (Metropolitan University, 15 years) commented that the decision on AB 540 and AB 2000 implementation was based on politics and money,

We're talking money. Whenever you're dealing with the revenue of the institution, it's got to go through. Well, there's a staff member who is the residency specialist, but nothing gets approved by her if it's not overseen by the associate director of admissions. So that person is really the one that makes the final decision on those.

In addition to the director of admissions, upper management including the president and the attorney for that campus. They decided how they wanted to implement AB 540 and AB 2000. Lorena (Metropolitan University, 15 years, Latina) further commented, "Because there's no guidance from the Chancellor's Office, and you got 23 campuses. If they're not getting guidance from the Chancellor's Office, they're going to do things however they want to do it." Front-line dream center staff were the first ones on their campuses who became aware of the policy inconsistencies between campuses. Dream center staff met regularly and discussed issues through the Dreamers Resource Center Coalition, a workgroup designed to help other colleges to establish Dream Resource Centers.

**Role as advocates.** Dream center staff, with their extensive knowledge of advocating through lobbying, are at the front-line to help undocumented students with their educational needs. For example, through some advocacy work from the Dreamers Resource Center Coalition and Dr. Macias, retired assistant vice president of government relations & community relations for California State University Long Beach who is also a strong supporter for the AB 540 community, the CSU system's Board of Trustees now accepts adult and continuation school for AB 2000. The ability to use adult school was finalized by the CSU Chancellor's Office, and all 23 campuses are no longer be able to implement their own standards and criterion.

In addition, dream center staff served as advocates for undocumented students on their respective campuses. Eric (Rocky College, 4 years, Latino) shared his short-term plan to ensure students' ability to start school on time and be ready to receive services including financial aid and EOPS,

I'm calling a meeting with the VP to the dean of enrollment, assistant director and also financial aid is going to be included, because all of us need to be in tune of how, if this is not processed in admissions correctly or in a timely manner, because the form takes about two weeks to get processed. I think it's too long. If a student turns in the AB 540 form here on campus, and did it wrong, no one will reach out to them to let them know because we have a large volume.

Undocumented students who filled out the affidavit incorrectly at Rocky College were not being notified and no one from the school reached out to the students to

inform them of the outcome. Thus, these students were not eligible for financial aid and other state funded student support services. Streamlining the AB 540, AB 2000, and financial aid processes for undocumented students is the number one priority for Eric, and he felt strongly about the urgency of his work and his responsibility to speak up about the issue.

### **Theme Three: Coping Mechanisms**

Front-line admissions, financial aid, and dream center staff talked about their strategies in dealing with the changes and the demands of their work. Especially in admissions and financial aid, staff talked about how they treat everyone, documented and undocumented students, the same, so no one received special attention. Furthermore, all of the front-line professionals in admissions and records, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers commented on the lack of institutional training, and how they had to self-educate and seek guidance from their supervisors in order to manage the changes and demands of their positions.

#### **Treat Everyone Equally**

Nine out of the 12 participants in admissions and financial aid talked about treating everyone the same way. They did not distinguish students by their immigration status. Madison (Rocky College, 33 years, Latina) from Admissions explained.

The business process that we have at the front counter is basically if we are busy and if there is an issue . . . I have the student, I help them as much as I possibly can, we do not ask them to step aside.”

Similarly, Tina from Financial Aid at Valley University (8 years, Asian Pacific Islander) talked about why she treated every student equally, “Sometimes special treatment may make students feel uncomfortable. I tried to make students feel comfortable and gain trust in me.” The goal of front-line admissions and financial aid staff was to help students as efficiently as they could so that the students did not have to come back. Mindy (Valley University, 12 years, Latina) asserted, “I find myself having to kind of distance myself because it's hard to get personal with each of the students, because, again, we serve so many.”

### **Lack of Institutional Training**

Yvette from Valley University (Admissions, 8 years, Latina) commented that with the implementation of AB 540 more students have been open about their identity and their needs. She mentioned, “Campus wide, everyone feels they need to go to the extra step to help undocumented students. There is no training. I believe everyone should go to training.” As for Sherry (Admissions, 9 years, Asian Pacific Islander), the residency specialist at Valley, she shared that although she received her training from the person who previously held her job The webinars offered by the CSU Chancellor’s Office, institutional training about the undocumented student population, is limited for front-line staff.

Penny (Rocky College, 6 months, Dream Center) commented that admissions, financial aid, and other department staff should be trained so they would understand the complexity of the undocumented student population,

They need to be trained, properly trained on how what to do with an undocumented student and how not to just automatically assume that

they're all going to be the same, and they all should be treated the same, because unfortunately, that's not the case. Not all of them have the same situations. Not all of them fall under the same regulations. I would really love it if they can just address that.

Although some departments had trainings, these trainings were not consistent and most of the trainings covered technical knowledge on the AB 540 and AB 2000 affidavit and the California Dream Act application; however, none of the trainings were about the experiences of the undocumented student population.

### **Self-Educate**

Thirteen out of the eighteen participants shared that they conducted their own research in order to understand the undocumented student population and the nature of their departmental tasks. Sherry (9 years, Admissions, Asian Pacific Islander), who is a residency specialist, noted that she read the Codes of Regulation on her own and after reading through the educational codes felt more confident about her decisions regarding AB 540 and AB 2000. Henry (Male, 2 years, Valley University), who works as a dream center coordinator also conducted research revealed,

I spend the weekends reading some of this stuff and engaging with it because there's just so much. . . . I feel like it's on me to be very informed about healthcare and immigration policies for older adults, because these are the things that our students are facing. We can deal with what's going on our campus, but when they're home it's a whole different ballpark, and so I think it's important for me to be very knowledgeable in that respect.

More specifically, the interview data showed that front-line professionals engaged in self-education through reading of codes, books, and articles and consultation with field experts like Dr. Elena Macias, retired assistant vice president from Cal State Long Beach.

### **Guidance from Supervisors**

Ten out of the 18 front-line professionals shared that they have sought guidance from their supervisors and management when faced with difficult situations. Sometimes, supervisors provided technical trouble shooting and procedural guidance, and, in other cases, supervisors helped with the unpacking of emotional struggles experienced by front-line personnel. Victoria (Female, Metropolitan University, Latina), who worked in Admissions for three years, described the guidance she received from her supervisor,

If I don't know . . . I call my two supervisors. If they're not available, I never tell the student, 'Oh, no, you won't be qualified for it,' or anything, because I'm not allowed to say that on the front-line. Everything has to go for review.

Many of these front-line professionals have relied on themselves, others, and their supervisors to manage the varying demands of their jobs.

### **Chapter Summary**

Front-line admissions, financial aid, and dream center professionals shared about their experiences of working with undocumented students. Through the three themes, front-line student affairs professionals detailed their stories on their interactions with undocumented students and campus policies.

In theme one, front-line personnel explained their journeys as student affairs professionals after gaining experience in their departments as student workers. In addition, front-line staff enjoyed their work and felt appreciated when students thanked them for their efforts. These student interactions and the ability to help someone in need were the main factors to their longevity in the field. Another common theme for the front-line staff was the commonality of having difficult conversations. Conversations with undocumented students can be extremely challenging because sometimes students know very little about their own immigration statuses. Furthermore, front-line staff often had to be the messengers of bad news: the inability of students to qualify for AB 540 or AB 2000 or the lack of enough financial aid for all students because the institution ran out of funding.

