

UNDOCUMENTED HISPANIC STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A
PHENOMENOLOGY OF STUDENTS STRUGGLING TO OBTAIN
EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER GOALS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition while enrolled at selected community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. This study is guided by Arnett's emerging adulthood theory, a stage of life linking adolescence and young adulthood marked by self-identity issues, exploration, planning for the future, instability, crisis, commitment, family expectations, new relationships, and new roles. The central research question focuses on the educational experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition enrolled in rural North Carolina community colleges with restrictive in-state tuition laws. A purposeful sample of 12 undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum courses at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina was obtained. The data collection methods included semi-structured face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and document review about their experiences during their educational years, motivations and attitudes, challenges, cultural and family values, and the importance of a college degree in their future plans. Qualitative data analysis procedures included the determination of recurring themes, reading, memoing, and thematic coding. Undocumented Hispanic students experienced multiple situations that increased their frustration during school years including inability to communicate, losing years of school, learning the school culture, and dealing unsupportive educational staff, faculty, and students. Undocumented Hispanic students consider that the value of a college degree is very important and may yet be uncertain. Undocumented Hispanic students expect to continue their college beyond associate degree and become successful professionals in their communities.

Keywords: higher education, undocumented students, emerging adulthood, 1.5-generation, Hispanics, community college, out-of-state tuition

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List of Abbreviations

City University of New York (CUNY)

Critical race theory (CRT)

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA)

Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit)

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to understand and describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition while enrolled at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. This chapter presents a general introduction of the problem through the lens of research, including the identification of a gap in the research literature focusing upon this important student population. The chapter continues with a brief description of the condition identifying the philosophical assumption and the research paradigm selected for the study. After defining the research problem and clarifying the purpose statement, the chapter describes the practical, empirical, and theoretical contributions of the study. The research questions are discussed along with a list of key terms defined and used in the study.

Background

Historically, the United States has been a nation of legal and illegal immigrants with Hispanics accounting for the largest group of immigrants for the last 50 years (Grieco et al., 2012). The influx of immigrants has affected every American institution including K-12 and higher education, especially in the poorest districts in the southeastern and southwestern states (Johnson, 2013). The increase of the Spanish-speaking population in rural communities in the southeastern states is mostly attributed to agricultural, restaurant, factory, and construction jobs that the local citizens do not want to perform because of low wages (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). The movement from cities to rural areas creates a need for college trained bilingual professionals in the areas of education, social work, health sciences, and services (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014).

School districts denied public K-12 education to undocumented students or children of undocumented immigrants up until 1982, when the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), that the Equal Protection Clause extends to illegal immigrants and their children, thus allowing undocumented children to attend public schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Perez, 2009). The ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), however, did not address enrollment of undocumented students in institutions of higher education (Cortes, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013b). Federal laws (e.g. the Higher Education Act of 1965, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 [PRWORA], and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 [IIRIRA]) directly banned undocumented immigrants from receiving any state or local public benefits interpreted by many states as including enrollment in institutions of higher education, access to federal financial aid/loans, and in-state tuition (Kim & Diaz, 2013b; Lee, 2012).

PRWORA included an exception in subsection 1621(d) allowing states to enact state provisions that allowed undocumented immigrants eligibility for in-state tuition (Lee, 2012). Exercising their rights under this provision, Texas and California were the first states to enact state laws allowing undocumented students to enroll in institutions of higher education and to pay in-state tuition rates (Johnson, 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013b; Lee, 2012). Other states followed with Texas and California approving similar state legislation allowing undocumented students to enroll in institutions of higher education and pay in-state tuition. Other states approved legislation banning undocumented students from institutions of higher education or allowing paying out-of-state tuition rates (Johnson, 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013b).

Over the last several years, the United States Congress has failed to approve immigration proposals allowing access to higher education for undocumented students in legislation such as

the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (Cortes, 2013; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Kim & Diaz, 2013b; Nienhusser, 2015). In 2012, President Obama introduced his executive action plan, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), allowing eligible undocumented children and young adults to receive a social security number, authorization to work, and a 2-year renewable protection against deportation (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser, 2015). Still, DACA does not grant these students access to higher education (Nienhusser, 2015). Millions of undocumented and DACA students are completing high school but cannot pursue a college education in many states. In response to this situation, states passed their own legislation to address undocumented students in higher education.

By 2015, 20 states currently had legislation authorizing undocumented students to enroll in public institutions of higher education paying in-state tuition rates: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin (Nienhusser, 2015; Serna, Cohen, & Nguyen, 2017). In contrast, the states of Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, and South Carolina ban public higher education to undocumented students (Nienhusser, 2015; Serna et al., 2017).

Beginning in 2011, the State of North Carolina allowed undocumented students to enroll in public institutions of higher education, paying out-of-state tuition rates (The University of North Carolina, 2011). In January 2016, state legislators revised and established new tuition rates for North Carolina's Community College System, with rates established at \$76.00 per credit hour for legal residents and \$268.00 per credit hour for students classified as out-of-state (The State Board of Community Colleges, 2015). Most studies on the topic of undocumented students in higher education have been conducted in states that allowed undocumented students

to pay in-state tuition rates and within urban 4-year institutions (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2014; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera, Garibay, Garcia, & Johnston, 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). The absence of research on the experiences of undocumented students in higher education paying out-of-state tuition rates supports the need of this research. This study will help add to the literature by providing research in the area of undocumented Hispanic students during their emerging adulthood stage of life while enrolled in community colleges located in rural communities in a state with restrictive in-state tuition policies (Arnett, 2000; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016).

Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood theory attempted to describe a different transitioning period just after adolescence and into young adulthood. Since its proposal, supporters of the theory have accepted emerging adulthood as a universal experience of all emerging adults. Most studies have been conducted with Caucasian emerging adults in urban settings in the United States and Europe. However, insufficient studies are available on how Hispanics experience emerging adulthood, especially undocumented emerging adults enrolled in community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition rates. Recent researchers have recommended additional studies on the topics of the universality of emerging adulthood theory and ethnic differences within community colleges in states with restrictive in-state tuition policies (Arnett, 2000; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Heinz, 2009; Hendry & Kloep, 2010; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Salmela-Aro, 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). This research is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

Situation to Self

Every person has a set of beliefs that are not testable under traditional scientific research (Whitley & Kite, 2013). People see reality from their own perspectives and reach conclusions

based on personal assumptions (Creswell, 2013). During this research, my ontological philosophical assumption is that participants see reality in different viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). I wanted to document and present the perspectives, struggles, challenges, and connections of undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in a community college during the emerging adulthood life stage. Participant experiences may differ depending on the nationality of the student, pre-adolescent years, family composition, and support systems (Creswell, 2013).

Social constructivism was used as the research paradigm. I aimed to develop subjective meanings from the complexity of experiences of the participants in their quest for a college education (Creswell, 2013). Because college education in the United States is based on the culture and norms of the Caucasian majority, underrepresented groups can be marginalized. Critical race theory (CRT) elements will be included as part of the social constructivist paradigm of this research, more specifically Latina/o critical race theory (Huber, 2010; Muñoz, 2016; Person, Keeton, Medina, Gonzalez, & Minero, 2016). Latina/o critical race (LatCrit) theory is appropriate because the theory centers the attention on the challenges and discrimination that Hispanic students encounter in higher education and on how they deal with these challenges (Huber, 2010).

I currently serve as the Director of Academic Services and Institutional Effectiveness at a local community college in rural eastern North Carolina. I am the human instrument of this study, and my life experiences influence the approach of the study. As a Hispanic United States citizen born and raised in Puerto Rico, I have lived in rural eastern North Carolina for the last 19 years. I moved from Puerto Rico, worked as the Spanish interpreter/translator while serving as the Coordinator of Bilingual Services for the local community college, and have seen the many

struggles undocumented Hispanic students must confront when they attempt to enroll at local rural community colleges.

I have been well-known throughout the local Hispanic community and within the Hispanic population at the local college. Spanish is my primary language, but I am a product of the bilingual instruction received in Puerto Rico's public schools and the University of Puerto Rico. Until 2017, I served as the college advisor for 260 early college students. The college has a high school on the campus with a 50% Hispanic population, many of them undocumented students. Undocumented middle school students and their families have identified the early college high school program as their best opportunity to attend college without paying tuition, and at the same time complete both high school and an associate degree.

As one of four Hispanic employees at the community college, I have served as an advocate for all college students. I have seen how many potential college students with excellent grades and abilities simply leave or quit their college education because they are undocumented students and cannot afford their college education. I have been one of the few Hispanic professionals in the field of community college education in the rural counties of North Carolina. I recognized the need to prepare more Hispanic professionals to serve the next generation of North Carolinians.

With this study, I have attempted to give undocumented Hispanic students a voice about their experiences and to help other undocumented Hispanic students reach their goals of obtaining a college education. These stories can help many other undocumented students pursue their college education and improve their possibilities in life. Illegal immigration is a complicated social and political topic. It was not my purpose to take a side on the issue. I focused on the life experiences of undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in community

college programs and identified and described common themes from their experiences. Political issues surrounding illegal immigration and higher education were excluded from this study.

I am against illegal immigration. When adults decide to infringe immigration laws to enter another country, they should be responsible for the consequences of the violation of immigration laws. In the case of minors brought illegally into the United States, they are in a different situation than their parents. Minors did not decide to come illegally into the United States, and they had no other choice than to follow their parents wherever they go. These minors grow up here and become adults knowing no other place than the United States and have nowhere to go to call home and to be productive residents. I believe there should be a provision to allow these young adults to complete higher education, to become professionals, and to be contributors to society.

Problem Statement

The problem is that undocumented Hispanic students who complete their high school requirements in North Carolina's schools or pass a General Education Development (GED) and enroll in North Carolina's community colleges must pay out-of-state tuition rates. When undocumented Hispanic students realize that they have no access to higher education after school, many of these students decide to drop out of high school, resulting in the problem of increased school desertion rates among Hispanics (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). Undocumented Hispanic students who drop out of high school remain in poverty, take low-paying jobs, and continue to live in the shadows of society (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

Undocumented Hispanic students must use different strategies to obtain a college education when they comply with the state requirements for enrollment, mainly because they have no access to federal financial aid or scholarships to help pay for their education (Hallett,

2013; Nienhusser, 2015). There is an extraordinary need for trained bilingual professionals in the areas of education, social work, health sciences, and services (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). There is limited research providing a voice to undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in community college curriculum programs who must pay out-of-state tuition rates (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition rates while enrolled at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. At this stage of the research, undocumented Hispanic students are defined as foreign-born, non-citizens who are not legal residents, who entered the United States without inspection, or who entered the United States legally and overstayed their visas after a specific time limit (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). This study was guided by Arnett's (2004) emerging adulthood theory, a stage of life linking adolescence and young adulthood marked by self-identity issues, exploration, planning for the future, instability, crisis, commitment, family expectations, new relationships, and new roles (Miller, 2011). Most community college undocumented Hispanic students are in this stage of development during the ages of 18-25 (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010).

Significance of the Study

This study has practical, empirical, and theoretical significance. Practically, this study addressed the practice of purging undocumented Hispanic students from higher education and has the potential to help increase the number of Hispanics in higher education (Diaz-Strong,

Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011; Hallet, 2013). Hispanics, especially undocumented residents, live at the lowest economic levels, perform the worst jobs, and have the lowest educational attainment of any racial or ethnic group (Saenz, 2010; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). In most cases, undocumented Hispanic students who have realized that they have no access to higher education after school, have often decided to drop out of high school, resulting in the problem of increased school desertion rates among Hispanics (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). Undocumented Hispanic students who drop out of high school remain in poverty, take low-paying jobs, and continue to live in the shadows of society (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). In an effort to improve their lives, completing high school is important for Hispanics, but a college education is vital in their efforts to improve their lives (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014).

The study attempted to understand the struggles and experiences of undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in higher education institutions paying out-of-state tuition rates. This study can help policy makers better understand the struggles and experiences of undocumented Hispanic students, and give consideration to change state policy on public higher education along with federal and state financial aid for these students in need (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez, 2011; Nienhuser, 2014; Nienhuser, 2015). The study can provide faculty and staff working in institutions of higher education with a better understanding of the struggles that undocumented Hispanic students encounter on their campuses (Hallett, 2013). The results of this study can help administrators to modify course schedules to fit into the life of this population of students, to create mentoring programs for undocumented Hispanic students, and to establish programs to increase retention and completion rates among Hispanic students (Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, & Flores, 2013).

Empirically, this study helped to address the gap in the literature with an original contribution detailing how undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in community colleges paying out-of-state tuition struggled to keep enrollment with so many barriers to overcome (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

From a theoretical perspective, this study provided more information about the universality of the emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2000) within undocumented Hispanic young adults who migrated to the United States as children, the *1.5-generation*, living in rural agricultural counties of the United States (Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013). Researchers have attempted to determine if emerging adulthood theory can be applied across countries and cultures, but their conclusions suggested that emerging adulthood is not a comprehensive principle that fits every person (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). This study produced new information about how emerging adulthood theory applies to Hispanic young adults committed to reach their academic goals.

Research Questions

The following principal research question and sub-questions were formulated for this phenomenological research:

Central Question

What are the shared educational experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition enrolled in a rural North Carolina community college with restrictive in-state tuition laws?

Most research on the topic of experiences of undocumented students in higher education is conducted in urban senior institutions in states where undocumented students can pay in-state

tuition rates (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Researchers recommended more studies in rural areas, community colleges, and states with more restrictive in-state tuition laws (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016).

Sub-Questions

1. What are the motivations, outlook, and overall attitude about higher education among undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges paying out-of-state tuition?

Researchers reported a strong correlation between discrimination and educational outcomes (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Discrimination barriers, an important deterrent of motivation, must be removed to allow undocumented Hispanic students the opportunity to be educated and to be more productive with the correct motivation (Lee & Ahn, 2012). There are limited studies on undocumented students and their experiences in higher education, especially in community colleges in rural communities. Researchers have recommended the study of cultural values, attitudes, motivations, and experiences under different theories (Crisp et al., 2014; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

2. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition rates, what specific challenges do these students identify as influencing their persistence towards their goals of higher education?

The literature documents the negative experiences undocumented students enrolled in institutions of higher education experienced while paying in-state tuition rate (Nienhusser et al., 2016). The most cited experiences included discriminatory campus experiences from high school counselors, college administrators and peer students, dissatisfaction with the racial

campus climate, and difficulties obtaining financial aid to persist in their programs until completion (Crisp et al., 2014; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). It is important to document the similarities and differences in the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying in-state tuition rates as compared to the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition rates to have a better understanding of the phenomenon.

3. What cultural or family values do undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges paying out-of-state tuition attribute to their persistence to complete college education?

Undocumented Hispanic students face multiple challenges from sources outside the family circle when the attempt to enroll and complete their college education (Hallet, 2013; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Terriquez, 2015). The negative impacts of depression, anxiety, physical and mental distress force many undocumented Hispanic students to disengage from college and stop their education (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Undocumented Hispanic students who persist to complete their degrees must use active coping strategies, and these strategies may be beneficial to other students under similar circumstances.

4. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges who pay out-of-state tuition rates, what role does earning a college degree play in their visions for the future?

In the past, high school education was sufficient to obtain a good job. In today's technological society, college education is often vital in securing access to higher wage jobs (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). If undocumented students view their professional future positively, they may be willing to persist and to succeed at completing their degrees despite perceived barriers. Motivation factors such as the possibility of obtaining legal status after

college graduation may have a positive influence and lead to increased persistence and completion (Muñoz, 2013).

Definitions

This section defines key terms pertinent to the research and is supported by the literature.

1. *1.5-generation* – Undocumented Hispanic young adults who migrated to the United States before young adulthood (Gonzales, 2011).
2. *Acculturation* – Adaptation to the dominant culture (Lee & Ahn, 2012).
3. *Critical race theory (CRT)* – Theoretical framework that allows researchers to examine how different forms of oppression affect the lives of minorities (Huber, 2010).
4. *Emerging adulthood* – Age span from 18-29 years of age where young people develop aptitudes, skills, and character while transitioning into adulthood (Arnett, 2000).
5. *Enculturation* – Socialization into one's own culture (Lee & Ahn, 2012).
6. *In-state tuition rates* – Cost per credit hour for college courses determined by the state legislature on a yearly basis. In community colleges, in-state tuition rates are significantly lower than in-state tuition rates of 4-year institutions of higher education. Students classified as in-state pay less than students classified as out-of-state (Nienhusser et al., 2016).
7. *In-vivo codes* – Words that participants used to describe their experiences that serve as code and theme labels (Creswell, 2013).
8. *Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit)* – Theoretical framework that examines the issues of racism and discrimination on Hispanics (Huber, 2010; Muñoz, 2016).
9. *Latino Diaspora* – State with a higher concentration of Hispanic residents than traditional states. Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, New York, and Florida, states with

large metropolitan areas are examples of states considered Latino Diasporas (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Muñoz, 2013).

10. *Microaggressions* – Collection of verbal, non-verbal, and environmental insults to communicate derogatory or negative messages to target and discriminate against a marginalized group (Nienhusser et al., 2016).
11. *Outlaw culture* - Serves as a support system for equity, social justice, and equality for undocumented students (Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, & Wilkerson, 2010).
12. *Out-of-state tuition rates* – Cost per credit hour for college courses determined by the state legislature on a yearly basis. In most states, this cost is five to seven times higher than in-state tuition rates (Nienhusser et al., 2016).
13. *Undocumented* - Non-citizens who are born outside the United States or its territories, who are not legal residents, who transferred illegally into the United States or who entered country legally and without authorization extending their visas after a specific time limit (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

Summary

Chapter One provided an overview of the study and described the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition rates enrolled at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. This chapter presented a description of the research problem and identified a gap in the literature: a need for studies of undocumented students in states where undocumented students are not granted in-state tuition rates in rural community colleges. The chapter described the researcher's philosophical assumption and paradigm: ontological and social constructivism. The problem and purpose were identified, and the chapter continued with a description of the practical, empirical, and theoretical contributions of the study. Finally, the

chapter concluded listing one central question and three sub-questions, the research approach, and definitions of terms used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States with 50 million of a population of 325 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Estimates from the United States' government reported that there were currently 11.7 million people living in the United States who were not citizens and did not have a valid visa to live and work in the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). For the 11.7 million people living illegally in the United States, 9.9 million are Hispanics who account for millions of undocumented children attending K-12 schools (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). The Supreme Court granted free K-12 education to undocumented children in their ruling of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), but higher education for undocumented children completing high school was not granted in this ruling (Anderson, 2013; Cortes, 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013b; Nienhusser, 2015). When undocumented Hispanic students realize that they have no access to higher education after school, many of these students decide to drop out of high school resulting in the problem of increased school desertion rates among Hispanics (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). Undocumented Hispanic students who drop out of high school are at a greater risk to live in poor conditions than their peers who finish high school (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand and describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition rates while enrolled at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. For this study, undocumented Hispanic students were defined as non-citizens who are born outside the United States or its territories, who are not legal residents, who transferred illegally into the United States, or who entered the country legally and without authorization extending their visas after a specific time limit (U.S.

Department of Homeland Security, 2013). The study is guided by Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood theory characterizing a stage of life linking adolescence and young adulthood where people are marked by self-identity issues, exploration, planning for the future, instability, crisis, commitment, family expectations, new relationships, and new roles (Arnett, 2004; Miller, 2011). Most undocumented Hispanic students in community college are in this stage of development, especially during early to middle emerging adulthood years (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Perez et al., 2010).

This chapter identifies and explains the emerging adulthood theory framing this study, and continues with a detailed description of the situation of undocumented Hispanic students in higher education. The chapter also details the role of community colleges with open-door policies, tuition policies, access and barriers, best practices, and social justice for undocumented students. Finally, the chapter ends by summarizing the current literature about this topic.

Theoretical Framework

During the years between adolescence and young adulthood, people are considered adults in age but are not mature enough to engage in adult roles as independent entities (Miller, 2011). Most college undergraduate students are in this category. Emerging adulthood is the stage of life when young adults prepare for the rest of their lives.

Emerging Adulthood Defined

Arnett (2000) developed the concept of emerging adulthood, a transitioning period between adolescence and young adulthood, from Erikson's (1968) gap on adulthood development introduced in his first paper. Arnett (1998, 2000, 2004, 2015) proposed that the emerging adulthood age span is from 18-29 years of age, different from adolescence, and different from young adulthood. During this period, young people not going through puberty,

not attending high school, not considered legally dependents from parents, and not considered legally as minors, and are in a constant process of developing aptitudes, skills, and character (Arnett, 1998, 2000, 2015). This stage is also marked by the acceptance of responsibility, independent decisions, and financial independence (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2004) introduced the term *emerging adulthood*, describing the universal stages and emotions of young adults. Arnett (2004) defined and explained the main elements of the universal concept of emerging adulthood as the five pillars of the theory: self-focus, identity exploration, feeling in-between, instability, and possibilities (Arnett, 2015; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010; Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

The emerging adulthood element of self-focus relates to the opportunity for the young adult to be the sole person responsible for making decisions and to determine the direction of his or her life including educational transitions, career opportunities, freedom, independence, and employment (Arnett, 2004; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Emerging adulthood is the time to trace roadmaps for life and to develop the foundations and skills needed for young adults living under their own conditions and self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2004). Identity exploration refers to exploring different possibilities, committing to the selected personal identity, self-acceptance, and understanding of what they want to obtain in life (Arnett, 2004; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). The element of possibilities allows young adults to be aware of their personal values, feelings, optimism, and need in their efforts to be genuine in relationships (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Instability involves the constant revision of plans during the emerging adult years, because life does not follow plans or directions (Arnett, 2004). Shulman and Nurmi (2010) described this instability as a period of confusion where young adults do not have a real idea of what they would like to do, triggering depression, dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and low resilience. Arnett (2004) described feeling in-between as being trapped between

the restrictions of adolescence and the responsibilities of adulthood. Young adults are not mature enough to feel as completely developed adults and continue to behave as teenagers by not accepting responsibilities for themselves, not making independent decisions, and not becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2004). New life potentials mean that emerging adulthood is the time of exploring future possibilities, attempting goals, embracing changes, and making commitments (Arnett, 2004; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010).

Universality of Emerging Adulthood

Arnett and Eisenberg (2007) published a special chapter about how the stage of emerging adulthood is experienced in other countries. The authors reflected on arguments and disagreements on the topic of emerging adulthood in different cultures and referred to studies about emerging adulthood conducted in Japan, Argentina, Latin America, and China (Arnett & Eisenberg, 2007). In their conclusions, Arnett and Eisenberg (2007) claimed that in general terms, emerging adulthood is universal based on the results of the research performed in other countries. In relation to Hispanics experiencing emerging adulthood, research conducted in Latin American's wealthiest countries suggested that Hispanics experienced emerging adulthood in similar forms as their counterparts in the United States, especially in urban areas and among members of wealthy families (Facio, Resett, Micocci, & Mistrorigo, 2007; Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernández, 2007). In their study on Mexican emerging adults, Fierro Arias and Moreno Hernandez (2007) concluded that emerging adulthood could be considered universal among Hispanics. Participants who completed high school education, were exposed to globalization, and were literate in new technologies demonstrated the same characteristics of emerging adulthood years to a significant level as their peer emerging adults in industrialized countries (Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernández, 2007).

Hendry and Kloep (2010) claimed that the concept of emerging adulthood is not as universal as previously thought, and attempted to determine the universal application of emerging adulthood theory. Hendry and Kloep (2010) concluded that emerging adulthood stages applied to only one sub-group of those interviewed. These researchers suggested that to understand the complex stages of emerging adulthood, advisors and psychiatrists must take into account the interactions of individual life experiences, health, self-agency, social changes, cultural norms, values, relationships, economics, job market, education, and structural forces (Hendry & Kloep, 2010).

Ethnicity and Emerging Adulthood

Detractors from emerging adulthood theory claim that the theory does not universally apply to every young person ages 18-29 but only applies to young people of higher economic backgrounds enrolled in American colleges and universities (Arnett, 2015; Heinz, 2009; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Arnett (2015) recognized the criticism that young adults from working class and poor communities do not have the luxury to experience emerging adulthood the way he presented his theory and agreed to do more research about the issue. Arnett (2015) restated that emerging adulthood applies to most emerging adults in the United States from diverse ethnic, racial, regional, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Arnett (2015) supported his claim of the universality of his theory with quantitative data from his most recent survey. Using the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults as a data collection tool, Arnett surveyed 710 emerging adults from different social class backgrounds in the United States including Hispanics. The multi-topics survey included the five pillars of emerging adulthood theory, expectations for adulthood, emotional well-being, school and work attitudes, and views of love, sex, and marriage. The results of the study suggested that there are no statistical significant differences

across social classes on emerging adults in the United States. Emerging adulthood was experienced positively across social classes and ethnic groups. According to Arnett (2015), the five pillars of emerging adulthood can be applied to every emerging adult no matter the social status. There may be many ways to experience emerging adulthood depending on social and cultural differences, but there are more similarities than differences among emerging adults (Arnett, 2015).

While most research on emerging adulthood theory has been conducted among the majority Caucasian population in the United States, researchers claim that there is not enough research on the topic of emerging adulthood and ethnicity (Katsiaficas, Suárez-Orozco, & Dias, 2015). Research is needed especially on immigrant-origin (foreign-born and United States born to foreign parents) emerging adults that account for nearly a quarter of the emerging adults in the United States (Katsiaficas et al., 2015). Emerging adulthood theory may not be applicable to ethnic minorities, and more research is needed on how ethnic minority young adults experience emerging adulthood (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). More research is also needed on ethnic minorities, including Hispanics, who cannot afford higher education because they are overrepresented among the low-income make up of society and their experiences of emerging adulthood are different when compared to the high-income make up of their peers (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

Independence is the main criterion used to define adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Independence includes personal, financial, and physical separation from the inner family circle (Arnett, 2004). While the ethnic majority in the United States promotes autonomy from the family as the main goal of adulthood, Hispanic culture promotes financial contributions to the family circle as an obligation of adulthood (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Hispanic emerging adults

experience independence differently from the majority of emerging adults in the world. Consequently, there is evidence that emerging adulthood may differ among ethnic groups and may not be as universal as previously considered (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). More research is needed about the universality of emerging adulthood, including the areas of ethnic groups attending community colleges, not attending college, attending small colleges/universities, traditional, and non-traditional college students (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

Hispanic emerging adults who complete high school are most likely to enroll in community colleges if they decide to pursue college education (Katsiaficas et al., 2015). Community college courses are less expensive than traditional universities, are conveniently located close to home, serve non-traditional students, have a diverse population of students, and have an open-door admissions policy allowing low-income Hispanic students to work while attending college (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Scherer & Anson, 2014). For Hispanic emerging adults attending community colleges, emerging adulthood is experienced different from their peer community college students in the areas of independence, individual responsibility, and social responsibility (Katsiaficas et al., 2015).

Hispanic emerging adults described independence in two categories (financial and decision-making) while the ethnic majority of emerging adults in the United States add the category of independence from the family, a significant difference that cannot be minimized (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Hispanic emerging adults continue to contribute economically to the family while other Caucasian emerging adults do not contribute economically to the immediate or extended family (Katsiaficas et al., 2015). Arnett's (2004) emerging adulthood theory claims that emerging adults are self-focused because they have little

or no social obligations or duties to others. This principle does not fit Hispanic emerging adults who have responsibilities and social obligations with their family members and the society they live that includes extended family members (Katsiaficas et al., 2015). As research on the topic of emerging adults and ethnic groups continues to grow, more differences than similarities will continue to be found providing evidence of what Arnett (2015) concluded: emerging adulthood is one stage of development with many paths of possibilities.

Goal Setting, Transitions, and Challenges

Several recent studies have focused on goal setting during emerging adulthood. Salmela-Aro (2010) examined the development of young adults through educational pursuits, parenthood, and adolescence to adulthood in the context of personal goals. Four important mechanisms with key roles in how teenagers navigate their lives were identified: choice, channeling, compensation, and co-regulation. Life transitions, such as emerging adulthood, may be important for personal goal setting and may offer new options to reach goals and well-being later in life. Life transitions are important for intervention programs to refocus goals of the emerging adults (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

Different researchers looked into the transition period of young adults after completing high school and on changes in social networks (Parker, Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Roberts, 2012; Settersten & Ray, 2010). During emerging adulthood, relationships change mainly because of personality changes. Research supports the claim that personality development during emerging adulthood has a strong effect on relationships (Parker et al., 2012). It is important for young adults to create new, strong relationships and networks that may last for years after transitioning into young adulthood. College relationships may have a positive effect on those newly created networks of professional support, especially with mentors from institutions of higher education

(Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Mentors from institutions of higher education can serve as reference contacts when graduates apply for job positions or for future professional promotions. Mentors can also help in the professional accomplishments of graduates in the areas of academia, business, and politics (Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

Settersten and Ray (2010) examined the transition to adulthood and its challenges for young people, families, and society during a longitudinal study. Emerging adulthood causes distress to families and established institutions including the military, community colleges, universities, and national programs. The adulthood stage does not start when adolescence ends; there is a time for transition between the adolescence years and the adulthood years, and most college students are in this transitional period. For young Hispanics during their emerging adulthood years, different challenges are linked to academic demotivation, low academic achievement, and disengagement from school, producing higher dropout rates among Hispanics (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bámaca, & Zeiders, 2009). No matter the size of these challenges, Hispanics must learn to use active coping strategies such as creating strong ethnic identities with other Hispanics, participating in mentoring programs, acculturation, and enculturation to surpass the negative outcomes of discrimination (Lee & Ahn, 2012). For Hispanics during the emerging adulthood stage, it is very important to learn to manage challenges as an indication of maturity for learning to stand alone and becoming autonomous adults (Arnett, 1998).

Related Literature

Emerging adulthood and higher education for traditional students go together because most emerging adults are in the age traditional students attend institutions of higher education after completing high school (Arnett, 2000; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Typically, young people

enroll in institutions of higher education based on their desire to increase knowledge and establish the foundation for their future (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2013).

Undocumented Hispanic students also have the desire to complete a college education and prepare for a better future during their emerging adulthood years (Heckhausen, Chang, Greenberger, & Chen, 2013).

Transition From High School to College

The transitional period of emerging adulthood from high school to college is stressful, and emerging adults are vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and depression (Taylor, Doane, & Eisenberg, 2014). Emerging adults who develop poor mental health have higher risks of not completing their college education, so it is important to help these students cope with stress using supportive networks (Hartley, 2012). Transitioning from high school into college is difficult for every student, documented or undocumented, because it is during these transition years when people establish the foundation for what they will be doing during the next years of adult life (Arnett, 2004). Many students describe high school as boring and without a purpose, except for the extracurricular activities they enjoyed (Arnett, 2004). In contrast, most students find higher education as the most important years of education because it allows them to see the larger picture of life and give them the independence, mobility, academic achievement, leadership, civil engagement, and financial success they wish to achieve (Heckhausen et al., 2013; Perez, 2010). More than ever, higher education is needed to qualify for decent wage jobs, job security, benefits, career advancement, and a better future (Gonzales, 2011).

Undocumented students who graduate from high school have a more difficult transition to college (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales, 2011; Hallett, 2013; Herrera et al., 2013; Perez, 2010). While high school citizen graduates benefit from in-state tuition rates, federal financial

aid, multiple scholarships, and the encouragement of high school counselors and college admission recruiters to enroll in higher education, undocumented students have been discouraged to transition from high school into higher education (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales, 2011; Hallett, 2013; Perez, 2010). During the 2003-04 academic year, an estimated 13,000 undocumented students, mostly living in states allowing undocumented students to enroll in higher education, successfully transitioned from high school into higher education (Kim & Díaz, 2013a). These students encountered difficulties during their transitioning to include the discovery of their undocumented status, the reluctance of high school counselors to help them to continue a college degree, and the closing of doors by admission recruiters and college administrators to undocumented students (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Heckhausen et al., 2013). A successful transition from high school to college requires motivational commitment from the students and a positive environment from both high school and college institutions to help emerging adults to focus in their efforts to reach their educational and career goals (Arnett, 2004; Clark et al., 2013; Heckhausen et al., 2013).

Undocumented Hispanic Students and Higher Education

Social and economic problems force people to change their ways of life, and many of these changes affect immigration (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). As a direct result, more Hispanic families are coming to the United States without proper documentation and staying (Herrera et al., 2013). Research on Hispanic undocumented workers and K-12 undocumented students in California was conducted with the purpose to document experiences, obstacles, survival strategies, and knowledge on civil rights of these undocumented residents (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Most of these undocumented students were born outside the United States and migrated before young adulthood. Many members of the *1.5-generation* learned of their undocumented

status at the end of high school when their safe-haven of inclusion as undocumented immigrants ended and attempted to obtain a driver's license, apply for a job, or apply for college (Gonzales, 2011; Muñoz, 2016; Person et al., 2016). Undocumented immigrants must use survival skills to live in the shadows of society, perform the jobs American citizens refuse to do, and educate their families for a better future (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Hallett, 2013; Nienhusser, 2015; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

Undocumented Hispanic students in K-12 schools face many challenges to become college ready including discrimination, learning a new language, poverty, low-quality education, low expectations from teachers, over-punishment, and high dropout rates (Lee & Ahn, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Other obstacles include microaggressions, such as policies that discriminate against undocumented students, withholding of college information, denial of college and professional opportunities, insensitive behaviors from college officials, low college expectations, fear of revealing themselves as undocumented, and hatred against undocumented immigrants both during college selection and the college application process (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016). One study suggested that most (a) Caucasian men, (b) Republican voters, (c) members of the Baptist Church, (d) members of the Church of Christ, (e) business students, (f) college seniors with positive racial interactions, (g) students in fraternities and sororities, and (h) students in white-majority colleges are against allowing undocumented students into higher education (Herrera et al., 2013). With the odds against them, the few undocumented Hispanic students who complete high school have to face another obstacle; most states prohibit undocumented students from obtaining a college education, or they must pay out-of-state tuition rates often making higher education prohibitive (Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Nienhusser, 2015).

Undocumented Hispanic students are underrepresented in higher education (Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Those few undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in college curriculum courses have a difficult time completing their educational goals while the institutions of higher education systematically purge these students from their colleges and universities (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Twenty states allow undocumented students to enroll in college paying in-state tuition rates, while the states of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina block undocumented students from higher education (Harmon et al., 2010; Nienhusser, 2015; Serna et al., 2017). Research recognized states' efforts to permit undocumented students' enrollment in college while paying in-state tuition rates (Kim & Díaz, 2013b; Nguyen & Serna, 2014). The state of North Carolina is one of the few states that allows undocumented students to enroll in public colleges and universities and pay out-of-state tuition rates (The University of North Carolina, 2011). North Carolina is also one of the states classified in research as the New Latino Diaspora for undocumented families in search of farm work and educational opportunities for their children (Muñoz, 2013).

Historically, Hispanics have been attracted to large metropolitan states such as California, New York, Florida, and Texas (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014) because of the abundance of jobs and financial opportunities. In recent years, the immigration trends of Hispanics have experienced significant changes. High costs of living and the increase of criminal activities in large cities have moved Hispanics out of metropolitan areas and relocated them to rural areas where agricultural labor markets, perceived safety, and tranquility are more attractive to raise their families (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). These new rural destinations for Hispanics have been labeled as the New Latino Diaspora (Muñoz, 2013). The state of North Carolina is one of the preferred states for Hispanics to migrate, establish residency, and get better economic opportunities for

their families (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Muñoz, 2013; Oseguera, Flores, & Burciaga, 2010). North Carolina's rural agricultural areas attract Hispanics, documented and undocumented, because of the abundance of jobs in low-skilled agricultural settings such as crop fields and hog, chicken, and turkey farms. The 1990 United States Census reported North Carolina having 76,726 Hispanic residents, 383,465 in 2000, and over 800,000 in 2010 ranking the state as the 11th state with the highest Hispanic population (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011). For Hispanics moving to North Carolina, the transition has not been easy. Rural destinations have disadvantages such as high poverty rates, low performing schools, lack of advanced courses in public schools, fewer educational and financial opportunities, underdeveloped social structures, scarce medical services, residential segregation, alienation, and discrimination (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). For documented and undocumented Hispanic residents of rural North Carolina, the New Latino Diaspora is not the land of opportunities that was expected.

Rural North Carolina does not offer many opportunities for Hispanic students, and it is especially more difficult for undocumented students to enroll in higher education and to obtain a rewarding job in the area. The North Carolina Community College System has 58 campuses serving 100 counties under a general open door policy for curriculum programs allowing undocumented students to enroll. The system does not, however, allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates (Kim & Díaz, 2013a; North Carolina Community College System, 2009). Hispanic students account for merely 3.5% of the total student population in North Carolina's community colleges, while undocumented Hispanic students account for less than 1% of the total community college student population (Oseguera et al., 2010). The exponential growth of the Hispanic population in North Carolina during the last 20 years does not correspond with the national increase of Hispanic students in local community colleges. Since 2006, North

Carolina's community colleges increased enrollment by 7.3%. No significant enrollment growth was observed in the Hispanic student population (Harpe & Kaniuka, 2012).

Challenges, Barriers, and Road Blocks

As the undocumented Hispanic population increases, it is also expected that the challenges undocumented Hispanics encounter in their communities increase in proportional rates. The following list of challenges undocumented Hispanics encounter in the United States is just a sample of what research has been documented. Unfortunately, these challenges are not exclusively experienced by undocumented Hispanics. Research has documented that most Hispanics living in the United States have continued to experience one or more of these challenges, barriers, and roadblocks (Flores, Tschann, Dimas, Bachen, Pasch, & de Groat, 2008).

Discrimination

Though the Hispanic community comprises the largest minority group in the United States, those numbers do not guarantee that Hispanics will live free of discrimination (Lee & Ahn, 2012). More than half of Hispanics in the United States report experiencing discrimination in the areas of immigration status (they do not belong here and have no rights), ethnicity (fear that Hispanics will take the jobs and education of Americans), English proficiency (speak broken English), region of residence (mostly live in poor rural areas), age (too old to be in school), and gender (more females than males) that prevented them to succeed in their pursuit of success and goal achievement (Flores et al., 2008; Taylor, Kochhar, Livingston, Lopez, & Morin, 2009). Hispanics experience daily discrimination and stigmatization in their neighborhoods, workplaces, health care facilities, churches, social services, security agencies, government agencies, professors, counselors, campus administrators, financial aid officers, and other students, just to state a few examples (Hallett, 2013; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Muñoz, 2013;

Nienhusser et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Schueths & Carranza, 2012; Terriquez, 2015). There are various forms of discrimination including microaggressions, social stereotypes, labeling Hispanics as lazy, unreliable, and that they speak broken English, or accusing all Hispanics of being criminals or illegal immigrants (Lee & Ahn, 2012; Nienhusser et al., 2016).

The main problem of discrimination is that it has a negative impact on the mental health of the recipients of discrimination producing higher rates of depression, anxiety, physical and psychological distress, and post-traumatic stress (Flores, Tschann, Dimas, Pasch, & de Groat, 2010; Lee & Ahn, 2012). For undocumented Hispanic students in higher education, a great deal of discrimination comes from college administrators and staff who distrust their legal status, adding more stress and anxiety during the application process (Muñoz, 2016). In many cases these students did not disclose their immigration status to administrators and staff because of fear to be reported to the immigration authorities, arrested, deported, and separated from their family (Muñoz, 2016; Perez, 2017).

Learning a New Language

Nearly 74% of undocumented immigrants who established residency in the United States come from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Ecuador where most residents speak Spanish (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). Spanish is the main language of most of the *1.5-generation* children enrolled in K-12 schools with no knowledge of the English language, and live with extended families that do not speak or read English (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). The *1.5-generation* lags in learning the English language when compared with native English-speakers and other Hispanic students born and raised in the United States, making language the main barrier to equal education opportunities (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). While learning a new language in a different school culture, *1.5-generation*

students must contend with language stigmas during their K-12 schooling experience and beyond as another roadblock to be successful in school (Crisp et al., 2014). The challenge of learning a new language in a different school system complicates what already exists within cultural differences of the community, the local school culture, an homogeneous teacher population unprepared to deal with a diverse populations, and lack of resources to implement effective English learning programs (Juarez, Smith, & Hayes, 2008; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013).

Poverty and Low-Quality Education

Many undocumented Hispanics come to the United States to secure employment in low-paying jobs often refused by native workers such as restaurant kitchen work, manufacturing, janitorial services, construction, and farm jobs (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). An unexpected consequence of low-paying jobs is that families have to live in rural, low-income neighborhoods, share the house with extended family members, and their children must often attend poor schools with low-quality instruction (Crisp et al., 2014; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Undocumented immigrant children are more likely to live below the federal poverty lines, forfeit appropriate medical care, and abandon school to work and support the family than peer students of their age group (Crisp et al., 2014; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Pérez et al., 2010; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Many undocumented students complete high school, but their families do not have the financial resources to pay for college education. Some of the reasons making paying for college education difficult include lower incomes that keep the family living in poverty, unavailable financial aid, the inability to obtain a job, and the legal status (Kim & Díaz, 2013a; Perez et al., 2010). In addition, undocumented students who complete high school are less academically prepared for college than their peers and often opt to enroll in community colleges because they are more affordable than senior

public and private institutions of higher education (Kim & Díaz, 2013a; Nienhusser, 2014). Factually, Hispanic students often receive education of lower quality than other ethnic groups and have the lowest graduation rates among all ethnic groups (Kena et al., 2014; Moreno & Gaytán, 2012; Wayman, 2002). Undocumented students with poor academic performance in high school and no opportunities to enroll in college paying in-state tuition rates are more likely to go straight into the workforce rather than enrolling in college (Terriquez, 2015).

Poverty strongly deters emerging adult undocumented Hispanic students from completing college on time. With tuition rates and housing costs increasing every year, the cost of higher education becomes unattainable for families living in poverty. Most undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in college or universities experience the need to take a leave of absence from college to deal with difficult financial situations, save money to continue paying for their studies and help their families financially, and return to college in an attempt to complete their degrees (Terriquez, 2015; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). This constant leaving and returning to college from undocumented students has implications in college retention and completion efforts. Poverty not only affects the ability of undocumented students to complete college but also the performance measures of the institutions of higher education (Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015).

Low Expectations From Teachers

Juarez et al. (2008) and Moreno and Gaytán (2013) reported that more than 80% of K-12 teachers were currently Caucasian females with education degrees designed to teach in an idealized Caucasian middle-class community where students came from English-speaking families and a homogeneous cultural background. Diversity and globalization are topics barely considered in education degrees leaving teachers unprepared to deal with students from different backgrounds, especially in areas where the Hispanic population has exponentially grown in the

last few decades (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Frustrated teachers often create cultural misconceptions of the diverse student population and alienate students by setting lower academic expectations that limit the delivery of high quality instruction to Hispanic students (Moreno & Gaytán, 2012, 2013). With Hispanics accounting for the largest high school dropout rates, teachers may misconceive that all Hispanic students are lazy, lowering expectations of academic success for Hispanic students (Kena et al., 2014; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). Hispanic students are more likely to be referred to special education, identified as having learning or emotional disabilities, placed in vocational tracks over college prep tracks, or enrolled in lower ability coursework that is less rigorous because of the teacher's lack of academic expectations for Hispanic students (Crisp et al., 2014; Moreno & Gaytán, 2012, 2013). Hispanic students who complete high school and apply to college are typically considered unprepared for college based on their placement test scores or academic ranks in school (Crisp et al., 2014).

Over-Punishment in Schools

Schools are supposed to be well-organized centers of learning with rules controlling student behavior. When students misbehave, they have to pay the consequences for their actions. Moreno and Gaytán (2013), Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011), and Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, and Tobin (2011) found no statistical significant difference of misbehavior rates between Hispanic and Caucasian students in schools; however, Hispanic students are punished more frequently over Caucasian students as consequence for the same problems or behaviors of even lesser offenses. Punishment included referrals to the principal's office, in-school suspension, home suspensions, alternative school referrals, and expulsions. Over-punishment in schools can be considered as a risk factor for poor academic performance and academic disengagement

(Skiba et al., 2011). Ultimately, Hispanic students disengage academically from school, dropout, and refrain to enroll in college education (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Wayman, 2002).