In theme two, student affairs staff explained their specific departmental tasks and described their interactions with undocumented students about AB 540, AB 2000, the California Dream Act, and Selective Service. In addition to the above policies, Dream Center staff served as one-stop-shops for undocumented students. Dream Center staff also provided services and programs that focused on community building and advocacy.

Under theme three, admissions and financial aid professionals talked about the need to emotionally distance themselves in order to serve the large quantity of students and the need to treat everyone equally, regardless of one's immigration status. In order to manage the changes and the demands of their

jobs, front-line student affairs professionals resorted to self-education through research and making connections on their own time.

In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings and compare them to the current literature on front-line education service workers. I also describe the connections and implications of my findings and make suggestions for practice, policies and future research.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

According to The Urban Institute, only five to ten percent of undocumented immigrants continue to pursue post-secondary education after high school graduation (Herrera et al., 2013). Reasons for this phenomenon are multi-leveled. Most of the current literature on undocumented students revealed economical, personal, and transitional challenges for undocumented college students (Albrecht, 2007; Aramburo & Bhavsar, 2013; Burkhardt et al., 2012). Despite the fact that there are no federal policies in place for undocumented youth, California has passed several laws attempting to increase access to higher education. The passage of AB 540, AB 130, AB 131, and AB 2000 directly impact the work of student affairs practitioners and has increased their interactions with undocumented students.

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers. By understanding their motivations, daily routines, and interactions with students, the researcher gained insight into the roles and functions of these front-line professionals. Some front-line professionals functioned as gatekeepers for in-state tuition and in-state financial aid while others took on the roles of being advocates to improve campus policies and procedures for increased access to higher education for undocumented youth.

Using exploratory qualitative research design, I conducted 18 individual, semi-structured interviews to answer the following research questions:

1. How do current student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers describe their experiences in interpreting and implementing Assembly Bill 540?
2. How are higher education departments of admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers currently interpreting and implementing AB 540 on their campuses?
3. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe how campus policies and procedures on AB 540 changed over time?
4. How do student affairs professionals in these areas describe their management of the demands and changes of the interpretation and implementation of AB 540?

I coded the interview transcriptions in three stages. Open, axial, and selective coding techniques helped narrow down the themes and findings (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The major findings of the study are organized into three categories: (a) the front-line student affairs experience, (b) the nature of departmental tasks as they relate to the research questions, and (c) coping mechanisms for front-line Student Affairs professionals. This chapter features data summary and interpretations, implications of the findings, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

## Summary and Interpretations

In this section I present interpretations for each of the major findings of this study. Moreover, I compare and contrast the three major findings with the findings of works reviewed in the literature review.

### The Front-Line Student Affairs Experience

The student affairs experience for front-line professionals was shaped by two major findings: (a) journeys to serving undocumented students and (b) common occurrences of having to have difficult conversations with undocumented students.

**Journeys to serving undocumented students.** Study participants shared their narratives and feelings on their interactions with students over the years. Many of them talked about the feeling of doing good work and feeling rewarded from student interactions. In addition, many of them shared similar personal narratives of working with the undocumented student body. Some participants were also undocumented, or they knew someone who is undocumented personally. More specifically, half of the participants identified as undocumented themselves or had close friends and family who were undocumented. Research conducted by Hanson (2009) and Passel and Cohn (2009) found that a majority of the undocumented population resides in our communities in California. Many of the participants who had been undocumented students were also student workers and some of them eventually transitioned into student affairs as full-time front-line professionals and are currently in the position of helping other undocumented students. There are

benefits to having undocumented student affairs professionals working on the front-line. Undocumented student affairs professionals were more aware of the needs of the student population and did not assume all undocumented students qualified for legislation such as AB 540, AB 2000, AB 130, and AB 131. Student affairs professionals who were undocumented students were also more likely to address the various needs of the undocumented student body. Other student affairs professionals who had family or friends who were undocumented responded in a similar way to the Dreamers' needs. However, these professionals did not relate or comprehend the differentiation of needs among the various undocumented student populations. The data suggested that ethic of care (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Noddings, 2005) was practiced in areas of admissions, financial aid, and especially in Dream Resource Centers. Henry, who works at a dream center, shared the importance of his work and his appreciation of having the ability to connect with students. He stated,

It's so rewarding to see students thriving. To see them come into our space, come to speak to me, and be discombobulated, not know what's going on . . . and then once we talk, and they give me a moment of their time, . . . [we are] able to highlight what has been done before or what wasn't available before.

Aside from developing bonds and practicing the ethic of care with treating undocumented students holistically, often times, these front-line professionals went above and beyond their duties. For example, staff at the Dream Center at Valley University conducted workshops and designed programs that addressed

issues in mental health, stress management, legal assistance, money management, and career options for undocumented students. Moreover, some front-line staff treated these undocumented students like family and friends. A number of the participants in the study volunteered their time and went out of their way to educate the undocumented student population in their communities, not limited to, but including visits to the supermarket, church, and local schools.

**Having difficult conversations.** In addition to building connections and rapport with undocumented students, student affairs professionals also had to figure out the reasons for students' visits. As Abrego (2008) stated, the AB 540 law created a sense of identity for undocumented students. These students began to embrace the identity of being Dreamers. Therefore, undocumented students have generally been more open about their status and needs than in previous years. Although this may be true for a number of students, in some cases undocumented students still feared that their immigration status could affect their educational attainment. Vanessa, who works in admissions, talked about one of the challenges working at the front-line,

I do encounter a lot of different issues where sometimes students aren't comfortable saying they're undocumented, or sometimes they're not really sure what to put [on the AB 540 affidavit] so sometimes they get confused and indicate that they're nonimmigrants. So I have to troubleshoot, I go over, well, what is your status, and try to figure it out with them, without telling them, because we're not supposed to lead them as to how to answer it.

While participants displayed a skill and an understanding of the nuances of a situation like this one, they had to be efficient as well. In order to work more efficiently with undocumented students who were not comfortable in disclosing their immigration status in public, at the front-counters of admissions or financial aid for example, front-line personnel developed a series of questions to narrow down the needs of the students. For instance, admissions professionals asked students about their immigration, visa, and high school graduation statuses, mirroring the language on the AB 540/AB 2000 affidavit form. Furthermore, financial aid personnel asked students about their Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) statuses and Social Security numbers, mirroring the language on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act application to narrow down which financial aid application the students need to complete.

As discussed by Lipsky (1980), “The decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures effectively become the public policies they carry out” (p. 473). The series of probing and questioning became a routine coping mechanism for front-line professionals. Although the intention for the probing and questioning was to better assist the students, the location and the sensitivity of the questions being asked sometimes led to students feeling interrogated. From participants’ perspective, students may be less likely to disclose their immigration statuses at the front-line due to the lack of privacy. The out-in-the-open interrogations became a part of the unintended implementations that may

result in the gathering of inaccurate information to determine eligibility for AB 540, AB 2000, AB 130, and AB 131.

### **Nature of their Departmental Tasks**

I interviewed student affairs professionals from various departments. The departmental specialization design makes responsibilities more manageable. The specialization of departments is referred to as the “silo structure” of higher education, which means professionals perceive the situation from the point of view of their own specialization and department (Orgera, 2007, p. 11). Student affairs professionals, similar to street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), were not prescribed how to serve their clients with various individual needs. Rather, they followed institutional and department regulations and policies and were asked to use their judgment to best serve their clients (Orgera, 2007). The data suggested that although the front-line professionals in this study tried to collaborate with other departments, their work remained segmented based on the nature of their tasks. Admissions offices set the AB 540 indicator on students’ electronic files so the fee statuses could be shared between admissions and financial aid. Hence, undocumented students were not required to pay out-of-state tuition. Admissions offices became the gatekeeper with the power to either allow or deny undocumented students access to in-state tuition and state funded aid. Once the out-of-state tuition exemption indicator was set by admissions, then financial aid processed and verified students’ California Dream Act eligibility and other types of aid.