High Dropout Rates

Hispanic students are the ethnic group with the higher dropout rates of any racial group in the United States (Clark et al., 2013; Harpe & Kaniuka, 2012; Kena et al., 2014, 2015).

Undocumented Hispanic students account for the highest dropout rates of all immigrant groups (Potochnick, 2014). They are more likely to disconnect from school at a younger age when they discover that college education is not an option because in-state tuition laws make college education financially unaffordable or impossible in some states (Clark et al., 2013; Potochnick, 2014). With decreased motivation in completing school and pursuing higher education, most undocumented Hispanic students are more likely to quit school and to join the workforce before the emerging adulthood years (Clark et al., 2013; Potochnick, 2014).

Hispanic students, especially males, are more likely to drop out of high school to get a job rather than to obtain a college education (Clark et al., 2013). In Hispanic culture, the female is expected to attend college after finishing high school if marriage does not happen during her emerging adulthood years, while the male is expected to work to support the family economically (Arnett, 1998; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Still, economic turmoil is not the only reason to blame for the high dropout rates. Social humiliation, microaggression, cultural pressure, immigration status, peer pressure, and structural inequality interact as forces that influence Hispanic students to decide to end high school before graduation (Clark et al., 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). If the challenges, barriers, and roadblocks Hispanic students face in school are not addressed, Hispanics are expected to continue reporting the highest dropout rates in the nation. In addition, Hispanics will continue to be

underrepresented in higher education depriving future generations of Hispanic professionals (Alfaro et al, 2009; Clark et al., 2013; Crisp et al., 2014; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Hallett, 2013; Schueths & Carranza, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

First Generation to College

Many undocumented Hispanic students are the first in their immediate families to complete high school and attend college. Some of the challenges associated with first generation college attendants include limited access to financial aid, limited knowledge of the college application process, the lack of cooperation and support from college staff and administrators, and working multiple jobs to finance education while contributing to the family's income (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). In the case of undocumented students with DACA status, these students could be the only ones in the family who have work authorization and may be the main contributors to the family's income, making the first generation college status more of a challenge than a privilege.

Stress and Health Care

Living in poverty often means living with inadequate health care to treat physical and mental issues. Undocumented students experience higher levels of stress than their documented peers because of the stacking amount of challenges, barriers, and roadblocks encountered during their pursuit of higher education (Terriquez, 2015). The undocumented status, constant fear of being deported, poverty, and not having medical insurance are main contributors to higher levels of psychological stress experienced by undocumented students (Perez, 2010; Perez et al., 2010; Terriquez, 2015). A high level of psychological stress in students is linked to physical health problems if it is not appropriately treated, and undocumented students are not receiving appropriate medical care that may account for their inability to complete a college education

(Terriquez, 2015). With so many difficult barriers to overcome, undocumented students need more help as they pursue education than any other underrepresented group in higher education.

The Role of Community Colleges

Community colleges are pillars in the education of millions of students. Community colleges are inclusive, economically affordable, conveniently located, and provide technical training opportunities that other institutions of higher education do not offer. More than half of the Hispanic students who decide to pursue higher education attend community colleges rather than regular colleges or universities (Person et al., 2016; Tovar, 2015). Community colleges are important institutions for the education of the Hispanic population, including undocumented students, who may not be able to attend other institutions of higher education in their efforts to improve their opportunities in life.

Open-Door Policies

Historically, community colleges in the United States have shared a common principle known as the open-door policy (Scherer & Anson, 2014). The purpose of this policy is to allow access to college courses to a larger group of college candidates (Scherer & Anson, 2014). The open-door policy states that students who graduated from high school or passed a General Education Development (GED) test may enroll in college degree programs, while students without a high school diploma or GED may enroll in certificate programs (Scherer & Anson, 2014). The reality is that in most states, undocumented students are not included under this open-door policy. Legislators from California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin established laws allowing undocumented students to enroll in college courses and pay in-state tuition rates (Kim & Diaz,

2013b; Nienhusser, 2015). State legislators want to have qualified workers who can contribute to the economy of their states, including underrepresented groups in higher education (Kim & Diaz, 2013b).

In-State or Out-of-State Tuition

The two largest barriers preventing undocumented students from enrolling in college are state laws prohibiting enrollment and in-state tuition laws (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). Researchers consider the impact of these laws on undocumented students, institutions, and faculty. If undocumented students are not allowed to pay in-state tuition rates, the possibilities of those undocumented students attending college decreases significantly. States that attempt to remove barriers such as out-of-state tuition rates for undocumented students is a step in the right direction (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). Quantitative data supports the claim that if barriers are removed, undocumented students will attend college (Cortes, 2013).

Nienhusser (2014) studied how the City University of New York (CUNY) and its community college system addressed the issue of accepting undocumented students on its campuses. The university and community colleges administration devoted resources to approve a policy that allowed this population to pursue a college education (Nienhusser, 2014). CUNY administrators engaged in the task of removing barriers such as high out-of-state tuition, discretionary policy applications, insensitivity from college staff, and the blocking of information about enrollment for undocumented students (Nienhusser, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016). Community college administrators were encouraged to follow CUNY's example and to remove barriers to help undocumented students enroll and complete higher education (Nienhusser et al., 2016).

Utah, New York, California, and Texas allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates, and enrollment rates increased to 41% at institutions with higher enrollment of Hispanic students (Kim & Diaz, 2013b). However, the numbers of undocumented students enrolled at institutions of higher education have not increased overall as expected (Kim & Diaz, 2013b). By changing state policies, especially those related to acceptance and in-state tuition rates, some undocumented students enroll in college courses to pursue their educational goals during their emerging adulthood years (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhuser, 2014; Nienhuser et al., 2016). The states of Illinois, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, Colorado, Minnesota, and Rhode Island not only opened their college doors to undocumented students but also allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition fees (Kim & Díaz, 2013b; Nguyen & Serna, 2014).

In-State Tuition may not be Enough

State efforts to allow undocumented students to enroll in institutions of higher education paying in-state tuition rates is commendable as a first important step to help this underserved population, and to help make improvements for the present and future. Still, researchers highlight that granting in-state tuition is not be enough to ensure that undocumented students enroll, stay in, and successfully complete a college degree (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Olivas, 2012; Perez et al., 2010).

Evidently, it is an important first step that states are taking to progress in the process of helping undocumented emerging adults to improve their situation by preparing for a career, but other key players in higher education must intervene with more efforts. Federal policy must provide a pathway for undocumented students to change their immigration status to legal, such as the DREAM Act or federal legislation that addresses permanent residency or student visas for

these students (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013b). Federal legislation is not only needed to address deportation and legal residency, but undocumented students need to work to finance their studies and need a driver license to commute to college campuses and work places (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Muñoz, 2016; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). State policies need to change to allow undocumented students to obtain a job and to be able to have the resources to keep their jobs and to be able to attend college. In-state tuition alone does not help to address these barriers (Conger & Chellman, 2013). State and private financial aid for undocumented students in higher education is also needed to overcome the financial barriers (Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). Federal financial aid or federal loans are not available for undocumented students based on the interpretation of federal laws PRWORA and IIRIRA (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Kim & Díaz, 2013a; Lee, 2012; Nguyen & Serna, 2014). Undocumented college students living in poverty are in need of financial help that may come from state funding and private partners willing to provide scholarships to help these students (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Kim & Díaz, 2013a; Perez et al., 2010).

Institutions of higher education need to step up in their efforts to help undocumented students to succeed in college and reduce some of the barriers these students find in their campuses. Researchers have documented how college administrators, faculty, staff, and documented students discriminate against undocumented students by isolation, discriminatory comments, prejudice, providing incorrect information, and denial of services because of their legal status (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016). Institutions of higher education must be proactive by identifying internal barriers that make the college experience more difficult for undocumented students, removing barriers, and providing mentoring programs in their efforts to

serve all students with their best practices while operating with social justice for every student (Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

Best Practices and Social Justice

A good practice that colleges and universities implemented was eliminating barriers that keep undocumented students out of college such as academic counselors discouraging them to continue their education, hostile school climates fueled by classmates and teachers against undocumented students, denial of internships and job experiences, microaggressions, discrimination, and denial of college opportunities (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser, 2014; Nienhusser et al., 2016). However, it is more important that these barriers start to disappear earlier during the emerging adulthood stage of development, particularly during high school years. Moreno and Gaytán (2013) discussed educational and social issues that Hispanic students face in schools. These issues include holding Hispanic students as English as second language (ESL) students for many years, misidentified disabilities, cultural differences, low-quality education, high dropout rates, and lower expectations from teachers and counselors. When schools remove barriers and establish positive supporting strategies for undocumented students, this population may be willing to complete school and pursue a college education (Cortes, 2013).

Higher education institutions in New York, California, Texas, and Washington are a step ahead in their efforts to implement best practices that benefit all students while applying social justice for underrepresented groups in education (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Nienhusser, 2015; Olivas, 2012). Researchers identified and examined successful practices to improve the achievement of underrepresented groups in California's community colleges, including undocumented students (Levin, Cox, Cerven, & Haberler, 2010). Some of

the best practices included cohesion, connection, cooperation, and consistency. Cohesion involves creating programs in which administrators, faculty, and staff work together consistently to support and to encourage every student to be successful, including undocumented students. Connection refers to developing and maintaining relationships with internal and external partners to advance the interests of the programs and student success. Cooperation means that administrators, faculty, and staff members work together to be respectful and supportive to every student no matter their legal status or diverse backgrounds. Lastly, consistency denotes the promotion of specific and constant counseling and advising support programs that promote interactions between students and college personnel (Levin et al., 2010). Implementing these practices or big changes will improve the college experience for all students, especially underrepresented minority students in higher education, including undocumented Hispanic students (Tovar, 2015).

These best practices must start with college faculty, college counselors, and extend throughout the staff and administration of the colleges (Clark et al., 2013; Nienhuser, 2014). Other best practices may include creating relationships with local industries to train undocumented workers, securing local funding to help undocumented students to pay for their education, hiring diverse staff and faculty, and sponsoring undocumented students (Levin et al., 2010; Nienhuser, 2014). Harmon et al. (2010) went a step further into social justice. The researchers concluded that a framework of *outlaw culture* has emerged from people attempting to provide access to higher education for undocumented students. The *outlaw culture* serves as a support system for equity, social justice, and equality for undocumented students. The authors invited every member of the institutions of higher education to be committed to social justice for

all students, even if this commitment will label them as *outlaws* in the eyes of those who challenge social justice.

Olivas (2012) categorized examples of what are considered bad practices in the higher education decision-making process. A bad practice related to this study is when institutions of higher education engage in the practice to inform immigration agencies about the enrollment of undocumented students in their campuses. The author praised the best practice of Texas and New York of not being immigration agents, opening doors of institutions of higher education to undocumented students, accepting students by academic merits and minority policies, providing sensitivity trainings, and creating scholarships for undocumented students. In general terms, college campuses must start changing their hostile environments against undocumented students and establishing programs to support undocumented students in the college's social environment, with financial assistance, and in the academic environment interaction between students and faculty and college staff (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Tovar, 2015). Institutions of higher education must act as agents of equal academic access and opportunities for all students, including undocumented Hispanic students (Person et al., 2016).

Transition from College to Careers

The transition from high school to college is a difficult path for emerging adults (Arnett, 2004). When high school graduates arrive to college, they had a minimum idea of what they wanted to do as professionals and were not prepared for college (Arnett, 2004). When emerging adults complete college, it is more difficult to transition into careers because in most cases they complete their education goals, but they are unable to complete their professional and life goals (Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010). If college to career transition is difficult for citizens, the transition from college to careers can be both difficult and frustrating to these students,

especially for undocumented college graduates who experienced financial stress to pay for their college degrees and the possibility of never using their degrees because of legal status (Anaya, del Rosario, & Hayes-Bautista, 2014; Muñoz, 2013).

Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, and Platt (2010) studied the experiences of 10 recent college graduates in their transition from college to careers. Participants highlighted the roles of social support to succeed (Murphy et al., 2010). College education is a difficult path to be crossed without proper support structures. Immediate family members are the first groups of supporters that college students rely upon. From this first support group, the mother is the most important supporter cited in the literature, followed by other immediate family members, coworkers, college advisors, counselors, and close friends (Murphy et al., 2010). Students with well-structured and well-supported social support groups are more likely to persist in their educational goals and complete college (Murphy et al., 2010). Without social support, the transition from college to work is very difficult for undocumented students (Clark et al., 2013). Many participants agreed that most high school and college counselors did not support the decisions of undocumented students to enroll in college (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2010). For this reason, undocumented students enrolled in college created student support groups of peer undocumented students as a mechanism to persist and to complete college (Clark et al., 2013; Hallett, 2013). Career counselors at colleges and universities are in a unique position to help all students who are aware of the challenges and frustrations that they may encounter as they transition from college students to professionals (Clark et al., 2013; Hallett, 2013; Nienhusser, 2014).

Goal Achievement for Every Student

During the emerging adulthood years, commitment to goals is very important (Arnett, 2004). Heckhausen et al. (2013) investigated the commitment of young adults to goal achievement and its association with their future well-being. The study compared educational and occupational engagement, progress towards their goals, and overall satisfaction of the participants. The researchers concluded that young adults who followed up their motivational commitment by focusing on college education first had a higher sense of well-being and satisfaction than the graduates who focused on careers and jobs first. Undocumented students also want to have a higher sense of well-being and satisfaction (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014). They should have the same opportunities to reach their educational goals in higher education during their emerging adulthood development stage (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

In a similar study on goal achievement, Messersmith and Schulenberg (2010) examined groups of youths who met or who did not meet their personal life goals during emerging adulthood. The researchers studied the relationships between goal accomplishment, continued goal determination over years, and the future well-being of young American adult high school seniors during a 10-year period. The researchers compared the paths of the groups and how these related to their sense of well-being, goals, and college completion. The study concluded that participants who at age 28 failed to reach their educational goals and continued working toward them reported a higher sense of well-being than those who stopped their quest to complete their goals. It will be interesting to determine if the few undocumented students in higher education will report similar results.

Shulman and Nurmi (2010) examined paths in which emerging adults establish goals and expectations. The researchers found that young adults are more interested in work and romantic

personal goals over college goals. A college education is not that important during the beginnings of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). As people age, establishing a family and having children becomes the priority. Therefore, it is important to encourage young people, documented or undocumented, to complete college and to prepare for a career during the emerging adulthood stage (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). After emerging adulthood, it may be too late for undocumented students to enroll in college, to complete a career, and to be productive professionals breaking the pattern of living in poverty and working unpopular low-paying jobs.

Summary

The review of the literature demonstrated that emerging adulthood is a crucial stage in the life of young adults (Arnett, 2002; Arnett, 2004; Arnett & Eisenberg, 2007; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). During this stage, young adults engage in decisions that would define the rest of their lives. For undocumented Hispanic students, this stage is very difficult and frustrating if they cannot reach educational and professional goals to complete college education (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales, 2011; Heckhausen et al., 2013). The constant and real fear of deportation adds more stress to these students because of their legal status.

The current literature documented the realities and barriers undocumented students deal with in general terms across the United States, especially in California, Texas, Washington, and New York, where undocumented students are allowed to enroll in public institutions of higher education and pay in-state tuition rates and receive state financial aid (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Heckhausen et al., 2013; Herrera et al., 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016). However, the current literature fails to document the stories of North Carolina's undocumented Hispanic students in rural areas who must pay out-of-state tuition rates. In North Carolina, undocumented students are allowed to enroll in public higher education and pay out-of-state tuition rates that they often

cannot afford because federal and state financial aid is not available for undocumented students. This study is designed to fill this gap in the literature while documenting the real struggles of undocumented Hispanic students in North Carolina, one of the New Latino Diaspora states, during their emerging adulthood stage while striving for educational and career goals (Muñoz, 2013).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition rates while enrolled at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. This chapter describes in more details the research design, restates the research questions, and describes the research setting. A description of the participants, the role of the researcher, the data collection methods, and detailed data analysis procedures is presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with the procedures to address credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study. Ethical considerations are also identified and addressed in this chapter.

Design

The design selected for this study is a qualitative transcendental phenomenology. The qualitative method is appropriate because I want to describe and interpret the experiences of a group of individuals, undocumented Hispanic students, experiencing the phenomenon of enrollment at community colleges in North Carolina paying out-of-state tuition rates (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative studies are necessary when a problem needs to be explored through the voice of the participants, and the research has a strong emphasis on social justice (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is also the appropriate design when the researcher is exploring issues in the natural setting using multiple methods of data collection including interviews with participants who lived the phenomenon under study (Whitley & Kite, 2013).

A phenomenological design is appropriate in this study to describe the common meaning for several individuals who experienced the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). This study is a forum of expression describing the real life experiences and perceptions of the

minority and underrepresented group of undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in rural community colleges located in a state with more restrictive policies related to in-state tuition rates (Creswell, 2013; Whitley & Kite, 2013).

The phenomenological approach is transcendental because it is oriented toward the description of the experiences of the participants in a different perspective from my personal views (Creswell, 2013). Transcendental approaches describe the experiences of a group of individuals experiencing a phenomenon openly, receptively, and in a simple format (Moustakas, 1994). In my efforts to avoid including my preconceptions and beliefs of the phenomenon in the study, and to be open and receptive to participants, bracketing or Epoche process was needed as the first step in transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing involved setting my personal experiences with the phenomenon separately and refraining from preconceptions or judgments (Moustakas, 1994). The second step followed was transcendental reduction (Moustakas, 1994). I considered every experience from participants as unique while giving a complete textural description from every participant viewpoint into significant quotes or themes (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The final step was imaginative variation, the development of textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon to summarize the essence of the experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As a Hispanic student and researcher, I understand this population and obtained access to their experiences less invasively than non-Hispanic researchers.

Research Questions

The following research central question and sub-questions were formulated to guide this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study:

Central Question

What are the shared educational experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition enrolled in a rural North Carolina community college with restrictive in-state tuition laws?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the motivations, outlook, and overall attitudes about higher education among undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges paying out-of-state tuition?

2. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition rates, what specific challenges do these students identify as influencing their persistence towards their goals of higher education?

3. What cultural or family values do undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges paying out-of-state tuition attribute to their persistence to complete college education?

4. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges who pay out-of-state tuition rates, what role does earning a college degree play in their visions for the future?

Setting

The research took place in rural community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. Several community colleges are located in this rural area. Community colleges located in rural areas are relatively smaller than community colleges located in urban areas, with an average student population below 3,000 curriculum students. Most of the community colleges in the area of study serve the population of one or two counties. The North Carolina Community College

System oversees 58 community colleges with enrollment of 3.5% of Hispanic curriculum students (Oseguera et al., 2010). Community colleges in North Carolina follow the bureaucratic organizational model composed of a board of trustees, a president, vice-presidents, department chairs, and departments where the information flows from the top to the bottom of the organization. The local board of trustees decides the direction that the institution is to follow. The president is responsible for managing the institution into the direction the board of trustees decided, while empowering the vice-presidents to get things done during the daily operations. Vice-presidents (academic affairs, administration, finances, and student services) control information, allocate resources, and assess performance of staff and faculty.

Pseudonyms for colleges were used to ensure confidentiality of the institutions and participants. Rural counties in Eastern North Carolina are large farming communities. Local agriculture depends on the hiring of Hispanic farm workers to exist. These rural counties have had an increase in the Hispanic population since 2000, and today, around 20% of the total population in rural Eastern North Carolina is Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Almost 90% of the farmworkers are Hispanic; around 40% of these farmworkers are undocumented immigrants with their families (Pew Hispanic Center, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). The ethnic composition of the Hispanics living in Eastern North Carolina was currently 80% Mexican, 15% Honduran, and 5% other Hispanic nationalities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Many undocumented Hispanic students who graduate from local high schools attempt to enroll in local community colleges because they are less expensive than senior institutions of higher education (Nienhuser, 2014). Some of these undocumented Hispanic students are able to enroll in curriculum courses along with other relatives in different community colleges in the

area. This convenient sampling gave me the potential of having many participants for this study (Creswell, 2013). Since 2011, the state of North Carolina approved legislation allowing undocumented students who complete high school in North Carolina to enroll at community colleges paying out-of-state tuition, making this state the perfect setting for the study (The University of North Carolina, 2011). Few undocumented Hispanic students can afford to pay out-of-state tuition rates, but they want to use this opportunity to complete a college education during their emerging adulthood years.

Because I was currently a resident in the study area, I interviewed participants at locations where they felt comfortable and without distractions (Creswell, 2013). I scheduled interviews at local community college libraries where participants attended or at public locations convenient for the participants such as churches, public libraries, and faith-based organization offices. I was at a driving distance of 1 to 2 hours from participants and organized meetings as needed.

Participants

The sample size recommendation for phenomenological studies is five to 25 participants (Creswell, 2013). I interviewed 12 Hispanic participants and reached thematic saturation. Participants received a \$25.00 gift card compensation for their participation in the interviews. Pseudonyms for participants were used to ensure confidentiality. To be a participant, candidates were classified under the category of undocumented residents based on the definition of the United States Department of Homeland Security (2013). Undocumented residents are non-citizens who are born outside the United States or its territories and are not legal residents, have an expired visa, or entered the country illegally. These participants were current students

enrolled in community college curriculum courses. Interviews were performed in the English language. None of the participants requested to be interviewed in the Spanish language.

The sampling method for this study was purposeful sampling in an effort to obtain maximum variation within the population (Creswell, 2013). Snowball samplings, or referrals from participant, were used until thematic saturation was reached (Creswell, 2013). I accepted referrals, nominations, and recommendations for other potential participants (Whitley & Kite, 2013). I had informal conversations with the potential candidates in order to determine eligibility for the study. After talking with potential referred candidates, I determined if they complied with the requirements of the study. Participants for the study were undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum programs at local community colleges paying out-of-state tuition rates. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 29 years old and were considered to be in the emerging adulthood stage of life (Arnett, 2000). All the participants complied with at least one of the following requirements for this study to be considered undocumented: students with DACA classification, students with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), students with no social security number, students with no visa, and students with an expired visa (The University of North Carolina, 2011).