This division of tasks remained consistent between admissions and financial aid among the three school sites. The ability to access financial aid is crucial for undocumented students who otherwise may not be able to afford school. Evidence of the above described process was confirmed by Financial Aid staff Mindy (Female, 12 years, Valley University) who shared that AB 540 implementation is “not our jurisdiction. We don't really implement that. Our part comes in with the Dream Act application and financial aid for AB 540 students.” Clearly, financial aid professionals do not administer AB 540 tuition exemption, and the division of labor and communication between admissions and financial aid is obvious. The question of how well this department specialization process serves undocumented students' needs to be addressed.

**Admissions.** Offices of admissions and records are responsible for setting the tuition fees for undocumented students across campuses. The data confirm Salinas's (2013) findings on the inconsistent admissions practices. Data showed that front-line professionals had various levels of understanding of the AB 540 policy. Although some “states have a clear defined policy stance on admissions for undocumented students, there is a lack of consistency between state, institutions and individuals implementing the adopted policy” (Salinas, 2013, p. 96). Lorena from Metropolitan University talked about her observations and experiences with the inconsistent practices from one campus to another, “You went to adult school, guess what, you don't qualify for AB 540. Even though at Greenland College you were fine, at Sky C.C. you were cool, but guess what, we're going to close the door on you.” Lorena described the challenge

many undocumented students face when they transferred from a community college to a four-year university. Some undocumented students identified as AB 540 eligible at their local community colleges arrived at their local public, four-year institutions and were told that they no longer AB 540 qualified. This occurred because some public, four-year colleges do not recognize adult school coursework as the equivalent to high school curriculum.

The inconsistent practices between the two college systems created financial issues for undocumented students who had previously qualified for in-state tuition under AB 540 at a community college. AB 540 interpretations and implementations should be consistent across campuses. However, echoing Lipsky's (1980) theory on street-level bureaucracy, front-line personnel's understandings of the policies influenced the outcomes for undocumented students. The variation of policy implementations on college campuses is a true testament to Gofen's theory (2014) of street-level divergence. Street-level divergence is the disconnection between intentions of the policymakers and the actuality of policy implementation on the street level (Gofen, 2014). For example, AB 540 intended to allow undocumented youth who had completed the majority of their high school courses in California to receive the benefit of paying in-state tuition. However, because the legislation specifically spelled out three years of seat-time in California high schools as a requirement, students who advanced out of traditional high schools with only two years of seat-time are not eligible for AB 540. Thus, the intention of providing access for undocumented students to higher education through affordable tuition and state financial aid has in reality

become another piece of bureaucratic red tape undocumented students must jump through and in some instances has become a barrier.

**Financial aid.** The results of this research confirmed Pluviose's (2007) interview with De Los Santos and DuBois' from Long Beach City College about the difficulties in securing financial aid for undocumented students due to competing policies and legislations. Financial aid professionals explained the complications created by policies such as Selective Service. Selective Service registration is a requirement for males between ages of 18 to 25 regardless of their immigration status. Without the proof of registration acknowledgement, financial aid for undocumented male students was held up. Prior to Selective Service being linked to the Dream Act application in 2015, students filed for the Selective Service by mailing in the registration, which took upward of six weeks to process. Oftentimes, by the time Selective Service was verified, the college had run out of money. Although some students were eligible for funding, the delay in processing negatively affected their receipt of monies. Tierney and Venegas (2009) urged policy makers to understand the lives of students and their families in order to learn about the challenges of accessing financial aid and how financial aid influences institutional access. The data from this study suggested that the current financial aid policies and processes in higher education and in the state of California are not Dreamers-friendly.

**Dream Centers.** Dream Center staff treated undocumented students differently based on their needs. In contrast to Lynch and Baker's (2005) beliefs about equality, including (a) equality of condition, (b) equality in educational and

related resources, (c) equality of respect and recognition, (d) equality of power, and (e) equality of love, care, and solidarity, the research data indicated that front-line dream center staff employed equitable rather than equal services with students. As stated by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), equity takes into consideration that the needs of undocumented students are unique and demand unique attention. Equity considers the fact that undocumented students have not always been given equal treatment or an equal playing field when compared to other students. Based on the varying needs of the students, every interaction and conversation with undocumented students looked and sounded differently. Penny (Rocky College, 6 months, Hispanic), a student worker, talked about her duties and her goal of meeting the needs of the students,

I feel like we go above it versus people who are next to us in Admissions.

I don't really see them go outside and helping them or guiding them versus if a student comes to us, we actually walk them through the process. Like I said, they're really confused; they don't know. When a student comes to us and they tell us their story, "Hey, I don't know what my status is. Can you tell help me?" versus if they go to Admissions or Financial Aid, like, "Well, I don't know; you should know." . . . We can properly help them whether it's an application, whether it's what—school offers a lot of help for undocumented students, whether it's resources, whether it's scholarships, how to go about when transferring and stuff.

Instead of offering equal resources to all undocumented students, dream center staff offered tailored programs, services, and individualized attention to

their clients. Front-line dream center staff did not assume all undocumented students were eligible for AB 540, DACA and other state funded programs, including financial aid. For those students who needed more individual assistance, dream center staff accompanied the students on their visits to various departments, including admissions and financial aid. Knowledge gained on the differences and the intersectionality of their students' needs brought about the development of specialized services and programs. Gender identity workshops that addressed the needs of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQQ) undocumented student community were offered. Furthermore, dream centers offered culturally tailored workshops for the multicultural and multi-national undocumented student body.

### **Coping Mechanisms**

A major way of coping with the demands of being on the front-line is to treat everybody the same. According to the participants in admissions and financial aid, as students arrived and approached the front counter for the first time, the students' immigration statuses were not known. Immigration status is not a topic front-line personnel automatically address. It is through the series of questions and deductive reasoning skills that student affairs professionals eventually discover students' immigration status. Additionally, the initial contact focused on the tasks that needed to be resolved rather than the individual.

Compared with Higgins and Endler's (1995) study on coping strategies, this research study proved that front-line professionals chose task-oriented strategies as their primary coping mechanism. The task-oriented coping strategy

is problem focused. In order to reduce stress in a difficult situation, one must take direct action to change the task at hand. Nine out of the 12 participants in admissions and financial aid talked about treating everyone the same way. They did not distinguish students by their immigration status. Tina (Valley University, Asian Pacific Islander, Financial Aid) stated, "Sometimes special treatment may make students feel uncomfortable. I tried to make students feel comfortable and gain trust in me."

Moreover, the interview data confirmed Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga's (2010) study on staff training. They explained that student affairs professionals face difficulties serving undocumented students due to the lack of training. In this study, front-line professionals indicated that they had minimal institutional trainings specifically focused on the undocumented student population. Front-line personnel mostly participated in self-education in order to better serve the student population. Thirteen out of the eighteen participants shared that they conducted their own research in order to understand the undocumented student population and the nature of their departmental tasks. Sherry (9 years, Admissions, Asian Pacific Islander), a residency specialist, spoke about how she read the Codes of Regulation on her own time. Moreover, front-line professionals engaged in self-education through reading of codes, books, and articles and consulted with field experts like Dr. Elena Macias, an advocate for undocumented students.

Many of front-line professionals relied on themselves, others, and their supervisors to manage the demands of their jobs. Ten out of the 18 front-line

professionals shared that they sought guidance from their supervisors and management when faced with difficult situations. For the majority of the participants, they utilized their supervisors as a source of information, someone with whom they would count on and collaborate.

### **Implications for Theory**

#### **Street-Level Bureaucracy**

According to Lipsky's (1980) findings, street-level bureaucrats are constantly battling their supervisors to gain control over their work because there is the need to be able to adapt to the unanticipated and complex situations of work, the need to remain flexible and sensitive to the human dimensions of services, and the self-regard of the workers. Data in this study showed that front-line professionals encountered complex situations in financial aid, admissions, and Dream Resource Centers. However, most of the front-line professionals did not battle their supervisors in order to gain control of their work. Instead, admissions, financial aid, and dream resource center front-line professionals relied on their supervisors and managers to assist them with problem solving and with emotional unpacking. Sometimes, supervisors provided technical trouble-shooting and procedural guidance. Furthermore, in other cases, supervisors helped with the unpacking of emotional struggles experienced by front-line personnel as they heard the heart-wrenching journeys of their students. Front-line admissions and financial aid personnel functioned similarly to the bureaucrats in other public sectors such as social services and other governmental agencies described by Lipsky (1980). These front-line people

created their own coping strategies to work with the diverse student body. Front-line admissions and financial aid professionals also dealt with the lack of resources and the increased demands of work that occurred once undocumented students became eligible for in-state tuition and state financial aid. However, Lipksy's (1980) theory did not address the operation of Dream Resource Centers.

Front-line staff at dream centers were able to work with students without the time constraints and had access to private rooms where students could share sensitive information. Four out of the six dream center participants were or used to be Dreamers; therefore, they understood the complexity of working with other undocumented students.

### **Street-Level Divergence**

As previously noted, street-level divergence is the disconnection between intentions of the policymakers and the actuality of policy implementation at the street level (Gofen, 2014). Street-level divergence is related to how individual street-level workers process the information from their clients including personal perceptions, emotions, attitudes, experiences, and their values and from the perceptions and knowledge of other individuals in their policy network (Jones, 2001, 2003; Keiser, 2010). AB 540 and the Dream Act implementation was complicated by institutional policies and the lack of knowledge and details about implementation by the front-line student affairs professionals. The data confirmed that personal presumptions and perceptions influenced front-line professionals' judgment on whether or not students qualified for in-state tuition.

Yvette (Female, Valley University, 8 years) shared that sometimes front-line professionals' personal beliefs influenced their decisions about students' AB 540 statuses,

The person who was in charge of residency was not friendly. I called the residency specialist, who was white. She said on the phone, "Why should I come out and talk to them. My children don't qualify for financial aid. Why should I help AB 540 students? They are not white. Why should I," said the residency specialist at the time.

Admissions professionals played a critical role in determining whether or not the student qualified for in-state tuition, which in turn provided or denied access to post-secondary education. Personal beliefs and values, silo structures, efficiency focus, and difficulty in treating students holistically and individually created street-level divergence on how AB 540 and the Dream Act should be implemented. As previously described, an undocumented student was not given the AB 540 tuition waiver because of the residency specialist's personal beliefs.

Another street-level divergence occurred with the implementation of AB 540 legislation. Front-line admissions staff shared instances where students were a couple months shy from qualifying for AB 540. AB 540's intention was to allow young undocumented students who had grown up and attended secondary schools in California to have the ability to pay in-state tuition as do California residents. However, because AB 540 legislation indicated students must have attended California high schools for at least three years, those students who advanced out of high schools by meeting graduation requirements through GED,

CHSPE, or adult school do not qualify for AB 540. High achieving undocumented students miss out on the in-state tuition benefit if they graduated from high school before putting in three years of seat time.

### **Coping Strategies**

Front-line personnel work in a fast-paced and ever-changing environment. Research conducted by Meyers and Vorsanger (2003) suggested four factors that influence street-level bureaucrats' coping and decision-making process in regards to policy implementation. First, street-level bureaucrats' decision-making process can be influenced by the political and administrative superiors' attitude on the importance of the policy. Second, the organizational structure, the ways of conducting business at the operational level, also influenced street-level worker's decision-making process. Third, the amount of knowledge that street-level bureaucrats had about the students and their attitudes toward the students influenced their actions and interactions with their clients. Fourth, the contextual factors concerning workload, client mix, and other external pressures also influenced their actions and interactions with their clients. This research reaffirmed that the four factors of the coping and decision-making process influenced front-line professionals' policy implementation.

Dream center staff were most aware of the political and administrative influences. Front-line dream center staff talked about their work with undocumented students and their need to compromise and comply with AB 540 and AB 2000 campus interpretations in spite of disagreeing with the decisions. For example, since the AB 540 affidavit form is a legal document, dream center

staff were told not to instruct undocumented students on how to complete it so as not to influence what the undocumented students included. In this case, dream center staff compromised with this request. They carefully balanced their responsibilities to the institutions and their students by only explaining the language of the form but not guiding the students on which box to check-off to make them eligible for AB 540. Dream center staff compromised with their administrators at the institutional level. Although Meyers and Vorsanger (2003) talked about the need for front-line staff to agree with their supervisors, they failed to recognize the powerful influences of an external coalition. When front-line dream resource center staff did not agree with the administrative decisions on their campuses, they resorted to the Dream Resource Center Coalition. Dream center staff leveraged outside resources and networks in order to help them cope with the situation.

Having all the necessary information, resources and technology also influenced front-line professionals' decision-making process. Without having the systems set up and institutional policies and procedures in place, financial aid staff had limited ideas on how to implement the Dream Act in 2012 and the Dream Loan that became available in fall 2016. Being understaffed and having an overload of work during its peak time also influenced front-line professionals' decision making. For example, during the beginning of the semester and summer time, although front-line staff wanted to spend as much time as they needed with every student, front-line staff felt pressured to move through the line. As Diana (Rocky College, Financial Aid) mentioned, her former supervisor

advised the front-line staff not to ask questions so they could move through the line of students more efficiently. However, without the ability to ask follow-up questions, front-line staff could not grasp the entire picture of the nature of the students' visits. Therefore, they made decisions about the students' eligibility based on limited information and knowledge.

### **Equality in Education**

Inequities in power influence educational decision-making (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Lynch and Baker (2005) believed in democratizing educational relations and fostering equality. To facilitate educational change, Lynch and Baker (2005) suggested addressing equality through the forms of condition, educational and related resources, respect and recognition, power and love, care and solidarity. Front-line professionals in admissions and financial aid embraced equality in education by treating all students the same, giving them the same respect and recognition. Front-line professionals shared that they enforced immigration status through blind routines and practices when working with students. Although equality sounded ideal, equality in education is not enough. Equality in education does not take into consideration the different needs, diverse backgrounds, and various starting points for undocumented students. As stated by Penny, a student worker at a dream center,

Front-line professionals need to be trained, properly trained on how what to do with an undocumented student and how not to just automatically assume that they're all going to be the same and they all should be treated

the same, because unfortunately, that's not the case. Not all of them have the same situations. Not all of them fall under the same regulations. Instead of assuming everyone has the same needs, equity takes into consideration the unique needs of undocumented students that demand unique attention (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

### **Implications for Policy**

#### **AB 540 and AB 2000**

AB 540 and AB 2000 were meant to reduce tuition costs for Dreamers so that postsecondary education would be more affordable. However, the technical language on the AB 540 and AB 2000 forms made the process difficult for students, parents, and front-line professionals. Hard to understand and confusing language on the actual form hindered correct completion. Many undocumented students checked off the wrong box on the AB 540/AB 2000 affidavit. More specifically, students checked off the box on the affidavit indicating that they were “nonimmigrant alien[s] as defined by federal law and have been granted T or U visa status” (California Student Aid Commission [CSAC], 2015, p. 3). As a result, this prolonged or denied their access to affordable tuition and the possibility of receiving financial aid.