More females than males participated in the study: four males and eight females. This is in proportion with previous research where most Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum courses in postsecondary education are females (Clark et al., 2013; Heckhausen et al., 2013). The ethnic composition of the participants was 67% Mexican, 8% Honduran, and 25% Salvadorians, similar to the ethnic composition of Hispanics living in Eastern North Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Participants were from low-income farm-working families (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014). Participants did not receive any type of federal financial

aid (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales, 2011). In addition, many participants worked at least part-time jobs to pay for their courses (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014).

Procedures

No data were collected before the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. Liberty University IRB approved the study on September 8, 2017 (see Appendix C). Immediately after this approval, the data collection stage started with the purposeful sampling procedure.

To begin sampling, I secured the written authorization from the community colleges to announce the need of participants for the study. The invitations to participate in the study were made through faculty announcements, emails to students, and announcements on the colleges' bulletin boards. I personally handed out invitations for participants to Hispanic students I knew. I did not select students under my supervisory role. Once these invitations were public, I received referrals from students who knew possible candidates willing to participate by using the snowball sampling procedure. Interviews started in September and ended in November, 2017. Snowball sampling ended when thematic saturation was reached with 12 participants.

Once participants were identified and their participation was confirmed by completing the informed consent form (see Appendix B), interviews were scheduled and completed. The interview questions were shared in advance of the interviews along with the demographic questionnaire to complete at home. Participants completed consent forms, demographic questionnaires, and some shared documents related to their experiences. Whitley and Kite (2013) recommended excluding demographic questions during the interviews. This brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) was the best method to collect demographic data about participants without extending the interviews.

A pilot test of the interview questions with the purpose of question refinement was performed prior to interviewing participants (Whitley & Kite, 2013). The pilot study consisted of providing the interview questions to three local Hispanic college students to review them and to determine if the interview and focus group questions were clear, appropriate, and without causing inconveniences to prospective participants. The pilot study took 30 minutes per participant. After the pilot study participants analyzed the interview questions instruments and were asked for feedback regarding possible changes and improvements. None of the participants of the pilot study recommended changes in the questionnaires or questions. The pilot study participants approved the questions unanimously.

Semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions and focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed (Creswell, 2013). I performed the interviews and took field notes after the interviews to record important non-verbal communication and details that helped during the interpretation phase of the research. Individual interviews were conducted for 30-45 minutes. After each interview, a verbatim transcription of the interview was completed. As soon the transcriptions were completed, a second meeting was conducted to perform member checking on the transcriptions in efforts to get further details or to clear up contradictions (Whitley & Kite, 2013). After all individual interviews and member checking sessions were completed, and participants agreed to participate in a focus group session, I contacted participants and scheduled a focus group session with six of the 12 participants (Billups, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). I conducted one focus group session to gather group data, clarify concepts, and to build an in-depth picture of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). All documents were stored in a locked file cabinet, including all interview recordings and the focus group session. The electronic versions of the personal interviews, focus group session,

and transcripts were stored in a password-secured computer hard drive for security purposes. All the data were secured and safe.

The Researcher's Role

Qualitative phenomenological research is used to describe what people lived and experienced in an effort to obtain a common meaning for the group under research (Creswell, 2013). To obtain the desired results, a human instrument is needed to conduct the phenomenological research, especially for the amount of time dedicated to personal interviews (Creswell, 2013). As a Hispanic researcher, I am an ideal human instrument for this research on the population of undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum courses at community colleges. I was currently employed at a local community college and frequently helped Hispanic students to overcome barriers and problems that affect their college experiences. I had also been well known in the local Hispanic community.

My experience in the community college setting and speaking Spanish as my first language allowed me to have daily interactions with undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum programs paying out-of-state tuition rates. I made these students comfortable sharing their experiences during the personal interviews and focus group. I was interested not only in learning about their personal experiences, but served as their channel to make public their stories. I wanted these stories to serve as a professional development tool for administrators, staff, and faculty members at institutions of higher education who serve this special population of students. With the knowledge provided in this study, college services provided to undocumented Hispanic students may improve and many of the challenges and barriers may be reduced. As the human instrument for this research, I conducted the personal interviews and focus groups. I also collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data.

Bias is a constant and real threat in qualitative phenomenological studies because of the use of a human instrument to perform the study (Creswell, 2013). While personal bias cannot be eliminated, it can be acknowledged and reduced. I recognized the potential of introducing bias to the study during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages mainly because of my Hispanic heritage. To reduce the possibility of introducing personal bias to the research, I developed a data collection plan that has review points to search for contradictory data and bias by using member checking and peer review sessions (Whitley & Kite, 2013). I also reduced personal bias by keeping my personal opinions bracketed during the research and stayed alert of my personal biases as a Hispanic researcher (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

Throughout the study, triangulation was used as a validation strategy to check for the integrity of the data and the interpretations of the results (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2007). Data triangulation involved the use of multiple data collection instruments at different points of time in different settings in an effort to meet trustworthiness criteria (Whitley & Kite, 2013). During this research, one questionnaire was used to collect descriptive data, and three instruments were used to collect the data to be interpreted. The data collection instruments in order of collection were interviews, documents, and focus group. A general description of the questionnaires, interviews, document collection and analysis, and focus group used in this study will follow.

Questionnaires

In an effort to obtain a better understanding of the participants' experiences and to know each participant on a personal, academic, and professional level, it is necessary to collect descriptive information. Whitley and Kite (2013) suggested avoiding demographic questions

during the interviews and collecting demographic information using other tools. I created a demographic questionnaire that participants completed on paper and returned on the day of the interview. A brief questionnaire was the best method to collect demographic data about participants without taking time from the interviews. Some of the information about the participants included age, gender, employment status, immigration status, K-12 preparation, college information, and country of origin. Participants had the opportunity to select their preferred pseudonym to identify the questionnaire and themselves during the interviews.

Interviews

The main data collection tool used in qualitative phenomenological studies is the personal face-to-face interview (Creswell, 2013). Interview questions can be used to acquire different types of information including detailed descriptions of experiences, processes, places, events, perspectives, and interpretations (Whitley & Kite, 2013). I conducted individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews with participants in the English language at pre-arranged locations where participants felt comfortable, and without distractions, using open-ended questions and probing questions for further detail or to clear up contradictions (Creswell, 2013; Whitley & Kite, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility to change the order of the questions in response to topics the participant brings up (Whitley & Kite, 2013). The interviews were recorded in a digital audio format and transcribed verbatim immediately after the interviews. I took field notes during interviews to collect information that was not audio recorded. A pilot test of interview questions was performed with a pilot sample after the IRB research approval to refine questions for clarity (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour per participant. Unstructured and informal follow-up interviews were performed with participants for member checking (Whitley & Kite, 2013).

Standardized open-ended interview questions. The following standardized open-ended questions regarding past, present, and expected future lives were used during the individual interviews. An explanation and justification of these questions follows.

1. What are the earliest memories you have of your childhood while living in your country?
2. Describe the living conditions of your immediate family during the years between your early childhood and before coming to the United States.
3. How and when did your family immigrate to the US? Explain the experience of crossing the border.
4. How was the experience of attending school for the first time while speaking a different language?
5. Describe your experiences during elementary school years in the United States.
6. Describe your experiences during middle school years in the United States.
7. Describe your experiences during high school years in the United States.
8. When was the first time you knew that you were considered an undocumented student?
Who gave you the news and why?
9. Why did you decide to attend college?
10. How did the school counselors, school administrators, or teachers react when you expressed your interest in enrolling into higher education courses?
11. How did your family members react when you expressed your interest in enrolling into higher education courses?
12. Describe your experience at the admissions and financial aid offices at your community college.

13. How are you paying for your college expenses? What arrangements does your family have in place to pay for your college expenses?
14. Describe how a typical college day is for you.
15. Describe any type of discrimination or fears that you experienced in college.
16. Where do you visualize yourself in the next 5 years after completing college? 10 years?
17. What advice do you have for other undocumented Hispanic students in high school and college?
18. Do you have anything else you feel the need to share?

Questions one through three are questions about the participants' early years living in their home country, early school experiences, and the migration journey (Burton, 2007; Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gonzales, 2011; Harmon et al., 2010). These non-threatening questions were intended to help participants feel comfortable bringing up memories from their home countries and helped to establish a historic timeline during the interview (Burton, 2007). Question one broke the ice of the interview. I wanted to compare the answers to identify similar themes of the living conditions of the participants before their migration to the United States. Answers to question one helped to document the heterogeneity among undocumented Hispanic students in higher education (Muñoz, 2013). Question two gave the opportunity to describe the living conditions of the participants before migration. Researchers cited various reasons to emigrate including political persecution, seeking a better way of life, economic opportunities, fleeing civil wars, and social instability increased by the violence generated with drug traffic (Harmon et al., 2010; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). Answers to question two helped to increase the transferability of the research. Question three was an attempt to get as much information about the immigration

experience to determine similar or different themes among the 1.5-generation in North Carolina (Gonzalez, 2011).

Questions four through eleven were questions about experiences lived during K-12 education in the United States. Most undocumented students arrive to the United States before they were 16 years old and their schooling experiences are important factors in their decisions to enroll in higher education (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Passel et al., 2011). Questions four through seven related to the language transition in school experiences during K-12 education. The first major obstacle undocumented Hispanic students encounter in their education is the need to reduce the achievement gap by mastering the English language enough to persist and to complete school (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Schueths & Carranza, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Question eight was the question about undocumented students discovering an important piece of information that may have been hidden for years and would affect and mark their lives for as many years as they stay in the United States (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). This information was important in their determination to fully participate in higher education and in American society as productive members.

Question nine investigated why undocumented students decided to pursue a college education. Compared to their citizen school peers, undocumented Hispanic students are in a disadvantageous position to enroll in higher education and they may know this reality (Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Conversely, these students must analyze the costs and benefits of completing higher education if they want to improve their future situation and choose the optimal level of investment that aligns best with their goals (Harmon et al., 2010; Potochnick, 2014). Questions 10 and 11 attempted to obtain the reactions of teachers, guidance counselors, school administrators, and relatives on the decision of undocumented Hispanic

students to pursue long-term educational goals against the odds they will face in their efforts to enroll and complete higher education in North Carolina (Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Some parents, classmates, K-12 teachers, counselors, and administrators may be willing to help undocumented Hispanic students to complete their goals while many others may become the main obstacles and close the doors of higher education for these students (Clark et al., 2013; Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014).

Questions 12 through 15 were related to the college experience of the undocumented Hispanic students. Parallel to the previous questions, question 12 sought the reactions of the community college's staff at the offices of admissions, financial aid, and guidance counselors on the decision of undocumented Hispanic students applying for admissions and financial aid at the institution (Nienhusser et al., 2016). While some college staff members may be helpful and trusted to assist undocumented students to enroll and pursue college education, other members of the college staff may be reluctant, discriminatory, and even become hostile and unfriendly to provide correct information to undocumented students (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Herrera et al., 2013; Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Question 13 was looking for strategies that undocumented Hispanic students use to pay for their college classes, especially because they are classified as out-of-state students and must pay a higher rate for credit hours. Most undocumented Hispanic students come from poor families and have fewer possibilities to obtain the financial resources to pay for their classes, do not qualify for federal or state financial aids, and may need to work full-time to pay for their college education (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015).

Questions 14 and 15 attempted to get the experiences of studying at a college campus being an undocumented student in a typical day of classes and to identify barriers undocumented Hispanic

students must overcome (Crisp et al., 2014; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Hallett, 2013; Pérez et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2014; Terriquez, 2015). Undocumented Hispanic students may fear that disclosing their legal status may bring legal issues to them (Nguyen & Serna, 2014), discrimination (Lee & Ahn, 2012), and they may encounter stressful interactions with classmates or instructors because their legal status that they may want to avoid (Conger & Chellman, 2013).

Questions 16-18 completed the interviews by looking for the long-term goals and words of wisdom from undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's rural community colleges. States may be losing potential skilled professionals and workers (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). These stories may encourage other undocumented Hispanic students to overcome the barriers and complete higher education degrees while waiting on the day their legal status may change and other doors of opportunity open for them (Oseguera et al., 2010).

Document Analysis

I created a journal album with documents, pictures, and copies of artifacts related to participants' experiences in their countries of origin and during their school years such as school records from the country of origin, homework assignments, student handbooks from the schools and colleges, class syllabus, newspapers, and college policy manuals. I collected and recorded directory information from community colleges about possible participants to schedule interviews and focus group sessions. Every year, community colleges report a list of out-of-state students to the System Central Office, including undocumented students enrolled in curriculum courses. This public information was vital to the goal of interviewing 12 participants. Other documents collected and saved included copies of the demographic questionnaires, consent forms, and any written communication necessary during the study. The documents and artifacts

were used to add detail to the data analysis and to identify themes and codes.

Focus Groups

In a similar structure to personal interviews, a focus group of six participants was conducted to obtain data of the phenomenon from the groups. Creswell (2013) listed focus groups as one of the data collection methods in addition to individual interviews. I scheduled one focus group interview after all the individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and validated. Questions for the focus group were similar to the individual interview questions but were modified to apply to undocumented Hispanics students as a group. Focus group questions can be used to acquire different types of information including detailed descriptions of how the students as a collective group experienced the phenomenon under study (Whitley & Kite, 2013). I conducted one focus group interview with participants in the English language at a pre-arranged location where participants felt comfortable and without distractions using seven open-ended questions and probing questions as needed for further detail or to clear up contradictions (Creswell, 2013; Whitley & Kite, 2013). The focus group interview was recorded in an audio format and was transcribed verbatim later, after participants agree to be audio recorded and not video recorded. I took field notes during the focus group interview to collect information and notes. A pilot test of focus group questions was performed with a pilot sample after the IRB research approval to refine questions for clarity (Whitley & Kite, 2013). The focus group interview was limited to approximately 1 hour and snacks and drinks were provided to participants. An unstructured and informal follow-up interview with the focus group members was performed for member checking (Whitley & Kite, 2013).

Standardized focus group questions. The following standardized open-ended questions were used during the focus groups. An explanation and justification of these questions follows.

1. What policies (federal, state, local) do you consider to be the most hurtful for undocumented Hispanic students who want to complete college education and why?
2. What policies (federal, state, local) do you consider to be the most helpful for undocumented Hispanic students who want to complete college education and why?
3. When you announced your interest to become a college student, how did people (family members, teachers, school counselors) around you react and why?
4. Describe your experience with the staff members (admissions, financial aid, counselors) at your community college. Were they helpful or hurtful to you?
5. Describe any type of discrimination or fears experienced in the community college coming from college administrators, faculty, staff members, or peer students.
6. How did your experiences at the community college, positive or negative, affect your persistence to complete your goal of completing college education?
7. What advice do you have for undocumented Hispanic students who want to complete college education?

The first two questions looked for the participant's view on policies that affect their enrollment in North Carolina's community colleges (Harmon et al., 2010; Oseguera et al., 2010). The North Carolina Community College System (2009) allowed undocumented students to be admitted in curriculum programs paying out-of-state tuition rates, while federal legislation prohibits undocumented students from receive federal financial aid (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Kim & Díaz, 2013a; Lee, 2012; Nguyen & Serna, 2014). These questions were intended to help participants express what they knew about laws that affected their college education and to express their opinions.

The third question attempted to obtain the reactions of parents, relatives, teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators on the decision of undocumented Hispanic students to pursue long-term educational goals (Clark et al., 2013; Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). The fourth question was related to the college experience of the undocumented Hispanic students in higher education. Parallel to the preceding question, question four sought the reactions of the community college's staff at the offices of admissions, financial aid, and guidance counselors on the decision of undocumented Hispanic students applying for admissions and financial aid at the institution (Levin et al., 2010; Nienhusser et al., 2016). While some college staff members may be helpful and trusted to help undocumented students to enroll and pursue college education, other members of the college staff may be reluctant, discriminatory, even become hostile and unfriendly to provide correct information to undocumented students (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Herrera et al., 2013; Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Question five was an attempt to identify barriers undocumented Hispanic students must overcome and an effort to look for similarities and differences (Crisp et al., 2014; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Hallett, 2013; Pérez et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2014; Terriquez, 2015). Undocumented Hispanic students may fear that disclosing their legal status may bring legal issues to them (Muñoz, 2016; Nguyen & Serna, 2014), discrimination (Lee & Ahn, 2012), and they may encounter stressful interactions with classmates or instructors because their legal status that they may want to avoid (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016).

Question six attempted to look for experiences that influenced persistence in both positive and negative ways (Crisp et al., 2014; Harmon et al., 2010; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Muñoz, 2013). Community college personnel have strong influences on young students and they can serve as a positive or negative power that affects persistence and retention (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Hallett, 2013; Perez, 2010).

Finally, question seven completed the focus group looking for the long-term goals and words of wisdom from undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's rural community colleges. States may be losing potential skilled professionals and workers (Nguyen & Serna, 2014).

Data Analysis

Once data were collected, the next step was to organize the interviews, documents, questionnaires, and focus group for data analysis and triangulation. Documents, questionnaires, and interviews were used for data triangulation and to describe the participants and their experiences. The data analysis software Dedoose was used to confirm the themes. Themes from the interviews and focus group were used to prepare a printed record with the participants' own words and to organize the records (Schwandt, 2007). Once the themes were identified, they were sent to the participants for any corrections, clarification, and confirmation they may need as part of triangulation and member checking. The data analysis followed a combination of the seven-step approach suggested by Moustakas (1994) combined with some suggestions from Creswell (2013). The following paragraphs describe the steps involved in the process.

Bracketing

In qualitative research, it is expected researchers will have their own ideas and experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In an effort to set aside my personal

experiences from the participants' experiences and reduce bias, I presented my personal experiences first before analyzing the participants' interviews (Moustakas 1994).

I had been working in a rural community college for the preceding 15 years and had the opportunity to interact with and advise hundreds of students who wanted to enroll in higher education. I witnessed how many potential college students with excellent grades in high school decided not to pursue their college education because of their immigration status. As a Hispanic student, I had to overcome some of the obstacles college staff place on Hispanic students who attempt to enroll in college. Many may assume if one is Hispanic in Eastern North Carolina, one is automatically assumed to be undocumented. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico, a United States territory, and I am an American citizen. As a Hispanic American citizen, I had to provide multiple levels of proof of citizenship and residency of North Carolina to get accepted to public colleges, mainly because many people in the North Carolina do not know Puerto Ricans are United States' citizens. My personal experience enrolling in public higher education in North Carolina was frustrating. I can testify about the frustrations undocumented Hispanic students experience and how difficult it is for them to make their immigration status public. I also experienced difficulties in obtaining the money to pay for my degree and had to take federal loans and work full-time to pay for my education. I can also testify how difficult it is for undocumented Hispanic students to come up with the resources to pay for their education with no financial aid. I can recount the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students with a good degree of understanding.

Horizontalization

The concept of horizontalization involves the process of listing significant statements from the interviews relevant to the experience and grouping them into categories (Creswell,

2013; Moustakas, 1994). During this step, data management is essential to create and organize files for data in a database or spreadsheet for further analysis (Creswell, 2013). I conducted all the interviews and the focus group session. All the recordings were transcribed as soon as they were completed. After transcriptions, the data were organized into computer files based on text units of stories (Creswell, 2013). In the development of codes and themes, two methods were used to identify the codes and produced final themes manually and using the software Dedoose. Manually, I read every transcription and compared them with the recordings. I underlined the transcripts when I noticed keywords and phrases that were interesting or related to the research questions. During a second reading of the transcripts, I wrote memos and side comments on emerging codes. I tallied the codes and determined their importance based on the counts. I entered the interviews and focus group transcript into Dedoose to make a count of the most used codes to compare with my manual process. I compared my results with the codes extracted from the software Dedoose. After pairing the software and manual codes, I looked for patterns between codes and then combined codes into themes. The most cited codes and corresponding themes were summarized in Table 2 as the most important from the data analysis. The demographic data from the questionnaires was used to describe the participants. These stories were organized in specific stages of the participants' lives in chronological order: life in the country of origin, migration experiences, schooling in the United States, transition into college, and college years. These categories were important because they helped me to describe the experience of being an undocumented Hispanic student (Creswell, 2013).

Reduction and Elimination

Once all significant statements are discovered, the processes of eliminating redundancy and reducing the data files followed (Moustakas, 1994). Statements that were vague, repetitive,

or that overlap were discarded, and some statements were restated for clarity (Moustakas, 1994). Reading and memoing were used during this stage. After the data were organized in a database, I read the transcripts and made notes while exploring the database to get a better understanding of the interviews (Creswell, 2013). I wrote important notes in the margins of transcribed interviews. Reading and memoing were important because they helped me to identify major organizing ideas (Creswell, 2013). The significant statements were grouped into horizons or meaning units during the next step (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Clustering and Thematizing

After the main meaning units or horizons were identified, they were grouped in clusters and themes to become the core thematic labels of experience (Moustakas, 1994). The techniques of describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes were beneficial in this stage. Using these techniques, I created codes and categories to build detailed descriptions, to develop themes and to interpret the data (Creswell, 2013). I identified and used *in vivo codes*, exact words and phrases used by participants in their stories, to describe the phenomenon and to develop general themes to group the codes. The techniques were important to interpret the stories and to describe the experience of being an undocumented Hispanic student in higher education.

Validation

During this stage, I re-read the themes and the statements related to the themes revising if the statements were explicit or compatible when compared to the interview transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Statements considered neither explicit nor compatible were rejected (Moustakas, 1994). Reading and memoing techniques were used during this stage again along with the techniques of describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes used

in the previous step (Creswell, 2013). Once the themes were validated, I took the next step of the data analysis.

Textural Description

After theme validation was completed and all the relevant and validated themes were identified and grouped, I developed a textural description of what happened during the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). During this stage, verbatim examples from the interviews were included (Moustakas, 1994). The quotes used in the descriptions were actual language of the participants and grammatical corrections were not corrected. Reading and memoing techniques were used during this process to obtain the verbatim examples. The technique of interpretation or abstracting meaning beyond the codes was used to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013). After completing textural descriptions, the next step was to create structural descriptions.