Furthermore, the technical language also created challenges for front-line admissions and Dream Resource Centers staff. Since the AB 540/AB 2000 form is an affidavit, front-line Admissions staff struggled with explaining the technical language to students and parents. They also wrestled with how to ethically provide instructions since they knew that checking of a specific box would allow

the student to be eligible for AB 540/AB 2000. Although dream center staff felt more at ease with explaining the form, they shared frustration of the dehumanizing language. The staff suspected the word “alien” created negative emotions and perceptions about how undocumented students viewed themselves and their worth. Additionally, using inclusive and yet definite language could reduce the ambiguity of the form. Moreover, the wording, “California high school equivalent to three or more years of full-time high school course work” (CSAC, 2015), allowed schools, districts, and school systems to decide whether or not adult school was equivalent to high school. When schools do not agree on what constitutes as equivalent, undocumented students are forced to find alternative ways to pay for their education, or they simply drop out.

### **California Dream Act**

Financial aid staff shared that when the California Dream Act went into effect in 2013-2014, they knew minimal about the details of the Cal Grant for Dreamers, and they relied on the CSAC for guidance on how to administer aid. CSAC mirrored the Cal Grant application process for undocumented students with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, without social security numbers, the Cal Dream Act application was a more manually intensive process for financial aid professionals and the students. For example, the name listed on the Dream Act application must match the name listed with admissions in order for the Cal Grant application to be processed. Unless students inquired about their financial aid status, mismatched Dream Act applications remain idle, neither processed nor rejected. Once it was brought to

the attention of the front-line financial aid professionals, they manually linked the students' Dream Act files and their financial aid files. Although there have been improvements to the California Dream Act application since it was first used in the 2013-2014 academic year, some of the processes are still paper based, which has resulted in longer processing times. Parent signature, GPA verification, name and date of birth change, and Selective Service registration can take up to 90 days to process which effects students' eligibility to receive aid. Furthermore, Dreamers who are currently eligible for Cal Grants are not eligible to receive competitive grants according to the AB 131 legislation. Over 25,750 competitive awards are available annually through CSAC. However, Dreamers do not have access to these 25,750 awards (CSAC, 2016). Contradicting information has also been publicized by the Department of Education and CSAC. In 2015-16, the U.S. Department of Education encouraged students with DACA Social Security numbers to complete the FAFSA in order to receive financial aid. However, this was not good advice for California college students. Undocumented AB 540 students in California should complete the CA Dream Act Application instead of the FAFSA in order to receive state funded financial aid. Without knowing this information, undocumented students who filed the FAFSA may not receive financial aid if they missed the California Dream Act deadline of March 2nd.

## Implications for Practice

### Focus on the Needs of Students

Undocumented students deserve equitable student support services. Equity takes into consideration that undocumented students have unique needs and demand unique attention. Equity considers that undocumented students have not always been given equal treatment nor an equal playing field when compared to other students (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Undocumented students have unique needs when it comes to their identity development (Abrego, 2008) and feel they need to keep their immigration status secret in order to keep their family safe from law enforcement. The need to hide one's immigration status from others is what Villazor (2013) referred to as the "undocumented closet" (p. 1). Immigration and other laws in this country are designed to exclude undocumented youth; therefore undocumented students fear disclosing their immigration statuses at the risk of deportation. During college, some experience the "coming out" process, similar to LGBTQQ youth, where they struggle with accepting themselves and letting others know about their identity (Villazor, 2013, p. 1). Front-line professionals should respect the identity development process of undocumented students. Also, they should respect students who embrace their identity as Dreamers, those who may never "out" themselves as Dreamers, and those continue to work on their development of the coming out process. Higher education institutions should provide spaces, like dream centers, and opportunities where Dreamers can dialogue about their needs and preferences. The staff at these centers should allow Dreamers'

requests and preferences to be communicated to the front-line staff. Student forums and dialogues can ensure that the needs of undocumented students are communicated to not only to the administrators, but also to the front-line admissions and financial aid staff who serve as gatekeepers to many resources, including in-state tuition and financial aid.

Not all undocumented students are the same. Some undocumented students do not qualify for AB 540/AB 2000 or DACA because of their age when they arrived in the U.S. Some undocumented students qualify for DACA and have access to work authorization and financial aid. These students are given social security numbers, which allow them to work legally in California. In addition, these students are allowed to travel out of the country and take advantage of study abroad programs by utilizing advance parole. Advance parole allows undocumented immigrants to travel and return to the U.S. for humanitarian and educational purposes (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016). The spectrum of needs varies from one student to another. Therefore, student service and student affairs professionals should function under the lens of equity over equality.

The current research findings suggested that our current student affairs practices are built on efficiency. Efficiency in higher education equates to completing the task at hand within the shortest amount of time possible so the student does not have to return to the office. Having the ability to serve the largest amount of students in the shortest amount of time created the illusion of progress and accountability. Due to the need to provide outcome driven and

accountable results, various student affairs offices and departments were created. Instead of focusing on the student as a whole, a person who has various needs, including, emotional, financial, and academic needs, the student affairs profession shifted away from ethic of care to bureaucratic, efficiency focused, business-like interactions. In order to address student equity as a whole and shift student affairs from its silo structures to holistic practices, campuses need to align their strategic and educational master plans with equity minded programs and services. Strategic and master plans should create intentional services and programs for specific groups of disadvantaged students. Additionally, institutional data should be utilized when determining and prioritizing funding allocations.

### **Focus on the Needs of Front-Line Professionals**

Front-line student affairs professionals who participated in the study also varied in their skillsets, years of experience, and personal backgrounds. Some front-line staff were student workers who only had six months of working experience and others had 30 plus years of student affairs experience. Technical skill levels, personal life-experiences, and student service training and exposure influenced their interactions with undocumented students. Some front-line staff were knowledgeable and aware of the needs of undocumented students because they conducted their own research, attended workshops related to undocumented students, and knew someone or was related to someone who was undocumented. Others did not have the opportunity to attend professional development workshops, and, therefore, had little knowledge about the

undocumented student population. Staff development opportunities for front-line student affairs professionals are crucial. Although professional organizations offer technical trainings, diversity, cultural, and sensitivity training on specific student populations is lacking. Training offered by professional associations like the California Association of Community College Registrars (CACCCRAO) and the Admissions Offices and California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (CCCSFAAA) cover topics related to the technical understanding of residency, Dream Act, transcript evaluations and so forth. (CACCCRAO, 2016; CCCSFAAA, 2016). However, these professional associations fail to provide resources on ethical decision making, leadership development, and identity development for undocumented college students, consistent policy interpretations and implementations, community outreach, rapport building, and self-care strategies to prevent burn-out.

### **Community Building**

Front-line dream center staff talked about the importance of and the meaning behind having a center on campus where undocumented students could feel at home and build a community. Dream centers and their staff facilitated the process where community building, education, advocacy, and student development flourished. According to Stanton-Salazar (2007), institutional agents like front-line dream center staff can add value to low-status youth's empowerment. However, community building should not be limited to only dream center staff but should also include front-line professionals in other departments. In this way, front-line professionals in various departments utilize

their personal and positional resources, networks, and knowledge to provide additional resources for undocumented students. Front-line admissions and financial aid professionals can engage in community building by continuing to conduct outreach to students and their families. It is essential that the outreach efforts are continuous and consistent. The more interactions undocumented students and their families have with front-line admissions and financial aid staff, the more empowered, connected, and successful they become.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Create Equitable and Inclusive Policies**

AB 540 and AB 2000 opened the doors for many undocumented students to pursue affordable post-secondary education. However, the language on AB 540 and AB 2000 created challenges for many undocumented students. Furthermore, the lack of clarity on the law also created inconsistent policy interpretations and implementations across college campuses. Community colleges do not need to verify students' high school transcripts unlike the California State Universities (CSUs). Therefore, many community college transfer students may lose their eligibility to receive in-state tuition and state funded financial aid when they transition from one school system to another. Many undocumented students are low-income and first-generation college students. Therefore, they are often not familiar with the processes of qualifying for the in-state tuition exemption. The Chancellor's Offices for California Community Colleges and the California State Universities need to work together to establish a consistent policy interpretation and implementation method across

the state. Systematically, all of the public post-secondary institutions need to develop consistent policy interpretations and implementations for AB 540/2000 students instead of leaving the policy interpretations to the front-line personnel, individual districts, and campuses. Consistency will help to reduce the students' inability to afford tuition when transferring from one institution to another and lessen frustrations associated with the application process.

Another suggestion to address the equity and inclusiveness in policy implementation is to establish a state-wide AB 540 and AB 2000 appeal process. Currently, none of the participating school sites have an appeal process in place. Once the AB 540 and AB 2000 statuses are determined by admissions, the decision is final and there are no further outlets available for students to challenge that decision. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the chancellors' offices from all public post-secondary institutions to outline and implement an appeal process. This appeal process would address student equity in policy implementation, because through appeals, front-line professionals, administrators, and faculty could gain an understanding of common complications and variations between students and help these students to qualify for in-state tuition.

In some cases, where undocumented students were aware of the AB 540 and AB 2000 affidavit form, they faced another challenge of not being able to confidently complete the form due to the use of inhuman language, "alien", and double negatives, "not a non-immigrant". Language on the AB 540 and AB 2000 needs to be updated to reflect inclusion. I recommend replacing the pejorative

and technical jargon words. Once the language is improved, family members and educators across various levels can help students correctly identify their immigration statuses and submit the forms confidently.

### **Prioritization on Staff Development**

Front-line student affairs professionals serve as the first contact or the only contact for incoming college students. It was found that many front-line staff did not have training on student service etiquette, cultural sensitivity, ethical decision-making, identity development for undocumented college students, consistent policy interpretations and implementations, community outreach, rapport building, and self-care when under pressure. Furthermore, most of the front-line professionals were not aware of the complexity and variances of the undocumented student population such as the different nationalities and cultural backgrounds within the Latina/Latino population and the Asian, Pacific Islander undocumented student population. I recommend institutions offer incentives and opportunities for professional development so front-line professionals can further their learning. Professional development opportunities such as stress coping techniques and student service etiquette are important for front-line staff to reduce burn-out, which can result in treating each student interaction as a business transaction, as opposed to an opportunity to develop and educate their students. Building a campus culture of learning for staff is necessary. Structurally, institutions need to incorporate staff development opportunities for all staff including part-time and temporary employees.

### **Prioritization on Departmental Collaboration**

This study suggested the importance of collaboration among admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers. Collaboration is critical in order for undocumented students to make college a reality, because they need the support of student affairs professionals from various departments. When departments work in silos, undocumented students are left alone to navigate the college-going process. Without the collaboration from admissions, especially with high school outreach, financial aid and Dream Resource Centers, undocumented students would not learn about the opportunities the AB 540/AB 2000 affidavit and California Dream Act could provide. Structurally, managers from these various departments should schedule regular meetings between their departments so that their front-line staff can exchange ideas and suggestions and work together toward solutions. As Gwen (Financial Aid, Metropolitan University) mentioned, before financial aid staff go out to the high schools, they collaborated with admissions so they are on the same page in terms of providing students and their families with consistent information.

Furthermore, collaboration work should extend beyond student affairs and student support services. Student affairs professionals also should be dialoging with faculty members about the needs of undocumented students. Tinto (2002) extrapolated the five conditions for student success. In order for students to persist, they need to encounter high expectations and involvement and have the opportunity to learn. Furthermore, students can persist in college by receiving the advice and support of their faculty and student affairs professionals. In order

to foster persistence in the undocumented student population, front-line student affairs professionals and faculty need to work together by educating, teaching, and advising students on how to navigate the college-going process. Faculty members play an important role in undocumented students' learning. Therefore, it is critical for faculty members to be involved in the development and implementation of campus policies and procedures. Faculty and front-line admissions and financial aid student affairs professionals can actively attend dream center workshops and programming on their campuses to be involved in these students' academic and personal development. Through more frequent interactions with the students, faculty may realize that certain class requirements may not be Dreamers-friendly, and therefore make changes to them. For instance, some courses may require students to visit federal buildings, courthouses, or other sites that may invoke anxiety and stress for Dreamers.

### **Prioritization on Dream Centers**

Starting in the 2017-2018 academic year, Assembly Bill 2009 requires the California Community Colleges and the California State University schools to designate a Dream Resource Liaison on each of their respective campuses (AB 2009, 2016). The University of California schools are requested to designate a liaison. The bill was introduced by Assembly Member Lopez in February 2016. The bill was passed in both the assembly and the senate. However, the bill was vetoed by Governor Brown in September 2016 (State of California Legislative Counsel, 2016). The liaison would assist undocumented students in “streamlining access to all available financial aid and academic opportunities”

(AB 2009, 2016, p. 2). This bill would require a designated liaison and encourage all institutions to establish dream centers on their campuses (AB 2009, 2016). Although having access to a Dreamer liaison is a step forward towards equity for Dreamers, having access to a dream center on campus is necessary.