Structural Description

Combining the textural descriptions from the previous step with the concept of imaginative variation, I constructed a structural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). While textural description relates with what happened during the experiences, structural description relates with how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) explained imaginative variation as looking for possible interpretations using imagination from different perspectives. The technique of interpreting was used during this stage (Creswell, 2013).

Essence of the Phenomenon

This final step involved the development of the essence of the phenomenon by combining textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The technique of

interpreting was used to develop the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Once the essence was developed, the data analysis section was completed, and the narration of results was completed in the next chapter.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness addresses if the results of the study are valid when compared to quality standards (Whitley & Kite, 2013). The four main perspectives of trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research established trustworthiness by using the following validation strategies.

Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which the results of the study reflect reality as experienced by the participants (Whitley & Kite, 2013). The only people who can legitimately judge credibility are the participants (Whitley & Kite, 2013). In my efforts to establish credibility, three validation strategies were used: member checking, triangulation, and peer review. In member checking, I returned to participants with the transcriptions of their interviews to check for accuracy of data and conclusions drawn from the data (Creswell, 2013; Whitley & Kite, 2013). When the participants found inaccuracies, these were corrected based on the feedback from the participants.

I used three triangulation techniques to increase the credibility levels of the study. Data triangulation was used to obtain multiple sources of data in different settings and points of time, such as childhood memories in their country of origin, the emigration experience, school experiences in the United States, and college experiences. Theory triangulation was used to approach data from multiple theoretical viewpoints and to provide a variety of perspectives for

interpreting the results. Methodological triangulation was used by implementing two or more analytic techniques to the same data (Whitley & Kite, 2013).

I used peer review to improve the credibility of the study. Peer review provides the use of an external expert to check the research and keep the researcher honest in every stage of the research (Creswell, 2013). I utilized faculty advisors and experts in research methods and theory as part of the dissertation committee who conducted regular reviews of the research. These advisors provided constant feedback on methods, data analyses, focus, interpretations, conclusion, and to ensure acceptability for publication of the research (Whitley & Kite, 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability emphasizes the need to keep in consideration the changing contexts of the research (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Confirmability is the degree to which the results of the research can be corroborated by other researchers (Whitley & Kite, 2013). In my efforts to maintain dependability and confirmability, I kept consistency across the research (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Two validation strategies were used to establish dependability and confirmability: inquiry audit and external audit. By using inquiry audit, I allowed outside reviewers from my dissertation committee to examine and audit processes, research reports, and results from various stages of the study to determine if the research was properly conducted and the conclusions were justified (Whitley & Kite, 2013). An external consultant who was not a part of the dissertation committee was allowed to examine the research methods, data analyses, and interpretations and determine if they were supported by the data and accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Results from both audits were taken into consideration to correct any inconsistencies in the research.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the study can be applied to other contexts or settings (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Two validation strategies were used to establish transferability: thick description and maximum variation. I provided a detailed account of the processes and the phenomenon under study to allow other researchers to determine if my research could be applied to similar phenomena or settings (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Creswell (2013) added that thick description includes verbal and non-verbal descriptions. I provided an exhaustive description of settings, participants, codes, and themes of the study (Creswell, 2013). Even though maximum variation is considered a sampling technique, its implementation helped to increase the transferability of the study (Creswell, 2013). I attempted to reach maximum variation by including as many participants as possible from different Hispanic countries, gender representation, ages 19-29, years in college, and fields of study.

Ethical Considerations

As the researcher, I ensured that participants were not exposed to any harm or discomfort. Participants were volunteers and had the opportunity to withdraw their consent to continue in the research at any moment; none of the participants requested to be removed from the study. Participants' autonomy was protected when they were asked for their voluntary participation, were never pressured to participate, and had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time as declared in the consent form (Whitley & Kite, 2013). A second ethical consideration of this study was the participants' informed consent to participate. Participants voluntarily agreed to participate and were informed of what was happening during the research, any risks involved, and the benefits for participation (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Participants received a detailed informed consent form that they signed before the data collection process. The third ethical

consideration of the study was the competence of participants to give consent. Participants must be capable of understanding the risks and benefits of the research (Whitley & Kite, 2013). I only interviewed college students who were 18 to 29 years old (Arnett, 2000; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Finally, another important ethical consideration was the confidentiality of data and participants. Participants were always kept anonymous (Whitley & Kite, 2013). The demographic questionnaire allowed participants to select a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Data were kept on a secure hard drive only accessible to the researcher.

Summary

This chapter described the design approach selected for this study as a qualitative transcendental phenomenology and the reasons why this selection was appropriate. The research questions were restated. The research setting was community colleges located in rural Eastern North Carolina, and the reasons why this setting was appropriate were discussed. The role of the researcher was detailed. The sample size of 12 participants and the selection criteria for the participants were presented. Steps necessary to conduct the study were discussed, and the data collection instruments, interviews, documents, and focus groups were explained and justified. The chapter ended with a description of the data analysis procedures, the procedures to increase trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition rates while enrolled at community colleges in eastern North Carolina. This chapter describes the participants, presents the results and themes from the data collection instruments, and answers the research questions.

Participants

Twelve participants shared their experiences during the study. In an effort to protect their identities, participants were allowed to select a pseudonym for purposes of this research. Table 1 illustrates the main characteristics of all study participants.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Native Country	Emigration Age	College Program	Responsible for Costs
Alex	Male	El Salvador	13 years old	Associate Arts	Scholarships
Alicia	Female	Mexico	4 years old	Comp Info Sys	Early College
Carlos	Male	Mexico	5 years old	Associate Arts	Cash
Elkin	Female	Honduras	8 years old	Bus. Admin	Telamon
Jose	Male	El Salvador	10 years old	Associate Arts	Scholarships
Maite	Female	Mexico	11 years old	Associate Arts	Telamon
Mara	Female	Mexico	7 years old	Comp Info Sys	Early College
Margarita	Female	Mexico	3 years old	Comp Info Sys	Early College
Pedro	Male	Mexico	13 years old	Associate Arts	Telamon
Sofia	Female	Mexico	1 year old	Associate Arts	Early College
Tina	Female	Mexico	6 years old	Spanish Interp.	Early College
Yami	Female	El Salvador	10 years old	Associate Arts	Scholarships

The participants included four males and eight females. Eight participants emigrated from Mexico. Three participants were from El Salvador. One participant began his journey to the United States in Honduras.

The early college high school program is one of the multiple programs under the Cooperative Innovative High Schools of North Carolina's public schools. This program allows students to attend a high school located in a community college or university campus. Students can complete high school, and at the same time they may complete an associate degree without paying tuition, fees, or textbooks. North Carolina has 125 Cooperative Innovative High Schools located in community colleges, public, and private university campuses. In North Carolina's community colleges, 110 of the early college high schools are currently active. Early college high schools have different selection and enrollment processes. Most early college high schools attempt to recruit students who are considered to be at risk of dropping out of school and considered first-generation college students (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2018).

Telamon Corporation is a private non-profit organization helping farmworkers and their families through educational services, including sponsorships to pay for college education. Youth Services and National Farmworker Jobs are programs that helps farmworkers and their dependents to build the needed skills to be prepared for a better future job, including high school completion, job trainings, career counseling, occupational credentials, remedial education, and college education. In order to qualify for a Telamon program, applicants must have a valid work authorization and be an eligible farmworker or a dependent of an eligible farmworker (Telamon Corporation, 2018).

All participants shared a current DACA immigrant status. Examples of acts described as discrimination by the participants can be found in the Results section of this chapter. A detailed personal description of each participant is following.

Alex

Alex was born in El Salvador as the oldest of three children. Alex's father left the country to obtain a better job in the United States to provide financial support for his family. The family was living in a poor rural area of El Salvador with the only family income provided by the father fabricating and selling mud bricks. Every member of the family worked together to fabricate bricks, so Alex started to work when he was 5 years old. The family was able to build a home with the unsold bricks the family made which were not sold. Still, the family lacked the basic necessities of support. Alex's father was the first in the family to emigrate to the United States. A few years after the father was established in the United States and sending money to the family, Alex's mother obtained a working visa and also moved to the United States. Alex's mother traveled back and forth from El Salvador to the United States for a year before moving the family to the United States. Alex had to emigrate to the United States separately from the other family members.

At the age of 13, Alex started his 1 month emigration journey from El Salvador to the United States. Crossing the border south of Guatemala was the easy part of the trip. Crossing the border from Guatemala to Mexico was more difficult. Mexican soldiers arrested Alex and kept him in jail until relatives came from El Salvador to take him back. During his second attempt to enter Mexico, Alex was caught again by Mexican soldiers. After paying a bribe to the soldiers, Alex was released to continue his journey to the United States. Alex traveled through Mexico without incident. When reaching the United States, he entered through the Arizona desert. After walking for 2 hours in the desert, Alex was arrested and placed in an American jail. When immigration agents discovered his age, Alex was placed in a juvenile detention center for

about six months and later released. Once released, Alex joined his parents and siblings in Arizona.

Alex's journey to the United States was not easy, and the school years after that were also difficult. Alex had been in the eighth grade in El Salvador's school system. He was placed in the eighth grade at his first school in the United States without knowing a single word of English. Alex remembers that he experienced some tough days of classes. He sat in class and stared at the teacher who spoke words and commands in a language incomprehensible to him. Not understanding the teacher or his classmates contributed to Alex's frustration and almost made him drop out of school. The only course he understood a little was mathematics because of the numbers and familiar operations, but Alex was unable to express his answers because of the language barrier. Alex felt discriminated by other Hispanic students whose parents were living undocumented in the country when they refused to interpret for him and telling him to return to his country if he could not understand the language. Shortly after Alex was placed into an ESL program, the language barrier started to dissipate. Alex learned English fast, started to play soccer with the school team, gained some popularity at school as a soccer star, and people started to like him. This encouragement enabled Alex to complete school and look for education opportunities after high school. Alex graduated from high school with honors 5 years after he considered dropping out of school.

Alex observed the different low-paying jobs his parents had to perform to keep the family living with only minimal provisions. When Alex expressed his desire to attend college to change the path his parents walked, he received complete support from his parents. Alex's father told him that a college education was the only way to change the future. His father changed his job to become a truck driver to get the money needed for Alex to attend college. As a first generation

college student, Alex received the support of other family friends to apply and to acquire the tools needed in college such as a computer, software, and transportation. Alex applied for and received private scholarships that helped pay his tuition fees. Currently, he does not have a job during the fall and spring semesters, so he can concentrate on school. During the summer breaks, Alex works as a farm worker to save money for his tuition and expenses. Alex's short-term goal is to complete his associate degree with honors, transfer to a 4-year university, and pursue a bachelor's degree in health and physical education to become a teacher in a rural school. Alex's long-term goal is to complete a master's degree in coaching to become a head soccer coach at the high school or college level. Alex's dedication and desire to pursue a college education has served as the inspiration for his younger siblings to follow him and attend college.

Alicia

Alicia was born in Oaxaca, Mexico speaking Mixtec (a native American dialect spoken in Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero, Mexico). Alicia was not a Spanish-speaker when her family came to the United States. Alicia remembers that the first time her family came to the United States she was only 4 years old. Alicia and her family crossed the border walking through the desert. After a 2-year stay in the United States (when Alicia was 6 years old), the family returned to Mexico. Alicia's memories of Mexico at 6 years of age were living in a rustic hut with dirt floors and tree branches as walls and roof. The family lived in extremely poor conditions. The hut had no electricity or running water. The family had to get water from the river and use the river to bathe and wash clothes. Drinking water was obtained by digging a hole close to the river, with the sand serving as the water filter. With no transportation system, walking was the only way to get around. Alicia's father worked as a farm worker in the corn

fields. The family grew corn for food and to exchange for other products. Other food items came from the local tropical fruits that the family picked.

Shortly after the family returned to Mexico, their economic situation forced the family to return to the United States for subsistence. There were no jobs, no money to survive, and nowhere to go in Mexico. At that time Alicia was 6 years old. This second time the children did not have to walk through the desert. Alicia and her siblings crossed the border with a family who had children. This family used the immigration papers from their children and passed Alicia and her siblings as their own. The family passed through inspection, went to the family's home in the United States to spend the night, and Alicia and her siblings were picked up by their parents the next morning.

Once established in the United States, Alicia was enrolled in kindergarten. Alicia did not understand the teacher or the students because she had no knowledge of the English language. Alicia was also limited in the Spanish language because she only knew a few words. Nobody in school spoke Mixtec, making Alicia's first school experience very frustrating. There was no communication between Alicia and the teacher, and no assistance was provided. The class included another Hispanic girl who spoke English and Spanish. This girl served as an interpreter for some of the words Alicia was able to speak in Spanish, and the student was able to interpret these to the teacher. The school lacked an ESL teacher at that time. Alicia's first experience at school was difficult, making her feel completely lost. Alicia did not know how to study or how to do homework. Her family was not able to help, and there was nobody around to assist her. It was Alicia alone against the school system. For Alicia, without an ESL program to help her, elementary school was chaos.

Middle school provided more of the same frustrations for Alicia. She was placed into an ESL program, but she did not stay in the program for long. The ESL teacher attempted to teach some English, but by that time Alicia was more fluent in the language, so she needed more guidance on how to do homework and how to study, skills more important than learning the language. Those skills were not offered in the ESL program. The school chaos continued for Alicia during her middle school years until she learned to navigate school and learned the skills needed to improve her grades.

In the eighth grade, Alicia attended a meeting about the application process for the early college program. The speaker talked about the opportunity to complete high school and an associate degree for free at the same time. Alicia was not sure about applying for this program, but some of her teachers encouraged her to apply. Alicia presented the opportunity to her parents, but they were not supportive of the idea. Alicia's parents have no education, and they had no understanding about college. However, Alicia applied for the early college program and was accepted. Her experience was wonderful. Alicia received the motivation and the help she needed to succeed in her high school and college courses.

From her college transcripts, Alicia's college GPA was 3.259 of 4.0 in the Computer Information Systems program. Alicia had to take developmental math and English because her placement test scores were low, but she passed the developmental courses and the college English courses with C grades. Alicia passed her college math class with a B as the final grade. She had completed most of her concentration courses with A's and B's. Alicia's lowest college grades were a D in history and management courses. Alicia may complete her associate degree this spring semester (2018). She wants to continue to complete a bachelor's degree if her DACA status is renewed or if her immigration status changes to permanent resident. She feels that she

is in a dead end right now until the DACA situation is determined. For the time being, Alicia expects to complete her degree, work, and wait until the DACA situation gets resolved.

Carlos

Carlos was born in Oaxaca, Mexico. His native language was Mixtec; therefore, Spanish was an unknown language for the family. Carlos described this as an area where everyone was poor. His family lived mainly from farming. Carlos' parents worked hard to provide the few necessities. Living in Oaxaca was a third world lifestyle. The house was a small hut with no furniture, dirt floors, no running water, and no electricity. The bed was made from a stack of plywood with sheets simulating a mattress. The economic situation was so desperate that Carlos' father started to travel to the United States to work and send some money to the family. He was in the United States when the last amnesty law was passed. He refused to apply for amnesty because he did not expect to be in the United States for a long period of time, missing the opportunity to become a legal resident. Carlos' father thought he was in the United States to work temporarily. After a few years, he decided it was time to take a risk and move his family to the United States to give them better opportunities, a better quality of life, and a better future.

Carlos was enrolled in kindergarten in Mexico at the time the family decided to move to the United States. Carlos still remembers crossing the border through the Arizona desert when he was 5 years old. The family walked for 4 days and 3 nights. Carlos was carried on the back of his father. Many times, the group had to hide under citrus trees to avoid immigration agents and helicopters. Even so, the family was caught, and all the family members were placed in jail for crossing the border illegally. In the immigration jail at 5 years of age, Carlos tasted a cheeseburger for the first time. At that time Carlos did not know what it was, but he still remembers that day as if it was yesterday. The family was then returned to the Mexican border.

Carlos' dad had to borrow some money to make a second attempt to cross the border. He obtained the loan; they attempted the second crossing and arrived in the United States without any incidents with immigration agents. Because the family members only spoke Mixtec, they experienced discrimination from Spanish-speaking Mexicans who did not treat them well. English speakers also discriminated against the family, which made it even more difficult for them to relocate and obtain a job. Since day one in the United States, dealing with discrimination has been a common issue in Carlos' personal and student life.

Carlos entered school in the United States in kindergarten at the age of 5. The only English word Carlos knew was a word that is not allowed in school. Every time Carlos' father made a mistake, he mentioned the word, so for Carlos it was a familiar word at home. The lesson Carlos learned the first day of school has stayed in his mind until today. After his first mistake at school, he used the forbidden word. The teacher immediately reported Carlos to the principal's office and Carlos got suspended. Being disciplined for not knowing the language and the culture resulted in Carlos learning a life lesson: there are certain rules to learn in school that are different from those in the family setting. Carlos believes that starting school in kindergarten allowed him to learn the language and the culture better than other students who started school at an older age.

Carlos's school experiences were challenging. Teachers did not take him seriously after the kindergarten incident. He was neglected and ignored by every teacher he had during his school years. To Carlos, a child in class who spoke no English at all was not important to teachers. For Carlos, being overlooked in school was enough reason to make him try to be noticed and gain attention. Poverty did not allow him to dress in nice clothes nor was he an academic achiever. The only way Carlos knew to be noticed was to get in trouble. For him,

being noticed for misbehavior was better than not being noticed at all. Carlos was constantly in trouble and repeatedly suspended from school. In middle school this pattern changed. Carlos got motivated to play American football on the middle school team. It was an odd choice because Hispanics are usually more attracted to soccer than football. No other Hispanic players were on football teams in the area. The football coach served as a mentor and inspiration for Carlos. After making the team, Carlos' focus changed for good because of sports. Acceptance from the team members was a huge motivator for Carlos. Being included and being expected to keep good grades to be able to stay on the team helped Carlos to complete all his courses, stay out of trouble, and graduate from high school. Carlos ranked 60th in his class of 120 members. He even completed the college preparation pathway. Most Hispanic students are placed in career and technical education pathways. Because most of his teammates and his parents wanted Carlos to attend college, Carlos applied and was accepted at a local community college. Carlos' parents value college education. Attending college was the only option Carlos had after high school.

Carlos faced the immediate financial challenge of attending college as an undocumented student. He was unable to apply for federal financial aid. In an effort to solve his dilemma, Carlos kept his undocumented status secret and did not share the information with college officials. Carlos' family still has to work hard to support themselves, so adding college out-of-state tuition and expenses to the family budget was impossible. However, Carlos' father insisted that Carlos attend college and said he would help Carlos to get his college education. Carlos used an ingenious plan to attend college and obtain in-state tuition. Carlos received a social security card when he was a child and his parents applied for residency. The federal government denied the residency application and issued deportation orders for the family, but the children's

social security numbers were not flagged and had no written limitations on them. The family stayed in the United States, and Carlos used this social security number while filling out the college application as a resident student. The social security was not flagged at the college and Carlos was able to enroll in college and pay in-state tuition rates. Carlos never applied for federal financial aid and he has been working hard to pay cash for his tuition and expenses.

Carlos is working toward an Associate in Arts degree. His college experience has been extended because he had to complete developmental chemistry, English, and math courses, and he changed majors three times. Based on his college transcripts, Carlos' first major was business administration. Carlos changed his major to nursing and was accepted in the practical nurse program. Carlos passed the nursing aide course with a B, but struggled with the first practical nursing course, failing the course and changing his major to Associate in Arts. Carlos struggled again with general education courses that he had to repeat. If Carlos keeps his pace and does not fail other courses, he should graduate in the next two semesters. Carlos expects his DACA status to change during this year and if this happens, he plans to attend a 4-year university. Carlos wants to become an educator to return the favor to the community while helping children who have experienced similar situations.

Elkin

Elkin was born in a small, rural town in Honduras. Farming was the main provider of jobs in the area. Compared with the rest of the families living in her neighborhood, Elkin's family owned their brick house and a small family farm in Honduras, making her think they were a middle-class family. When Elkin compares her current family situation in the United States with the situation in Honduras, the current yearly United States family income ranging from \$20,000 - \$40,000 is much higher than the family income from farming back in Honduras.

Elkin's parents attended college in Honduras to improve their farming skills. On the family farm, Elkin's family grew crops and livestock. Elkin is a fourth-generation farmworker.

When Elkin was 8 years old, family issues forced the family to apply for a traveling visa to the United States. The visa was approved, and Elkin and her family traveled by plane to North Carolina. Elkin and her family settled in rural eastern North Carolina, and the family continued their tradition of farm work. At age 9, Elkin was enrolled in the fourth grade for her first experience in a local school. Elkin's experience was frustrating because she was not able to communicate in the English language. Elkin looked for other Spanish-speaking students in her class, but she was the only Spanish speaker. The language barrier was a huge obstacle for her even though she had attended a bilingual school in Honduras for her first 3 years of school. The math class in her new school was not that bad, but all the other courses resulted in a constant source of frustration for the young Elkin who was unable to read, write, or understand the English language. The fourth grade teacher asked for help and Elkin was placed in an ESL program to teach Elkin the English language. ESL was a blessing because Elkin learned English and was able to complete fourth grade with a better understanding of what was expected of her to pass her classes.

Elkin transitioned to middle school with a better attitude, and she never struggled again in school because of the language barrier. She played soccer on the school team, and her educational future was looking promising because Elkin was obtaining good grades in school. Once in high school, Elkin selected the career technical education pathway. Everything was going well in school; Elkin was in her school Spanish honor society, played soccer, and participated in track meets. However, everything changed when Elkin reached the eleventh grade and struggles started. Personal and family issues forced Elkin to drop out of school and

move to New York. Elkin lived in New York for 2 years and did not return to school. After being out of school for 2 years, Elkin completed her GED in New York. She then attempted to enroll in college, but the college opportunity was denied. Elkin returned to North Carolina in an attempt to enroll in a community college, and the opportunity was denied again. The main reason for both denials were that Elkin's visa had expired and she had no social security number. Therefore, Elkin was considered undocumented by overstaying in the United States with an expired visa. When the DACA program was announced, Elkin applied and obtained her DACA status. With her DACA status, Elkin applied again to a North Carolina community college, but the director of admissions at the community college denied Elkin the opportunity to enroll again because she was an undocumented student.