Dream centers served as one-stop shops for undocumented students on the campuses in this study. Dream centers not only provide physical space for students to complete homework and have access to computers, these centers also send messages to undocumented students that they are welcomed on these campuses. Many dream centers have been offering workshops, which assist students with the development of their identity and career. Currently, dream centers are not available on every campus. Only four out of the 23 CSUs have designated centers (Gonzalez, 2016) and even fewer Dream Resource Centers are available for community college students. However, community colleges have the largest undocumented student population because of their low cost and physical accessibility. Funding for Dream Resource Centers is crucial in order to build sustainable programs. The Dream Centers in Rocky College, Valley University, and Metropolitan University secured their funding from different avenues. Rocky College relies on the Student Equity fund. Valley University relies on its Diversity Initiative funding and Metropolitan is funded through a private endowment from a local community member. Therefore, it is necessary for the state to not only mandate the program, but also reimburse the schools

with the cost of personnel, which can cost up to \$7.6 million annually (Gonzalez, 2016).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid and Dream Resource Centers who interpret and implement AB 540 related campus policies as related to undocumented students. Future quantitative research might consider the front-line professionals' education levels, race and ethnicity, and immigration statuses. Front-line student affairs professionals work in different offices and some positions require specific training and education. By using an inquiry of front-line personnel's education levels, race and ethnicity, and immigration statuses and comparing it with Dreamer students' satisfaction survey on front-line personnel, future research can shed insights on how other factors like education, race, and ethnicity can influence the interactions between front-line personnel with undocumented students. A second recommendation would be to carry out a qualitative study focused on front-line professionals' abilities to interact with students and their families through bilingualism and biculturalism. In this study, front-line professionals shared that the ability to speak another language allowed them to connect with students and their families better. A study on the effects of language and culture and how language and culture affect undocumented students' interaction with front-line staff and faculty would also contribute new knowledge about the importance of bilingualism and biculturalism in the classroom and outside of the classrooms. Furthermore, only Spanish

speaking front-line professionals shared their ability to connect with students and parents through the usage of Spanish. None of the Asian Pacific Islander (API) participants talked about their bilingual exchanges with API undocumented students. Hence, this research can add knowledge to the current literature on how front-line API student affairs professionals connect and work with the API undocumented student population. The API undocumented student population is often silenced in the literature and media; however, the undocumented API population is one of the largest in the U.S. Nationally, there are an estimated 1,532,304 undocumented APIs, which is 13.9% of the total undocumented population (Center for Migration Studies, 2015). Another study that focuses on the roles of student workers and assistants could be beneficial. In this study, many of the participants started working in the field of education as student workers and assistants, and many participants felt empowered and grateful for the opportunity to work on campus. What does the vocational and career development process look like for undocumented students, especially for those who have DACA? By understanding the development of undocumented student workers and assistants, we can gain new information on the career pipeline for undocumented student workers.

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

This study was an exploratory qualitative study examining the experiences of front-line student affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers and their dilemmas in interpreting and implementing AB 540 and AB 2000. Study participants shared their narratives on how they navigated

through difficult conversations, irate students, institutional policies, and state policies.

Many times front-line professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Resource Centers are the first and only people who interact with undocumented students prior to the first day of class. Front-line professionals may be the make-it or break-it people for undocumented students to attain their dreams of acquiring post-secondary education. Front-line professionals utilized their knowledge, resources and networks to help students navigate the college-going process; however, campus policies and state and federal laws, departmental silos, the lack of professional development, resources, guidance, personal experiences, and knowledge of the Dreamers population dictated the capacity to which they can help. With the delay in receiving guidance from management and institutions and the demand to serve a large number of students, front-line admissions and financial aid professionals found it difficult to exercise self-discretion, which resulted in the diminished level of care and attention.

It is evident that many front-line professionals enjoyed the student interaction and found their careers rewarding. However, front-line professionals had to balance their roles as advocates and policy-enforcers. This study serves as a foundation for further research on the tireless work front-line student affairs professionals provide for undocumented students. It also adds knowledge to the complexity of front-line work. Front-line student affairs professionals had to juggle the high demands of their work, the lack of resources and professional

development, and their personal beliefs to serve the undocumented student body.

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## APPENDIX A

### RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

My name is Lynn Wang. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Eugene Fujimoto at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) in the doctoral program in Community College Educational Leadership. I am conducting a study to gain understanding of the AB 540 policy implementation from the viewpoint of Student Affairs professionals who work as front-line workers. The purpose of this study is to understand experiences of Student Affairs professionals in admissions, financial aid, and Dream Centers who implement campus policies in their work with undocumented students.

As a practitioner who is on the front lines of this issue, you will be a resource to other higher education professionals who may be grappling with ways to assist undocumented students. Your participation in this study also has the potential to affect institutional, state, and possibly federal policies by highlighting a need for comprehensive policy changes for undocumented students in general.

Your participation will involve one face-to-face interview that will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. If you choose not to be recorded, I will take notes during the interview. At the time of the interview you will receive a gift card with my thanks for your participation.

During the interview, you do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. If you choose not to answer, there will be no consequence and you will still remain a part of the study. The only identifiable risk to you as a participant in this study is that you may recall negative experiences in your work with students.

Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. I am the only person who will know your name. The responses you provide will not be connected with your name in any way, as participants will be referred to only by pseudonym (alias). Interview transcripts and other study information will be stored in a locked cabinet and on a password-protected computer and USB drive. Data will be kept indefinitely for future publication or presentation.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from participation at any time without suffering penalty or loss of benefits or services to which you may otherwise be entitled.

If you have questions please contact me at [lynnjwang@csu.fullerton.edu](mailto:lynnjwang@csu.fullerton.edu) or Dr. Eugene Fujimoto at [efujimoto@fullerton.edu](mailto:efujimoto@fullerton.edu). If you have questions about the rights of human research participants, contact the CSUF Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at (657) 278-7640 or [irb@fullerton.edu](mailto:irb@fullerton.edu).

I have no conflict of interest relating to this study, financial or otherwise.

Thank you,  
Lynn J. Wang, CSUF Graduate Student

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I have carefully read and/or have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. I have also been given a copy of this form.

---

Printed Name

Signature

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this research study only.

---

Printed Name

Signature

Date

All California State University employees are mandated reporters under California's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act ("CANRA"). Whenever a CSU employee, in his/her professional capacity or within the scope of his/her employment, has knowledge of or observes a person under the age of 18 years whom the employee knows, or reasonably suspects, to have been the victim of child abuse or neglect, the employee must report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

#### Interview Protocol for Admissions Staff

Thanks for agreeing to participate in the study. As you have read in the Consent Form, your participation is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential and I will be the only person who will have access to your information. The goal of this research is to honor you, the professionals who work tirelessly with students.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

You have agreed that I may record this interview, so I will start the recorder now.

I will be asking you a few questions on your experience working with undocumented students.

1. Tell me about your journey as an admissions officer working with undocumented students?
2. What inspired you to become an admissions officer?
3. How long have you worked in admissions? What do you like about being an admissions officer? What do you dislike?
4. To your knowledge, how does the admissions office make its first contact with undocumented students?
5. On average, how many undocumented students do you work with on a daily basis?
6. In what ways do you interact with undocumented students? What are some questions you as the admissions officer have to answer when interacting with undocumented students?
7. What are some reasons undocumented students visit the admissions office?
8. As an admissions officer, how do you learn about a student's status, or do you ever find out about student's legal status?
9. Tell me about your understanding of the AB 540 exemption form? In your opinion, how does it affect the work that you do and affect the undocumented student population on your campus?

10. Please share your experiences in implementing campus policies related to undocumented students. What type of policies/programs do you have to implement? How does it feel having to implement institutional policies/programs?
11. In your opinion, what role do admissions officers play with AB 540 policy implementation, or if any at all?
12. Has there been any changes or updates on how you interpret, understand and implement AB 540? What are some factors that influenced your interpretation and implementation of the policy?
13. How would you compare the policies and practices related to undocumented students at your institution with other (private or public) institutions?
14. Tell me about a time, if you can recall one, when you faced challenges as an admissions officer when working with undocumented students? What did you do to solve the issue? How did you feel?
15. What would you do if an undocumented student approached you during admissions and records' peak time/season and you know you have a long line of students to get through?
16. Please talk about where and how you received training and information about campus policies/programs related to undocumented students.
17. How do you feel about your skills and confidence working with undocumented students?
18. What persons or resources help you feel more competent about your skill in working with undocumented students?
19. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think I should know?
20. Lastly, is it okay for me to contact you in the near future if I need further clarification on your interview responses?