Elkin returned to work as a farm worker in North Carolina, but her interest to enroll in college continued to grow. Elkin looked for opportunities to enroll in college, and finally one college counselor advised her to obtain a sponsor to pay for her college tuition. Because of her experiences as a farm worker, Elkin was directed to Telamon Corporation as an alternative to obtain her sponsorship for college. Elkin qualified to receive sponsorship from Telamon and immediately enrolled in college as an out-of-state student sponsored by Telamon. Telamon has been paying for Elkin's college expenses. From tuition to gas money, Telamon has covered all the expenses with the only condition that Elkin must remain enrolled in college and pass all her courses. Elkin's parents pay for any expenses that Telamon does not cover, including child care for Elkin's 4-year-old son. Elkin is currently a full-time first year student in the business administration program, and although she does not have any college grades yet, she is still keeping high grades in her tests and assignments to retain her sponsorship. Elkin is confident that after completing her degree, she will be able to help her parents build and manage their own

agriculture business in North Carolina. The possibility of becoming a business owner is real.

Failing is not an option for Elkin.

Jose

Born in El Salvador, Jose is the youngest in a family of three children. Jose lived with his siblings under the care of grandparents while his parents were working in the United States to supply financial support. When Jose was 2 years old, his father left for the United States and entered the country illegally after crossing through Guatemala and Mexico. Three years later, Jose's mother obtained a visa and traveled by plane to the United States to work and contribute to the family income. The financial situation in El Salvador was critical, so both parents had to look for a better way to support the family. After working in the United States for 5 years, Jose's parents made plans to bring their children to the United States to be together. Jose, who was 10 years old at the time, and his sibling travelled illegally through Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. The children passed United States immigration using the documentation of other children, provided by the parents of a family with similar children. Because the children were little, the immigration agents did not ask many questions and allowed the family to enter the United States. Once in the United States, the family was reunited and moved to North Carolina.

In El Salvador, Jose had been in the sixth grade, but he was enrolled in the fifth grade in North Carolina. On the first day at his new school, Jose was a victim of bullying from his school peers. Every time students misbehaved, they placed the blame on Jose who had no way to defend himself because of the language barrier. As a consequence, Jose was always in trouble or in detention. It was very frustrating for Jose to not be able to communicate and understand the language, but it was even more frustrating when other Hispanic students bullied Jose because he was not able to speak English. Jose needed to quickly learn English to defend himself and

succeed in school. The school assigned Jose to the ESL program, and the instructor helped Jose to learn English fast. The instructor stayed with Jose multiple hours after school teaching him the English language. This ESL teacher went far beyond school expectations to help Jose learn English and adapt to the new school system. A few months after being assigned to ESL, Jose was able to communicate in English and defend himself from the bullies in school.

High school was challenging for Jose. Bullying and discrimination were part of the daily school routine. Jose excelled in science and math, so he applied to the School of Science and Mathematics. However, his application was rejected. Jose attributes this a negative letter of recommendation from an English instructor who was influenced by Jose's soccer coach who was perceived to be unsupportive of Hispanic students. At the end of his sophomore year, Jose could not stand the bullying and discrimination from teachers and students, including other Hispanic students who were born in the United States. Jose asked his parents to move him to another high school, so his parents enrolled him in a different high school for his junior and senior years. In the new school, Jose played soccer, football, track, and took honors level classes. He enrolled and passed advanced placement calculus, enabling him to obtain college credit. Jose also participated in his high school's United Nations Club and math club. Jose's academic performance allowed him to graduate third in his class.

Jose refused to stop his education at high school. His parents had been very supportive about him attending college. Jose learned from his parents that the best way to avoid the burden of a low-paying job was to become a professional by completing a college education. Jose attempted to enroll at a local community college close to his house, but the admissions office denied his admission citing his legal status. Jose attempted to enroll at another community college within an hour's commute where he was accepted. Jose was classified as out-of-state

and was expected to pay that tuition rate, but the director of admissions suggested Jose get a business as a sponsor. The sponsor would be charged in-state tuition for him. By that time Jose owned a registered car services business in North Carolina, so his own business sponsored him. Jose also applied for scholarships to pay for his college degree. The scholarships were granted. Jose is now paying all his college expenses with the scholarship money and the sponsorship letter from his business. Jose expects to complete his Associate in Arts degree at the end of this school year. His main goal is to transfer to a 4-year private university and complete a bachelor's degree in math education. Jose has already been accepted at a private university in North Carolina with a uniform tuition charge without regard to residency. Further, he has been assured of a full scholarship from a private anonymous citizen.

Maite

Maite was born in a poor, rural area of Sonora, Mexico. Her earliest memories include helping her mom to prepare tamales, which the family sold as the family income. The family of six members lived in a small shack with wood walls, a dirt floor, and a metal roof. At that time, Maite's father had lost his job in Mexico, and the sale of tamales was the only family income. So Maite's parents moved to the United States to seek employment in the fields of North Carolina to support their family. Maite's dad left first and his wife soon followed him; Maite stayed in Mexico under the care of her aunt, but the money her parents sent was not enough to support the family. After a few years, Maite's mother returned to Mexico. She organized the emigration of the family to the United States by crossing the United States border in Arizona. Maite and her siblings crossed the Arizona desert with their mother and a group of people. Maite's mother encouraged her children to continue because their dad was waiting for them in

Arizona. Many times the group lacked food and water. After a few days of crossing the desert, the family arrived at the meeting place and the family was reunited again.

After a short stay in Texas, the family moved to rural North Carolina. Maite was enrolled in the sixth grade, the same grade she had completed in Mexico. Maite's first experience in a United States school was full of frustrations. The language barrier seemed unbearable. According to Maite, in Mexico students who spoke English were students from the higher economic levels. Maite felt dumb because she was not able to communicate in English with teachers or students. The school in the United States was in better shape than the school she had attended in Mexico. However, for Maite the food in the United States school was awful. Grilled cheese and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches had not been part of her diet in Mexico or at home.

To help Maite adapt to school and learn English, a bilingual teacher assistant was assigned to Maite. Using Spanish, the teacher assistant helped her understand what she needed to do in school. The teacher assistant took time to teach English words to Maite and to tutor her in math. The amount of time the teacher assistant invested in Maite resulted in Maite's fast adaptation to school and an improvement in her English vocabulary and communication skills. In addition to the time spent with the teacher assistant, Maite was also assigned to an ESL class. Once in high school, Maite was placed in the career technical education path, a common placement for Hispanic students in schools. Maite was not allowed to take honors courses, college courses, or advanced placement courses even when her grades were good. The fact that she was kept in the ESL program during her school years disqualified her for college preparation courses, at least in the eyes of her teachers and principals. Maite experienced discrimination in school because of her skin color. Maite was not accepted by black students and teachers because

she was not black enough and she was not accepted by white students and teachers because she was not white. Maite and other marginalized Hispanic students had to create their own group to feel acceptance from peers. Maite did not participate in sports, clubs, or school organizations during her school years.

When Maite finished high school, she was determined to get a college education because she refused to follow her mother by cooking tamales for others. Maite wanted to be a professional, so she applied to a local community college. Maite's father disliked the idea of his daughter being a professional; to her father, women belonged in the house and the kitchen, not in college or professions. In contrast, Maite's mother supported her decision to attend college. She was accepted at the community college paying out-of-state tuition, but the amount of money to pay per semester was excessive for the family. Maite was ready to quit her aspirations for higher education when she heard of Telamon Corporation and their sponsorship of farm worker families to attend college. Because Maite's parents worked as farm workers, she received full sponsorship from Telamon.

At this time, Maite is pursuing the Associate in Arts program in an effort to complete the general education courses needed to transfer to a university in a major that she has not decided on yet. She will have to take developmental courses in reading, English, and math because her placement test scores were low. The high school pathway Maite was placed in did not help her to be college-ready. Maite's transcript shows a current GPA of 2.656 after completing developmental courses, humanities, sciences, and Spanish courses. Maite failed a history course, but she will repeat the course in her efforts to keep the sponsorship. Maite has set a high goal, and she is working hard to complete her goal. If the DACA situation gets resolved, Maite hopes

to complete her college education at the graduate level if possible. Maite is sure about one principle that guides her during college: she never gives up on her goal of being a professional.

Mara

Mara was born in Coahuila, Mexico, close to the border city of Eagle Pass, Texas. Mara grew up with her two older sisters in a small, rural town in a small house her parents built. The family lived in poverty even though Mara's father worked as a railroad builder far away from their home. Mara's dad was absent from Monday through Friday, returned home on Saturday, and went back to work each Sunday. As a supplementary family income, Mara's father opened a small convenience store at their house where Mara's mother managed the store and served customers. They also sold tacos and other prepared foods at the store. The economic situation did not improve so the family decided to cross the Texas border and come to the United States to get a better job, form a new life, improve the family income, and realize the American dream. The family had a border crossing card that they used to enter Texas legally. Immigration officers allowed the family to enter, and the family got on a bus headed to North Carolina. The border crossing card allowed the family to enter. It did not, however, allow the family to establish a permanent residence or work in the United States. Mara was 7 years old when she entered the United States. In a college essay Mara shared for this interview, she detailed the family trip from Texas to North Carolina recalling her mixture of frightening and pleasant feelings.

Once in North Carolina, Mara (then 7 years old) was enrolled in the third grade. Mara's school experience was frustrating because of her lack of knowledge of English and the school culture and expectations. Mara recounts sitting in class and not understanding what was going on. Mara did not know how to ask to go to the restroom, how to say she was hungry, or express any thoughts. A bilingual teacher helped Mara understand the school requirements and learn

English. After a few months of help from the bilingual teacher, Mara became fluent in English. When Mara was not in school learning, she was practicing her reading skills by reading books out loud, watching cartoons, and practicing the words she had learned. The first year at school was hard for Mara, but it was also hard for the family because Mara's parents were not able to get jobs. Economically, the family was in a worse situation than the situation in Mexico. After the first year, Mara's parents found jobs and were able to move the family to another house in a different school district. In that district, teachers were not helpful to Mara or any Hispanic students. The years Mara spent in that school were full of discrimination, frustrations, and struggles.

During her middle school years, Mara struggled with homework and exams. Mara knew enough English, but she had to change her strategy to get help because no help was offered at the school. In middle school, Mara's mother obtained a Spanish-English dictionary. Mara called the dictionary the big blue book, and Mara and this dictionary were inseparable during Mara's middle school years. A source of frustration for Mara was the realization that she was an undocumented resident. While peers were planning for high school and later college, Mara discovered her immigration status would not allow her to pursue a college education. She was not eligible to pursue a nursing career or any other career that required state certification. It was in middle school when Mara learned about the early college high school program as an opportunity for an undocumented student to obtain a college education. Mara applied and was accepted to attend the early college.

Mara is currently attending an early college program at a local community college. She has already completed all her high school credits and is working on her final year of college courses tuition free. As a high school student, Mara has completed honors level courses. Some

of the college courses counted as dual credit for college and high school. Mara is on track to complete her Associate Degree in Computer Information Systems this coming spring (2018); she currently has a college GPA of 2.701. From the college transcript Mara shared, she had to take developmental English, reading, and math courses because her placement test scores were low. Mara completed most of her concentration courses with primarily B grades and a few C grades. She made D's in three courses: college math, general psychology, and operating systems. During her early college years, Mara received help from her college mentor and advisor. Mara's advisor is always available to correct her when she takes a bad route but also encourages her to complete her degree. This mentor and advisor has been a source of motivation to help Mara fulfill her goals. Mara's next goal is to transfer to a university and complete the next degree if she can change her immigration status to permanent resident.

Margarita

Margarita was born in Michoacán, Mexico. She spent most of the time in Mexico living with her grandparents. Margarita's parents had financial problems, and the father was not able to obtain a job that paid enough to support the family. Margarita was 3 years old when she first came to the United States. The family crossed the river and the desert with Margarita in her mother's arms. Margarita's parents got restaurant jobs and worked hard to support Margarita. She was enrolled in pre-K, but this did not work. Margarita was crying all day at pre-school, and her mother was called every day to pick her up. Because Margarita did not adapt to the situation, she returned to Mexico to live with her grandparents. Margarita's parents remained in the United States and supplied the money needed to take care of Margarita and the grandparents who supplied everything Margarita needed. Margarita attended school in Mexico until the fifth grade. Margarita was 11 years old when her parents returned to Mexico to reunite her with them and her

other siblings born in the United States. Margarita was 11 years old when she returned to the United States, crossing the river and the desert again.

Once established in North Carolina, Margarita was enrolled in school. Even though Margarita had completed the fifth grade in Mexico, the school principal enrolled Margarita in fifth grade again. Margarita started school not knowing the English language. A bilingual student was assigned to be with Margarita to help her communicate in school. The student assigned to help Margarita did not like the assignment and made all type of efforts to show Margarita she was not welcomed, even when she was also Hispanic. This student made Margarita feel uncomfortable, humiliated, and discouraged. The rest of the students treated Margarita as unwanted and unacceptable in that school. The uncomfortable situation was not limited to students; teachers also treated Margarita as unwanted and unwelcome. Margarita was treated as a pariah in the classroom. Middle school was full of bullying, discrimination, and segregation. The lack of help from school teachers, administrators, and students was evident. Discrimination came not only from locals, but other Hispanic students who discriminated against Margarita. Margarita continued improving her language skills and at the end of middle school she was ready to attend high school with a better knowledge of the language.

Margarita applied for the early college high school program and was accepted. Her experience at the early college was different and satisfactory. Margarita was accepted by students, teachers, college faculty, and college administrators. Margarita experienced no discrimination during her years at the early college. During her high school years, Margarita completed honors level courses and most of the college courses required for the degree in computer information systems. Margarita scored low on her placement test and had to take developmental reading, English, and math. At the end of early college, Margarita was not able to

complete her degree. She was five courses short, so she had to return to the community college as a regular college student to complete the degree.

Margarita wanted to finish the degree she had started at the early college. She applied for college admission and was accepted as an out-of-state student. Margarita's parents supported her by paying her tuition and expenses to complete the five courses she needed. The early college had covered the cost of most of the degree, so Margarita is happy that she has not been a burden for her parents in her effort to complete her degree. Margarita is projected to be the first in the family to complete a college degree. Her family and friends helped in every way possible, from transportation to textbooks, to tuition and supplies. Margarita will complete her degree this spring (2018). The transcript she shared indicates she has achieved a GPA of 3.066. Margarita's grades show no failing courses or grades below C. Margarita's only concern is the future of DACA. She will complete her degree but is unsure if she will be able to work as an information technology specialist or if she can pursue a career in nursing. Only time will tell if this will be possible. Margarita is ready for what the future will bring.

Pedro

Pedro was born in Tamaulipas, Mexico in a rural area where living conditions were tough. There were not many jobs available. Pedro's family was large and included extended family living together. Pedro's father reached the point of desperation when he was not able to get a job that would supply the money needed to support his family. On the small family farm, they had a cow, chickens, and they grew corn. Due to the desperate economic situation, Pedro and his family decided to move to the United States to work and to provide a better quality of life for the family.

At the age of 13, Pedro and his family crossed the Rio Grande. Pedro remembers that it was a difficult river crossing because all the children were attempting to cross the dangerous currents with ropes while avoiding immigration agents. The family successfully crossed the river and arrived in Texas, where they stayed for a few months. A farm work opportunity was presented in Florida and the family moved there and stayed for a few more months; however, the working and living conditions in Florida were not satisfactory. Some of the family friends mentioned seasonal farm work opportunities in South Carolina and North Carolina. Pedro's family became migrant workers staying in Florida during the winter citrus season and coming to North Carolina as migrant workers for the spring through fall seasons, working on the different large corporate farms. After a few years of migrant work, Pedro's family decided to stay in North Carolina permanently.

As a migrant child, Pedro attended schools in Florida and North Carolina. Because the family stayed longer in North Carolina, Pedro spent more time in North Carolina's schools and was classified as a migrant student. Pedro started in the eighth grade because of his age. The school experience for Pedro was very difficult, especially because Pedro did not have knowledge of the language and the school culture. First, the language barrier made him feel academically inferior to his peers. Pedro was placed in an ESL program and he learned some English. Pedro was not able to grasp the full benefit of the ESL program because in October the family left to go to Florida, and Pedro had to leave the school. In Florida, Pedro was enrolled in school, but it was difficult to catch up with school work and continue learning the language. Pedro's stay in Florida schools was short, from October to March. In March, the family moved back to North Carolina. Pedro was enrolled again in a North Carolina school to complete the year. This

transition made Pedro feel he was not smart enough to keep up with his peers, and he became very frustrated with school.

During his school years, Pedro experienced discrimination from other students and teachers. Pedro was treated differently because his school clothes and book bag were worn-out, sometimes stained, and many times smelled like tortillas. Pedro received some help from the Backpack Buddies program, where needy students receive school supplies, food, and clothes to help them improve their economic situation. Some teachers and school staff helped Pedro and his brothers by donating clothes and school supplies in addition to the supplies from the Backpack Buddies program. Pedro felt discrimination coming from teachers because he believes he was often separated from the class and placed in front of a computer because the teacher refused to help a student who did not speak the language. Other types of discrimination from teachers were reflected in their body language. Teachers gave Pedro a mean look and harsh tone every time they had to address something directly to him. Pedro was placed in the CTE path during high school because teachers thought he was not a candidate for college. Pedro never took college prep courses or honors classes. With all the frustrations and struggles experienced during his school years, Pedro barely graduated from high school.

Pedro observed that most high school graduates planned to attend college. Pedro wanted to attend college too. Pedro asked for information about how to apply for college, but people told Pedro he could not attend college because he was undocumented. Pedro continued to ask about attending college until one person mentioned the possibility of being sponsored by Telamon Corporation because Pedro and his family had worked as farm workers since their arrival in the United States. This information moved Pedro to contact Telamon Corporation, and after reviewing his case, Pedro was granted sponsorship to pay for college.

The people of Telamon Corporation helped Pedro with every step of the process, from application to enrollment. Pedro enrolled in a local community college where the staff was friendly and welcoming. Pedro received money from Telamon Corporation to pay for his expenses while attending college, and his family contributes to pay for the expenses Telamon does not cover. Pedro also works part-time as a farm worker to cover part of the expenses. He has not felt any discrimination at college. Only a few people in the student services division know about his immigration status as a DACA and undocumented student.

Pedro is currently enrolled in the Associate in Arts program, and he wants to transfer to a university that offers a program in education. Pedro wants to be a bilingual teacher if the DACA situation is resolved in favor of the students. Pedro has a low GPA of 2.373, based on the college transcript he shared during the interview. Pedro had to take developmental courses in reading, English, and math because his placement test scores were very low. Pedro failed college English twice, anatomy and physiology, history, general psychology, and college algebra. To maintain his sponsorship, Pedro has been repeating the courses he failed. Pedro's associate degree has taken longer than the average student because of the developmental courses he needed and the courses he failed.

Pedro is expecting to complete his degree by next spring (2019) if he passes the course he is repeating. Pedro recognizes his weaknesses, but he is working to correct them in his efforts to become a teacher.

Sofia

Sofia was born in a rural town of Sonora, Mexico. The small town was hot, dry, and dusty during the summer, but when it rained, it poured. The town had no electricity, no busses, no roads, and no technology. The closest city was 2 hours away. Sofia lived in the mountains

where residents had to walk downhill for an hour to arrive at a road and get a ride to the city. The small town was isolated, extremely poor, and empty. People knew each other because all were family. The house Sofia lived at in Mexico belonged to her grandparents. The house was a rudimentary shack made of wood tied together with some type of rope and was hammered to the dirt, with cardboard as the roof, and mud as the floor. The house had no electricity or plumbing system. The only illuminating source was jocote, a candle made with wood and tree wax. Sofia lived under these conditions until her dad build a sturdy concrete and cement house a few years later.

Sofia's parents moved to the United States years before Sofia was born. Sofia's father performed agriculture jobs during those years. During their stay while working in the United States, Sofia's dad had a family emergency in Mexico and had to return. Sofia's mother was 8 months pregnant with Sofia, but her husband refused to leave his pregnant wife by herself in the United States with no relatives. Therefore, Sofia's mother returned to Mexico with her husband, and Sofia was born in Mexico. After Sofia was born, her father decided to return to the United States with the family. Sofia's father refused to leave his wife and newborn baby in Mexico because of a past experience with their first child. Sofia had an older brother, and while the father was in the United States working, both his child and wife stayed in Mexico. The child died of heart failure 3 months after he was born. The father was not there when his first child died. Sofia's father wanted to make sure this event would not be repeated with him separated from the family, so at the age of 1 year, Sofia entered the United States by crossing the border illegally.

Sofia thrived in the United States with her family, but when she turned 6 years old, her family returned to Mexico. This was a cultural shock for Sofia, who remembers arriving at the

house in the mountains late at night and walking on dirt paths and not pavements. Sofia attempted to turn the light switch on, but there was no light switch or electricity. Sofia learned to adapt to the new normal in Mexico where she lived for the next 3 years. Her parents again made plans to travel again to the United States with 9 year old Sofia and her 1-year-old brother. The family told the neighbors they were going to the city to do some shopping and would return in 2 days. There was a fine in the town if people left the town, so the family left without anyone knowing their destination. The family crossed the United States border with the help of an uncle who knew the route through the Arizona desert. Before crossing the desert, the family purchased garlic and onions to fill their shoes and pants. They believed garlic and onions would work as snake repellents during the family's 3-day walk through the desert. During the trip, they barely escaped the border patrol helicopter and agents in all-terrain vehicles by hiding under spiny bushes. The family reached a house where Native Americans gave them shelter. While they were at the house, border patrol agents arrived looking for illegal immigrants, but they were not able to find Sofia and her family, who were hidden in the basement of the house. From Arizona, the family moved to Florida.

While living in Mexico, Sofia learned Spanish but forgot English because she was not able to practice. Once back in Florida, Sofia was enrolled in the fifth grade at the same school where she had completed kindergarten and first grade the first time she lived in the United States. She recognized some of her old friends from a few years back and attempted to talk to them, but her feelings were hurt when those students were not nice to her and made faces as though they were disgusted with her presence. A few months later, Sofia was moved to another school. In that new school, Sofia's English improved dramatically, and she started making new friends. After that year, Sofia was fluent in English again. During middle school, Sofia was in a

language and cultural predicament. Sofia had friends in two different groups: English and Spanish speakers. Her friends from both groups forced Sofia to pick which group she would belong to because they thought she should not have friends in both groups. Sofia was not happy about this and decided not to have friends in either group, so during her last year in middle school she had no friends. During this year she heard about the opportunity of the early college high school. Sofia decided to apply to this program and was accepted.

The culture of the early college high school resulted in a satisfactory experience in high school and college. During high school, Sofia wanted to get her driver's license. When the school principal asked her for her social security number to write it on the application, Sofia did not know the number. Sofia went to her mother to ask for her number and was surprised when her mother explained the story of how they were in that situation. Sofia had no social security number because she was not born in the United States, even though her father was a resident of the United States. Since that moment, Sofia has made sure nobody else knows her status as an undocumented student, and her situation frustrates her today as much as it did when she discovered her immigration status.

Sofia is in the fifth year of her early college experience, completing the Associate in Arts degree. Her college GPA is 2.257, based on the college transcript shared during the interview. Sofia had to take developmental reading, English, and math as prerequisites for her college English and math courses. Her placement test scores were low. Sofia attempted the Criminal Justice program first but changed her mind after completing three courses because her status of undocumented student would not allow her to be a crime scene investigator. She then decided to complete the general education courses to transfer to a college and complete a bachelor's degree if the DACA situation is resolved. Sofia failed a political science course and had D grades in

communication, substance abuse, religion, college algebra, and college English courses. Sofia is working hard to complete the degree requirements by the end of the summer semester. If the DACA situation is not resolved, Sofia may have to return to Mexico. Sofia is not sure if she will be able to continue her college education once she finishes the early college program. Still, Sofia is not quitting. She stays positive and does not lose her faith that something better will happen soon.

Tina

Tina was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, and is fluent in Spanish, English, and the Mixtec dialect. Tina described the living conditions in Oaxaca, Mexico as a rural area where everyone is poor. Tina's family lived in a three-bedroom hut with dirt floors, wood walls, and mud roofing. Tina's family was composed of eight people, including parents, grandparents, and four children. Because nobody had money, the town depended on farming and goods exchange. Tina listed three social classes in Oaxaca: extremely poor, poor, and poor but having some land to plant crops. Tina's grandparents had a few acres to plant some crops and had some pigs and chickens. Tina's parents had nothing. When crops were harvested, and enough food was in the house, the rest of the crops were taken to the market for good exchanges between people of different towns. Nobody in Tina's town had a vehicle, so the way to transport the goods to the market was by walking long distances.

Tina attended first grade in Mexico at 6 years of age. After school summer recess, Tina's father took the family on a long trip to the United States. Tina's father was a coyote, a person who brings people to the United States for a fee. Tina's father made multiple trips to the United States and had knowledge of the route the family needed to take to enter the United States without being captured by the border patrol. The trip was difficult, especially with four young

children. The group did not have enough food or water, and after 5 days of walking through the Arizona desert, the family was near death. Tina's father kept saying to keep walking because they were close to completing the journey, but the family was hungry and thirsty. The group found a pond in the desert, and they obtained their water from the pond, which enabled them to survive.

Once relocated in the state of Florida, 8-year-old Tina was enrolled in the third grade. Tina had not been in school for almost two years, and it was difficult for her because at that age she only spoke Mixtec dialect. Tina was in a school with many Hispanic students and bilingual teachers, mostly from Puerto Rico. Tina learned Spanish and English in the Florida school. The bilingual teachers provided help and guidance to the new students, but the help did not last for long. Tina's parents decided to move the family to North Carolina, but in North Carolina there were no bilingual teachers and barely any Hispanic students. In her frustration, Tina wanted to return to Florida, but that was not possible. Tina was enrolled in a North Carolina elementary school with mostly black and white students who did not receive her well. She felt discrimination from students who made her feel unaccepted, and North Carolina teachers did not supply any help to her. Later that year and after continuous struggles to fit in, Tina was placed in an ESL class in an attempt to teach her some English. As a result, Tina learned English and was able to navigate school. By middle school, Tina felt more comfortable at school. She decided that she did not want to be like other students who dropped out of school or only finished high school and did nothing with their lives. Tina was self-motivated enough to be at the top of her class. She continually tried to improve her grades. In middle school, Tina heard about the early college program and the opportunity to complete high school and an associate degree for free. Tina wanted to complete a college education; she was motivated to apply to the program, and she

was accepted. Tina wanted to achieve a higher level of education than her parents who had only completed elementary school.

The early high school program has been tough for Tina. All the high school classes are were honors classes and there are higher expectations for the students. Because the school is on a community college campus, the expectation is that students will be more mature than traditional high school students. The high expectations also include monumental amounts of homework to do every day after school. In her college classes, Tina is not treated differently than other college students. She is keeping her immigration status a secret, as a strategy to blend in; none of her peers or college instructors knows she is undocumented, except her closest friends. Tina had no driver's license during her first college years and took the risk of driving a car to campus without a license. After applying for DACA status, she got her driving license and a part-time job to cover her expenses such as meals, gas, and supplies. Early college pays for tuition and textbooks, but she has to work to cover the rest of the expenses.

From the college transcript Tina shared during the interview, she will be completing her associate degree in Community Spanish Interpreter this coming spring (2019). Tina is at the top of her class and is ranked number five of 40 students. Her college GPA is 3.631. Tina had to take developmental reading, English, and math because of low scores on her placement tests. Her grades list multiple final grades of A, a few grades of B, and only one C in Introduction to Sociology. Tina expects to be working full-time as a Spanish interpreter as soon she completes her degree. She is waiting for the future of her DACA status to allow her to obtain permanent residency. For Tina, North Carolina – and not Oaxaca, Mexico - is home. It will be a difficult experience if she must return to Oaxaca. Tina believes if she returns to Mexico, the experience will be worse than when she was moved to the United States as a little girl. Then, Tina did not

make the choice to live in the United States. Tina's father did something wrong in Mexico and had to escape. He was the one who decided for the family. Tina and her siblings are now paying for something they had no control over. Tina hopes that her immigration status changes for good soon.

Yami

Yami was born in El Salvador. The family of five members did not have enough money to buy food or clothes, so their economic situation was difficult. Her parents had to limit the food, and there were days when there was nothing on the table. Yami's diet and clothing improved once the family moved to the United States and the parents obtained jobs that provided the basic items for living. Yami's father came to the United States first and started sending money to the family. After a few years, Yami's mother followed him to the United States and together both parents took care of the family finances, while the children stayed with their grandparents. Finally, the parents brought the children to the United States to be together. Yami was 10 years old when she crossed the border with her little brother. She and her brother used documents from another family who pretended they were their own children. Yami and her brother pretended to be asleep to avoid questions from the immigration agents at the main gate at the border. Once in the United States, a bus took the children to meet their parents.

Yami always liked school. In El Salvador, Yami attended kindergarten at age 2 because her youngest brother was too young to play with her and her oldest brother was in school. Yami's parents agreed to leave her at school and the teachers had no opposition. Yami had finished seventh grade when she left El Salvador. In North Carolina, Yami was again enrolled in the seventh grade. Discrimination started the first day of classes. Yami stated that students looked at her as if she was a monkey that had escaped from the zoo. There were no Hispanic

students in that middle school, so Yami was the odd person there. It was the first time for these students to see and hear a Hispanic student. It was hard for Yami to communicate in English. She had learned a few words in her school years in El Salvador, but she was not able to understand what was being said to her. People in the school were not nice to Yami. The first English word Yami learned was bathroom. She did not know how to request to go to the bathroom and spent the whole day holding the need to go to the bathroom. The school brought someone who spoke Spanish and asked Yami what she wanted. When Yami expressed she needed a bathroom, the person told the teacher. The teacher turned to Yami and told her in Spanish to not bother him again. With that lesson learned the first day at school, Yami persisted in learning English as fast as possible. No ESL teacher was provided and Yami had to learn the language and the school culture by herself with the help of a dictionary. During the eighth grade, she was assigned to an ESL program.

Once in high school, Yami finally overcame the language barrier. She was doing well in school, communicating and participating in class frequently. She was kept in the ESL program although she did not need this service anymore. Yami felt the reality of being undocumented at the time the students were getting their driving permits. She requested driver education, but the counselor denied the request because Yami did not have a social security number. She was frustrated at that time, and her frustration escalated when the counselor told Yami that college enrollment was impossible because of her legal status. Yami insisted on completing a college application, but the counselor ignored her. After getting constant questions on how to apply for college, the counselor told Yami she needed to take the SAT but gave no other information. Yami arrived at the SAT test site unprepared and without having had lunch. Yami explained what happened:

Some of my classmates told me that I was going to be there the whole day and that I hadn't brought lunch. So they were like, if we give you our lunch, would you let us cheat off of you? And I told them no, but they were still looking over my shoulder because the way they had set up the classroom, they were still looking over my shoulder. So, what they didn't know is that it was different versions of it. So I was like, well they're looking over my shoulder so I might as well act like I'm letting them cheat off of me and eat their lunch. So when results came, we were in the same homeroom when the results came, I was the only one that had passed. And with a high score. And they were really mad, but I had already eaten their lunch.

Yami finally applied for college and was accepted but would need to pay out-of-state tuition. She also applied for scholarships and received several private ones to pay for her tuition. Yami's parents paid the rest of her tuition and other expenses not covered by the scholarships. Yami is currently a full-time student taking 20-21 credits per semester to obtain the most credits for the tuition fees paid. In North Carolina community colleges, students are charged for 16 credit hours. Any excess credits over 16 are not charged. Yami has good grades, so she gets approval to take over 16 credits each semester. She is enrolled in the Associate in Arts program and has a college GPA of 3.632. Yami did not have to take developmental courses in college, saving her thousands of dollars in tuition. She should finish her degree by the end of the spring semester of 2018. She has already secured her enrollment at a private university to complete a bachelor's degree in math which she will begin this fall. She has been awarded a full scholarship to live on campus and covers all expenses; she has other scholarships as well. Yami wants to be a math teacher and help students like her have a better school experience. She expects to continue her

college education until she earns a Ph.D. in mathematics. Yami is working very hard to reach her goals.

Results

This section presents the themes and codes resulting from the data analysis and will follow the order of the research questions. The main themes and their related topics are summarized in Table 2. The first column contains the main themes for each of the research questions. Columns two through six contains the mains codes identified during the data analysis that corresponds to each of the research questions when read from left to right. The explanation of the codes follows the table.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Theme	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5
Educational Experiences	First year in US school	Unfriendly atmospheres	Middle school	High school	College
Motivation/ Attitude	Value of higher ed.	Future may improve	Failing not an option	Personal satisfaction	Acceptance/ inclusion
Challenges	Journey into the US	Age coming to US	Family economics	Living in the shadows	Paying for college
Cultural/Family Values	Family support	Appreciation for education	First in family	Better future	
Role of College Degree	Positive	Uncertainty	Prepared if deported	Become educators	

Educational Experiences

A common experience the candidates were not able to forget was their first year in an American school. Because emigration ages ranged from 1 to 13 years of age, undocumented students were placed in grades ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. No matter the grade where the student started, the common descriptor of the experience was frustration. Alex described his experience during his first day in his eighth grade class:

I still remember my first day. I walked in the classroom and I sat down. The teacher started talking and I just did not know what she was saying. She called my name and she

wanted me to go to the board and do something, but I just sat there because I did not understand what she was saying.

For Alicia, who came to the United States at age 4 and was placed in kindergarten at age 5, the experience was as frustrating as Alex's experience as she recounted:

I remember kindergarten when I first started, it was, I didn't understand them. I didn't understand nobody because I didn't know English. I only knew, I think I knew a little bit of Spanish, if I even knew Spanish, I don't even remember. But I remember a girl was one who helped me during the first school year, which was Cruz, I remember her. She was the only who helped me, like, kind of communicate with the teacher because I wasn't able to.

Frustration was also described in Sofia's recount of her first day at school after returning from Mexico. Sofia was enrolled in kindergarten at age 5 the first time she was in the United States. Sofia was brought at age 1 the first time, learned English, attended kindergarten and first grade, and was able to communicate well in English. Her family returned to Mexico for a few years and Sofia lost her English skills. Her family returned to the United States and Sofia was enrolled in fifth grade. The second time in an American school was completely different and frustrating:

So by the time we came back, I could slightly hint what was going on, but I didn't really understand it. I went to my old school where I initially started going in first grade and that's where I went back for my fifth grade. So I knew the names when they mentioned students' names, I knew who they were because I'd like, oh, that's my little friend from kindergarten. I tried to approach them, but they weren't so nice. So that really hurt my feelings and they were making more like stinky faces and, like, because I didn't know, I

guess, at the time, but it was really hurtful because to me, they were like really close friends and it was tough.

In general, for undocumented Hispanic students, the first year in an American school was permanently marked in their minds. The first year was stressful, frustrating, and unforgettable. The language barrier was a major obstacle to overcome, as well as understanding the school culture and the educational requirements such as studying, completing homework, and socializing. Alicia described her experience with the school culture:

I was completely lost. During elementary school years, I was completely lost. I knew what school was, but I didn't know how to study, I didn't know how to do my homework, and didn't know much because you go to school, it's in English. Everything is in English. You go home, there's no English there, it's, I mean, there's no one to help you do your homework, there is no one to guide you and tell you, hey, you need to this and this and this. You're just on your own, you have to deal with it. So in elementary school, I don't think I did that good.

Margarita, Maite, Elkin, and Sofia had to repeat the last grade they attended in their home country, losing a year of schooling and becoming 1 year older than their peers due to the language barrier. Margarita expressed this experience on her own words, "I had finished fifth grade in Mexico, but they wanted me to repeat the fifth grade here." In an effort to learn English fast, participants made alliances to navigate school during the first year as Margarita recalled, "I always had to have somebody that spoke Spanish and English with me because I did not understand a single word."

A frequently mentioned theme from within the students' educational experiences was the recurring belief that North Carolina schools presented an unfriendly atmosphere for

undocumented Hispanic students. The unfriendly atmosphere had three components: native English-speaking students, school faculty and staff, and Hispanic native English speaking students. Margarita had to navigate a school where local native English speakers and Hispanic students bullied her in many incidents:

I still had problems with people that were trying to kind of get me down because, oh, you're not from here, or you don't speak good English, or people would bully me all the time. They'd try to fight me, call me names, like they were trying to make me feel inferior. And what makes me sadder that most of the time, those people were actually Hispanic like me.

Jose experienced an unfriendly atmosphere from native English-speaking students from an affluent school as he described the incident:

When I went to high school, I went to a fairly wealthy school. A school where pretty much a lot of rich people lived around, so rich kids went to school. I remember it being a tough time because, well, we weren't as, we didn't have that kind of money or that economic status that they had. And I remember being looked down on because of that. I actually ended up leaving that school right after my sophomore year because of the discrimination I was facing.

Yami had to defend herself from a teacher who was trying to create an unfriendly atmosphere in class. Yami described what happened that day in her civics class:

We were talking about naturalization and he stopped the whole class when we got to that word during vocabulary and he, he was like, "*Yami, is that what your parents did for you? Did you come in with papers or are you illegal?*" I knew he couldn't do that, but I just went along so that they wouldn't know that I was illegal. So I told him that I was

naturalized, that my parents had come to the United States, had gotten papers and then applied for us to come over, that's why they had taken so many years for, in between that process for us to come back to our parents.

Alex was not immune to unfriendly school atmospheres, especially from other Hispanic students who were United States citizens, nevertheless with undocumented parents:

Well, in my eighth grade year, the first day of school, there was a student there, his mom was from Mexico and his dad was from El Salvador. And he spoke English and Spanish and I remember the teacher asked him to translate for me and he did not, he wouldn't do it. So, I mean, that was, that was tough because he said that I needed to go back if I didn't understand what the teacher was saying. I mean, it was terrible especially because it was my first day of school and, I mean, for somebody that had parents who were basically illegal here as well and having to tell me that I had to go back, I mean, it was, you would expect that from someone else, not from your own race.

There were many other examples of unfriendly atmospheres in schools. Even though these were frustrating and painful experiences, participants used them as learning tools to get motivated and not allow these situations to force them to drop out of school.

Not all the participants attended elementary school in the United States, but all the participants attended middle school. For most of the participants who moved up from elementary school in the United States, middle school resulted in a better educational experience. Those participants had a better understanding of the English language and the school culture. As Tina explains:

By middle school, I would have learned some English, so it was good at that point, I think that was when I really decided that I didn't want to just be like other kids, just

finish high school or just drop out and not do anything. I wanted to have better grades, I wanted to be top.

Most of the participants played sports and became part of a team in middle school. The experience was positive, and their experiences at school started to improve, as Carlos described:

I played football for the middle school. After that, my focus changed towards sports. Now going into high school, I was known as the, as somebody that plays football. I continued to be the only Mexican on the football team surrounded by nothing but Caucasians and African Americans. I quickly joined another group of friends that I would not have if I would not joined the team. Now, they were not only my friends on the football field, but they were also my friends in the classroom, in the hall, in the line. So that's, in middle school, that strived me to pass my classes.

For participants who started school during their middle school years, these years could be compared to the elementary school years of those participants who were enrolled early: full of frustrations and challenges as Pedro described: "Sometimes the faculty are the worst. The thing is that when you have teachers that they just put you on a computer, they don't want to teach you or nothing." In Sofia's case, she had to choose which group to join, English-speakers or Spanish-speakers during middle school. Sofia explained the controversy she had to deal with in this time period:

Seventh grade, I was a bit rebellious because I was torn in two languages I suppose. And although I really enjoy my Hispanic friends, I also enjoy a lot of my English-speaking friends. And for some reason or another, I was torn apart in between choosing one, which I refused. And so I constantly fought and argued with other students. I was getting

in trouble. In eighth grade, I did well. I knew that I need to belong to a new group, so I just dedicated in school.

In general terms, educational experiences during middle school resulted in an improved attitude towards school and the desire to attend college after completing high school. Alicia, Mara, Margarita, Sofia, and Tina heard about the opportunity of taking college classes in high school through the early college program. Alicia still remembers the day she heard about the early college high school opportunity:

I remember the early college principal, I think, she was the one who went and spoke at our class and she told us, *“Imagine you going to school for five years and at the end of five years you graduate with a high school degree and an associate degree all at once and it’s for free.”*

These five participants seized the opportunity and applied for the early college program as their high school option. In the process, they had the opportunity to attend college for free even with their immigration status as undocumented students. For students who attended early college as their high school, middle school resulted in the opportunity to become college students without experiencing the challenges other undocumented Hispanic students had to confront at the college admissions office after completing high school.

All the participants attended high school. Their educational experiences in high school prepared them for the next level of education: college. There were good and bad educational experiences during the high school years. Seven of the participants attended traditional high schools. Maite’s educational experience in high school was better than middle school but challenging. Maite explained:

The students sometimes they are really cruel because the color of my skin and they look at me and they, I mean, I'm not white. And they, if I'm not white, then I'm black, for them. Doesn't matter if I am Hispanic or not, it's the same for them. And even for the teachers.

For Elkin, the high school educational experience was difficult. She described the situation as "In my high school years, I started struggling, I think it was my eleventh grade year, and then I moved. So that's when I ended up leaving high school and then I just got my GED." Elkin was the only participant who did not complete high school but completed a GED a few years later. Other participants considered the decision to drop out of high school but declined. One of the participants who had a difficult high school experience was Yami. She started high school with language limitations because she had enrolled in school in seventh grade. She received much needed help from her GED teacher, an instructor dedicated to students in need:

Well at high school, I remember that the same teacher I had for eighth grade ESL, I had her for ninth grade. And it was my first class, so each, she explained to me everything. Even though I learned pretty much all my English during seventh grade, my English teacher gave me, the second day he gave me a notebook, a ruler, and a pencil, and a dictionary, Spanish-English. He told me that he was going to treat me like any other student. That the only thing I had was extra time to turn in assignments, but I had to turn them in. He was really tough on me, but I thank him because at the end of the year, I was having full conversations with him. I had the best English teacher, the best ESL teacher, and the best math teacher.

In contrast, Alex described his high school years as “fairly easy for me, even though I didn’t know English.” Alex was the star of the soccer team and received all the courtesies student athletes received; he explained:

When I went to the high school, I was basically coming in as a soccer star. I didn’t have to try out for the team and, I mean, everybody just knew that I was the pretty good soccer player, so everybody treated me well, I didn’t have much trouble at all.

Like Alex, Carlos and Jose also played sports in high school. This experience was positive and helped them to fit in at school and to complete high school. Carlos described his high school experience on the football team:

I did have a bad year in the tenth grade where I failed the English class. Worried that I would need it to play football the next year, I took a summer English course and I passed it, and I was able to pass. I believe if it had not been for that football requirement, or the football sport, I would have been careless and would have never attempted to go to summer school that year. Possibly to never finish high school.

The participants who described the educational experience in high school as the best were the participants who attended the early college high schools, where they were able to complete high school taking honors level courses and earning a college associate degree. Alicia described early college as “a wonderful experience,” while Margarita expressed “I was lucky to be in the early college, and do not remember having any issues in there.” Sofia described her early college experience as “I felt really comfortable and accepted” and “I was not judged or looked down.” Mara described her experience as “really good” and “harder.” The only disappointment for Mara was the limitation of college programs available for undocumented students as she described her feelings:

We were able to, but it was to a certain extent that the degrees that you actually probably wanted to be in or what actually you thought you were passionate about, you were not eligible for that. Like let's say, for example, nursing. You're not eligible to be a nurse because you need to pass a state exam and you need a social security number for that. So the possibilities for an actual career, I guess, there's not many.