Thank you so much for participating and sharing your experiences with me. I look forward to sharing the interview transcript soon.

### **Interview Protocol for Financial Aid Staff**

Thanks for agreeing to participate in the study. As you have read in the Consent Form, your participation is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential and I will be the only person who will have access to your information. The goal of this research is to honor you, the professionals who work tirelessly with students.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

You have agreed that I may record this interview, so I will start the recorder now.

I will be asking you a few questions on your experience working with undocumented students.

1. Tell me about your journey as a financial aid officer working with undocumented students?
2. What inspired you to become a financial aid officer?
3. How long have you worked in financial aid? What do you like about being a financial aid officer? What do you dislike?
4. To your knowledge, how does the financial aid office make its first contact with undocumented students on your campus?
5. What are some reasons undocumented students visit the financial aid office?
6. On average, how many undocumented students do you work with on a daily basis?
7. As a financial aid officer, how do you learn about a student's status, or do you ever find out about a student's legal status?
8. In what ways do you interact with undocumented students? What are some questions you as the financial aid officer have to answer when interacting with undocumented students?
9. Tell me about your understanding of the AB 540 exemption form, and how does it affect your work as a financial aid officer? Also how does it affect the undocumented student population on your campus?
10. Please share with me your experiences in implementing campus policies or programs related to undocumented students. What type

of policies and/or programs do you have to implement? How does it feel having to implement institutional policies?

11. Has there been any changes or updates on how you interpret and understand AB 540? How has the change in your understanding affect the work that you do as a financial aid officer?
12. How would you compare the policies and practices related to undocumented students at your institution with other (private or public) institutions?
13. Tell me about a time, if you can recall one, when you faced challenges as a financial aid officer working with undocumented students? What did you do to solve the issue? How did you feel?
14. In your opinion, what role do financial aid officers play with AB 540 policy implementation, or if any at all?
15. What would you do if an undocumented student approached you during financial aid's peak time/season and you know you have a long line of students to get through?
16. Please talk about where and how you received training and information about campus policies related to undocumented students.
17. What persons or resources help you feel more competent about your skill in working with undocumented students?
18. How do you feel about your skills and confidence working with undocumented students?
19. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think I should know?
20. Lastly, is it okay for me to contact you in the near future if I need further clarification on your interview responses?

Thank you so much for participating and sharing your experiences with me. I look forward to sharing the interview transcript soon.

### Interview Protocol for Dream Centers Staff

Thanks for agreeing to participate in the study. As you have read in the Consent Form, your participation is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential and I will be the only person who will have access to your information. The goal of this research is to honor you, the professionals who work tirelessly with students.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

You have agreed that I may record this interview, so I will start the recorder now.

I will be asking you a few questions on your experience working with undocumented students.

1. Tell me about your journey as a Dream Centers staff member working with undocumented students.
2. What inspired you to work at the Dream Center?
3. How long have you worked at the Dream Center? What do you like about working at the Dream Center? What do you dislike?
4. On average, how many undocumented students do you work with on a daily basis?
5. How is your role different or the same compared to other Student Affairs professionals on campus for undocumented students?
6. How do you learn about a student's legal status?
7. Tell me about your understanding of the AB 540 exemption form? In your opinion, how does the AB 540 exemption form affect undocumented students on your campus and the work that you do?
8. Please share with me your experiences in implementing campus policies related to undocumented students? What type of policies do you have to implement? How does it feel having to implement institutional policies?
9. Has there been any changes or updates on how you interpret, understand and implement AB 540? What are some factors that influenced your interpretation and implementation of the policy?
10. How would you compare the policies and practices at your institution with other (private or public) institutions?

11. Tell me about a time, if you can recall one, when you faced challenges as a staff member for the Dream Center when working with undocumented students? What did you do to solve the issue? How did you feel?
12. What would you do if an undocumented student approached you during Dream Center's peak time/season and you know you have a long line of students to get through?
13. In your opinion, what is the role of Dream Centers staff in implementing AB 540 on your campus?
14. Please talk about where and how you received training and information about campus policies related to undocumented students.
15. How do you feel about your skills and confidence working with undocumented students?
16. What persons or resources help you feel more competent about your skills working with undocumented students?
17. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think I should know
18. Lastly, is it okay for me to contact you in the near future if I need further clarification on your interview responses?

Thank you so much for participating and sharing your experiences with me. I look forward to sharing my transcription for the interview soon.

## APPENDIX C

## AB 540/AB 2000 FORM

### California Nonresident Tuition Exemption Request

*For Eligible California High School Graduates*

*Note: This form is accepted by all California Community Colleges and all campuses in the California State University system; some University of California campuses will allow use of this form, but most require applicants to complete a campus-specific form to apply for AB 540 status.*

Complete and sign this form to request an exemption from Nonresident Tuition. You must submit any documentation required by the College or University (for example, proof of high school attendance in California). Contact the California Community College, University of California, or California State University campus where you intend to enroll (or are enrolled) for instructions on required documentation, additional procedures and applicable deadlines.

#### ELIGIBILITY:

I, the undersigned, am applying for a California Nonresident Tuition Exemption for eligible California high school graduates at (specify the college or university) \_\_\_\_\_ and I declare the following:

Check YES or NO boxes:

- Yes  No I have graduated from a California high school or have attained the equivalent thereof, such as a High School Equivalency Certificate, issued by the California State GED Office or a Certificate of Proficiency, resulting from the California High School Proficiency Examination.
- Yes  No I have either:
- attended high school in California for three or more years, or
  - attained credits earned in California from a California high school equivalent to three or more years of full-time high school course work and attended a combination of elementary, middle, and/or high schools in California for a total of three or more years.

*Specify the most recent three years of elementary, middle, and/or high schools you attended in California:*

School	City	State	Dates:	
			From – Month/Year	To – Month/Year
		California		

*Documentation of applicable school attendance and high school graduation (or its equivalent) is required by the University of California, The California State University and some California Community Colleges. Follow campus instructions.*

Check the box that applies to you – check only one box:

- I am a nonimmigrant alien as defined by federal law and have been granted T or U visa status, under Title 8 of the United States Code, sections 1101(a)(15)(T) or (U).
- OR
- I am NOT a nonimmigrant alien. [U.S. citizens, permanent residents, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) grantees, or aliens without lawful immigration status, among others, should check this box.]
- OR
- I am a nonimmigrant alien as defined by federal law. [Nonimmigrant aliens have been admitted to the United States temporarily and include, but are not limited to, foreign students (persons holding F visas) and exchange visitors (persons holding J visas)]. Do not check this box if you have been granted T or U visa status (check first box above).

**AFFIDAVIT:**

I, the undersigned, declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the information I have provided on this form is true and accurate. I understand that this information will be used to determine my eligibility for the nonresident tuition exemption for eligible California high school graduates. I hereby declare that, if I am an alien without lawful immigration status, I have filed an application to legalize my immigration status or will file an application as soon as I am eligible to do so. I further understand that if any of the above information is untrue, I will be liable for payment of all nonresident charges from which I was exempted and may be subject to disciplinary action by the College or University.

Print Full Name (as it appears on your campus student records)	Campus/Student Identification Number
Print Full Mailing Address (Number, Street, City, State, Zip Code)	Email Address (Optional)  Phone Number (Optional)
Signature	Date

Rev. 1/15

**RETURN THIS COMPLETED FORM TO THE CAMPUS ADMISSIONS OFFICE**