Mara opted not to enroll in the nursing program but selected the computer information systems program instead. Tina described her early college experience as "hard" and that "they were expecting a lot more from us, especially to act more maturely." All the participants who attended early college related better educational experiences during high school than the participants who attended traditional high schools.

All of the participants are currently enrolled in a community college. Four of five of the participants who attended early college will complete their associate degrees. Margarita did not finish her degree at the early college as she only completed 50 of the 65 credits required for the associate degree. However, she is enrolled in college to complete her final five courses.

Margarita had an early start for her degree. With her positive experience at college, Margarita knows she will be able to complete her degree:

When I was doing the early college, I was actually working on my degree, my computer information technology degree. And for some reason or another, I didn't get to finish it in the time that, early college time. So I had to, when I graduated high school, I had to go back to the college and finish that degree. Well, I think it was mainly because I had already started on it and I wanted to finish the degree and maybe, who knows, go a little bit higher. Because I wanted to do something, I was the first one in my family to go to

college, my entire family. So I wanted to do something different, like maybe make them proud, you know, make them proud of me.

The college educational experience at the community colleges has been positive for the majority of the participants. Most of the participants have not experienced discrimination or an unfriendly atmosphere at the college level, mainly because they've kept their immigration status to themselves. When undocumented students reveal their immigration status, college staff turn out to be not as friendly and welcoming as they are with documented students. Jose experienced the unwillingness of some college staff members to help undocumented students obtain a sponsorship or other alternative to pay for tuition. Jose explained:

I remember going to XYZ Community College, which is a lot closer than ZYX Community College is from here, and they said there was no way I could get in-state tuition. XYZ Community College has totally denied any help they could possibly give me. That's why I ended up going to ZYX. A good friend of mine actually ended up talking to me about going to ZYX and trying to go there, see if I could, they could do something for me. And they actually ended up making it happen in their form.

Jose received the opportunity to have a sponsor cover his tuition expenses.

In Carlos' case, he refused to be mistreated by college staff. Carlos describes the feelings all the participants share when he expressed, "Nobody knew that I was undocumented at the time, nobody knew. Everybody, that's something, that's a secret that I did not share, I did not want to be labeled." Carlos used a different strategy and kept the immigration status a secret and received a good treatment from the student services staff at his community college. Carlos revealed to me what he did:

I got a clean social security card when I was a child and my parents applied for residency. When the residency was denied, the Social Security Administration did not flag the social security card. When I came to apply for the community college, that, I had to have a social security card to apply, that's the reason I could apply. I filled out the application, I filled it out like a citizen. I put that I was a citizen, that I was a resident here in North Carolina. I put down my social security card, almost like any other child that is born here in this town. And I had in-state tuition, no financial aid of any sort.

Carlos is attending college paying in-state tuition and receiving all the attention denied to undocumented students who reveal their immigration status as undocumented. When he completes his degree, he may have to change his strategy to continue his bachelor's degree. In general terms, the college educational experience resulted in a better experience than the K-12 educational experience, mostly because of the ability to keep one's immigration status a secret as well as the college opportunities provided at the early college high school.

Motivation/Attitude

All the participants are highly motivated to complete their college education and are eager to continue to study beyond the associate degree. Yami values education as she confessed, "I've always loved school, I read all the books in my library." Even in the case of students who struggled in school, dropped out, and completed a GED to enroll in college, most undocumented Hispanic students place a high value on higher education as a tool for a better future. Elkin struggled in school, but her attitude towards education did not change as she "wanted a better future for myself and my son." Elkin wants to be a good example to her son and wants to be prepared for what the future will bring.

The parents of the participants had an important role in setting the goal of higher education for their children. Alex's good attitude towards higher education is an example. His father always encouraged him to pursue a college education and embrace education with a good attitude. Alex remembers his "dad's words that I needed to go to college to change our future because that was the only way." In Alex's family there was no other options than to attend college to improve their personal and professional situations. Jose's belief in higher education also came from his parents who insisted that he "needed to pursue a better education, and they wanted us to have a better life than the one they had." In the case of parents not knowing what college is, as is the case of Alicia's parents, "they were quite supportive when they learned a little bit more about the program."

The motivation and attitudes of participants were not based on what their current situation was, but mostly what the future situation may be. All of the participants demonstrated a fear of their current immigration situation, but they used this fear as a motivator to continue their goals of completing a college education, as the future may include more opportunities. Tina's words summarized the general opinion of the participants of the focus group: "DACA is gone, but I hope that the government will actually do something to at least legalize or find a pathway to become a permanent resident." Sofia has also demonstrated some faith that the future may improve; therefore, undocumented students have to be prepared:

I feel like staying strong, it's easy to say and it's easy to lose courage and the ability to keep studying because that was me. And the last year of high school, I was at a point where I was like, it's not really worth studying, and it's not really worth doing the homework because at the end, I won't be able to continue my education. So I fell down on that part, but I would say don't worry about tomorrow, just go ahead and finish this

year. You never know what's going to happen in a year or two, let alone 6 months, you know. Possibly something new will come up and maybe you'll talk to a lawyer and there's other possibilities of you finding other ways and other options to find a new way to go to school, find a job or whatever, but definitely don't lose faith, but always be careful of who you talk to and keep on going.

A strong common motivator shared with most of the participants is that failing is not an option to them. Participants showed the courage of not being quitters. Elkin's case is an example of being motivated to complete her college education even when sometimes she has to take a step back to reorganize, gain strength, and continue. Elkin's advice to undocumented Hispanic students who want to continue their education, but are reluctant about their current situation, is:

I'd tell them not to give up, just keep working. Something's eventually going to come to help them or just, you know, to earn, or, if you have to move out of state, move out of state. Like, you don't have to stay in North Carolina to go to school. Just try to find somewhere else where you could go and you should just keep moving towards your goals.

Carlos' advice about failing not being an option is well summarized in his positive words:

The advice that I have for other students is don't give up, look at the bright side, because if you look at the negative side, there is just so much negative that you, it's going to consume you. You're going to just fall in the negativity, look at the bright side. Look at, you have two hands. Look at, you have two legs. Look at, you have your health. Think about the other people, don't let the immigration status be that much of a depression.

Personal satisfaction is a great motivator and has a positive impact on the participants' attitude towards higher education. When participants were asked why they decided to attend college, personal satisfaction was one of the most popular answers. Mara expressed this feeling when she answered "I always said that I wanted to do something for myself and to make my parents feel proud." Personal satisfaction also involves what Sofia described as "I wanted to do something different." Margarita's personal satisfaction was shared by most of the participants, "I wanted to do something different, to be the first one in my family to go to college." Personal satisfaction has proved to be a powerful motivator for undocumented Hispanic students in higher education. All the highly motivated participants will complete their first major educational goal, complete a college degree, during the next few months.

Undocumented Hispanic students have been rejected in their schools and communities. They have a strong desire to be accepted and included in a society that they were forced to blend in because adults decided it was the best thing for them. The need to be accepted and included in a group has motivated undocumented Hispanic students to work harder to reach this goal. Carlos' words summarize the feelings of the rest of the participants in their attempt to be accepted and included into society:

I really hope that there is a way that I can become legal because my biggest concern is to graduate and not be able to find a job, not be able to be a professional. In the next 5 years, if there is a system where I can become legal, then I see myself contributing to society in a positive way, being an educator or being some type of, doing some type of job that is giving back to the community.

In their efforts to be accepted in school and society, most of the study group participated in sports and teams. Elkin participated in the track team and played soccer. Carlos played football

in middle and high school, and Yami, Alex, and Jose played soccer. Those who did not play sports were active in school clubs and other school-related extracurricular activities.

Challenges

Multiple challenges to the completion of a college degree for all student participants in this study have been identified during the data analysis. The five most cited challenges include: their initial journey into the United States, the young age when crossing borders, family poverty and economic challenges, the fear of living in the shadows, and paying for college expenses. The following is a brief summary of the findings.

During the journey to enter the United States, only Elkin made the trip in the security of a plane. The rest of the participants reported a dangerous journey that almost took the lives of them and their families. Alex, Jose, and Yami, ages 10-13, had to cross multiple borders to enter the United States. Some of them traveled alone as in the case of Alex. Alex's description of his experience crossing the borders revealed how challenging his trip was:

I wasn't as lucky as my siblings. When I was crossing, it was easy to cross from down south to Guatemala, but then from Guatemala to Mexico, the Mexican, I guess, agents caught me and they sent me back, so one of my uncles had to come. Since I was a minor, somebody from my family had to come and basically get me out of jail. And that was the first time, and then the second time, we got lucky. We got caught again, but we had to pay some money so they will just let us go. Then traveling through Mexico wasn't too bad, but then having to cross the border between Mexico and the United States, that was tough. I think it was about two hours in the desert and then we got caught, so we got taken basically to jail. I lied and I said that I was older so maybe they will let me go, but

that wasn't the case. And when they found out my real age, they basically sent me to, like, a juvenile detention center. And I was there for about six months probably.

Incarceration is a difficult challenge, and it is more difficult being incarcerated a few months at age 13. Adding the dangers of crossing multiple countries alone at a young age and the possibility of not surviving the trip makes the journey into the United States a most difficult challenge to conquer. Facing death was a common challenge most of the participants experienced. Tina's story is as dramatic as Alex's story:

So he brought us across Arizona, but we didn't have enough food. So we ran out of food and then we ran out of water also. We walked for 5 days. We ran out of food and then when we ran out of water, we were all giving up, but my dad kept on telling us that it was just around the corner. That's what he kept saying, he said just keep on going and then we'll find it. We found a pond with water and so we ended up drinking what we found and that's how we actually survived. But other than that, I don't think we would have.

Keep in mind that the previous survival stories as well as many others recounted during the interviews were from children who were ages 1 through 13 when they happened. If surviving this journey is hard for an adult to overcome, imagine the trauma caused in young minds. This challenge was still fresh in their minds. At a young age, undocumented Hispanic students learned how to survive in difficult situations. If they survived the trip coming to the United States at a young age, they can overcome almost any challenge that may be presented in life.

All the participants are from families formerly living in rural areas where extreme poverty was the norm. The families had limited incomes and multiple family members. All the families struggled financially in their countries of origin, situations that forced the parents to look for better opportunities. Elkin described her village as "a small town in an agricultural

area.” Maite described her father’s job situation as “We were poor and my dad lost his job while my mom would sell tamales, but it was not enough for the family.” Unemployment was high in these rural areas. Pedro’s family situation was similar, “There were not a lot of jobs and my father was desperate.” Tina’s family’s financial situation was also difficult, “Nobody had money, and people do not go around with money in their pockets.” The economic situations in their countries of origin were so desperate that parents often moved away, looking for a better way to support their families. Even in the United States, their family financial status was better than in their home countries, but were still considered low income. Their annual family incomes did not surpass \$30,000 while parents had to keep multiple jobs to support their families. Jose explained that “My dad had to get a CDL license to make more money” in addition to his regular job on a farm.

Living as an undocumented resident is a challenge by itself, but living in the shadows of society, keeping the secret of one’s immigration status is a bigger challenge. In an effort to improve their living conditions, undocumented Hispanic students applied for DACA status. This allowed them to obtain a driver’s license and get a part-time job to cover college expenses. Tina had to drive to school with “no license because there was no other choice.” Tina also added “The only one that I have discussed about my status would have probably been you.” Keeping the undocumented status a secret has been a challenge for all the participants. They fear that the knowledge of their status would bring agents to deport them, as Carlos expressed, “I do not feel so much discrimination; I feel a fear of being deported. I feel fear of people finding out my true identity.” Fear of deportation is a challenge that all the participants discussed during the personal interviews and the focus group session. Undocumented students have no other option than to live in the shadows of society until their immigration status is resolved.

The fifth most cited challenge for participants was obtaining the money to pay for their college tuition and expenses. All the students, except Carlos who impersonated a United States citizen, were classified as out-of-state tuition students. To pay his tuition without any financial aid, Carlos had “to work in the fields, I had to work long days without the car I wanted or any luxuries because I have to pay tuition.” Alicia, Mara, Margarita, Sofia, and Tina took advantage of the early college high school program and their tuition, fees, and textbooks are paid while they are enrolled in high school. Margarita had to return as an out-of-state student for her final courses, but her father was “helping me a lot and he told me just to focus on school right now,” and providing the money to pay for her college expenses. Pedro, Maite, and Elkin fell into the same category as one “ended up getting sponsored by Telamon because I did farm working, so they said I could qualify for them to sponsor me.” Finally, Alex, Jose, and Yami applied and received multiple scholarships to pay for their tuition and also worked to supplement their respective family incomes to make college education a reality.

Cultural/Family Values

Education is important in life, but more important than education are the cultural and family values that are transmitted from generation to generation. Although these families came to the United States undocumented due to life situations, this does not mean that they did not have values that they want to pass along to their children. On the contrary, some of the values identified in this research include family support, appreciation for education, being the first in the family to complete high school and a college degree, and the desire for a better future for every family member.

All the participants reported being supported by their parents and immediate family members in their efforts to enroll and complete their college education. Mara’s parents “have

always been there for me no matter what I decide to do for my career.” Sofia’s parents did not understand the concept of college because “they only finished elementary school,” but they supported Sofia by “giving me money for food and transportation to and from college.” Alicia’s parents were “not that supportive because they did not know what college was,” but later they learned the benefits of a college education and “they were very supportive.” Tina’s mother “managed to get me a used car and I drove to college.”

Carlos’ parents appreciated college education because they “knew the importance of education back in our country, they told me that I had to go to college; I had no choice.” In Maite’s situation, her mother appreciated college education but her father was reluctant. Maite explains that her father “wasn’t so happy at all. He was like you’re a woman and you are here, you better cook, you better clean the house, you better do everything.” Although her parents were divided about Maite’s college education, her mother’s determination for Maite to attend college prevailed, and today Maite is a college student. In Elkin’s case, both parents completed college in Honduras, so they were expecting Elkin to enroll in college. When Elkin was rejected at a local community college because of her immigration status, her parents “did not support the college’s decision that I could not come to college.” Elkin’s parents helped her look into alternatives to attend college and helped in every aspect, including taking care of Elkin’s son while she attends college.

Hispanic families have a special pride when their children are the first in sports, school, or in being the first in the family to complete a college education. Most of the participants were the first in the family to complete high school and attend college. Margarita was the first member of her family to attend college. Margarita talked about the family celebration, “They were very happy because I was the first one to actually go on to college.” None of Margarita’s

family members currently had a career or completed high school. Tina was also the first in her family to complete high school and go to college. Tina stated “I needed to achieve a grade higher than my parents did; both of my parents did not finish primary school and I would be the first one.” The same theme repeated with every parent of the participants who celebrated the fact that their children would be the first in the family to complete a college degree.

Completing a college degree for personal satisfaction or to reach a goal is not the only reason to do it. A college degree is the unplanned culmination of what the parents started when they decided to bring the family into the United States: give a better future to their children. All the participants agreed that a college education was the beginning of a better future in the United States or in their home countries if they have to someday return. When asked how they visualize themselves in the next years, all of the participants expect to be in a better situation than the one they are in now. Pedro said, “I see myself in a good job or maybe have my own business. I just want to be successful and help my family.” Alex sees a brighter future as he explained, “I am coaching now, so I want to go higher into coaching and maybe work at a college.” Jose looks farther in the future as he expressed his goal of “hoping to have a Ph.D. in math and teaching at a college.” Yami’s better future will come as she works to “get my NC certification for my teacher license in math education.” Margarita sees her better future as “I see myself into the medical field, I want to become a registered nurse.” It is clear that all the participants are working hard to improve their chances to have a better future as professionals.

Role of College Degree

Having a positive view of their future as professionals with a college education is not the full picture the undocumented Hispanic students in college envision. For undocumented Hispanic students, the role of a college degree is viewed in different ways. Roles can be

positive, uncertain, and makes them more prepared with alternative plans in the case of future deportation. For five participants, the role of a college education was a step forward to meet their goal to become educators.

Participants interpreted the role of a college degree as positive because it opens doors of opportunities for careers that they may not be able to reach without the preparation offered in college. Pedro saw college education as a positive “opportunity to continue in college to do your best and try to do better for you and your people.” Yami also viewed college education as positive when she expressed, “There is nothing better than having an education.” The general consensus of the participants about the role of a college degree is positive, while none of the participants see any negative elements in a college education. Tina summarized the positive role of college education with her quote: “Yeah, prepare now, oh yeah, and the future will be better.”

The aspect of the uncertainty of a college degree is not in having a college degree itself, but the uncertainty students have of being able to pursue their careers after completing their degrees. This was more critical for DACA recipients whose permits were scheduled to expire in the next 2 years with no renewal, unless Congress develops a plan. Tina expressed her uncertainty with the following words: “I do not know what is going to happen after I finish college, or how a college degree will benefit me if I cannot work.” Tina’s DACA status will expire by the year 2019. Sofia explained her uncertainty about her DACA status and the possibility of continuing her college education and practicing her profession with the following quote, “I am not sure what I will be facing to.” Carlos also joins the group of college students who are uncertain about being able to complete a degree because his “biggest concern is to graduate and not being able to find a job and not being able to be a professional.”

Participants who felt positive or uncertain about their college education and how it will affect their future profession agreed that no matter what happens with their immigration status, they will be prepared if deportation becomes a reality. Yami considers that having a college degree does not limit your future. Her wise words are “Even if you cannot get papers in the United States, you will have your diploma and you can take it with you somewhere else.” Tina recommends to “Prepare now and finish your degree, you just do not know what the future holds.” Elkin recognized the importance of being prepared even if she has to move from North Carolina. If she has to she will “move out of state, move out of state” and keep looking to reach her goals.

The most cited goal participants had was to become educators. Jose was “hoping to have a Ph.D. in math and teaching at a college.” Carlos saw his opportunity to contribute back to society by “being an educator.” Yami’s goal was to obtain her teaching license in math education. Alex wanted to “maybe work at a college and be an assistant coach first and then eventually moving into a head coach.” Pedro wanted to be “a bilingual teacher assistant in school or something related.” Certainly, bilingual educators are a necessity to help current and future undocumented Hispanic students deal with all the challenges they face in school.

Research Question Responses

This section provides answers to the research question and the sub-questions that guided this study using the themes developed from the data collection and analysis.

Research question. What are the shared educational experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition and enrolled in a rural North Carolina community college with restrictive in-state tuition laws?

Since their first day of class, undocumented Hispanic students have experienced multiple situations that remained in their minds until today, causing them to be determined to complete their education. Students started school at different school years ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. Alicia remembers her first day of school in the United States: “I remember kindergarten when I first started, it was, I didn’t understand them.” Pedro, who was 13 years old when he started school in the United States, recounted, “It was in eighth grade, and they said that they put me there because my age.” Regardless of the age and grade participants were when they started school, the common descriptor from those first experiences was frustration for not being able to communicate and understand the language. Alex summarized the experience with these words, “I just did not know what she was saying.” Many negative experiences during the first year of school were described as stressful, frustrating, and unforgettable. The language barrier was present in the educational experience on the first day of school and extended for years until participants learned the language and the school culture such as studying, completing homework, and socializing. In reference to the school culture, Alicia described herself as “... completely lost. During elementary school years, I was completely lost. I knew what school was, but I didn’t know how to study, I didn’t know how to do my homework.”

A common educational experience undocumented students faced was the loss of school years by being placed a grade lower than they attended in their home countries. Margarita expressed this experience in her own words, “I had finished fifth grade in Mexico, but they wanted me to repeat the fifth grade here.” Another educational experience was the creation of alliances with other Spanish-speaking students to navigate school during the first year. Margarita described her strategy as “I always had to have somebody that spoke Spanish and English with me because I did not understand a single word.”

School also provided an unfriendly atmosphere that undocumented Hispanic students had to confront on a daily basis. School staff, faculty, native English speakers, and Hispanic students were the main contributors to this atmosphere that made participants feel unwelcomed at their schools. Margarita experienced the unfriendly atmosphere: “I still had problems with people that were trying to kind of get me down because, oh, you’re not from here, or you don’t speak good English, or people would bully me all the time.” Yami experienced the unfriendly atmosphere in class from the teacher, “*Did you come in with papers or are you illegal?*” Alex experienced the unfriendly atmosphere from other Hispanic students as he described “you would expect that from someone else, not from your own race.” These, and other experiences in which the students believed others were unsupportive, served as motivators that encouraged students to persist in completing their education, making them stronger students.

During the middle school years, participants who had started school in the United States in elementary school adapted to the culture more quickly and experienced a better school experience. Undocumented students learned the English language, developed study skills, and learned to navigate their school’s expectations. Tina is one example of a student who adapted to the system and improved her grades as she declared: “By middle school, I would have learned some English, so it was good at that point.” Many of the participants became part of teams, as Carlos who “played football for the middle school. After that, my focus changed towards sports.”

In contrast, participants who started school during the middle school years experienced many of the same educational frustrations and challenges as students who started school during elementary school. Pedro described the unfriendly environment created by teachers in middle school when he said, “Sometimes the faculty are the worst. The thing is that when you have teachers that they just put you on a computer, they don’t want to teach you or nothing.” Middle

school was a good experience for students who had started school in elementary school, but school was frustrating for students who had started school in their middle school years. During their middle school years, five participants embraced the opportunity to attend college. These undocumented students enrolled in an early college high school program that would enable them to complete high school and earn a college degree for free.

It is worthwhile to highlight that all the participants attended high school, and only one of them dropped out of school, later completing a GED. Their high school educational experiences motivated most of the participants to attend college after high school. Seven of the participants attended traditional high schools. The participants had positive and negative educational experiences during high school years. Maite described her high school educational experiences as “The student sometimes they are really cruel.” Even high school teachers contributed to bad experiences as Maite continued: “Doesn’t matter if I am Hispanic or not, it’s the same for them. And even for the teachers.” In contrast, some high school teachers were willing to help undocumented Hispanic students to be successful in school, which contributed to positive educational experiences. Yami described them as “I had the best English teacher, the best ESL teacher, and the best math teacher.”

Undocumented Hispanic students who played sports accounted for the best educational experiences in high school. Alex played soccer, with his athletic skills helping him to have better educational experiences and personal empowerment: “I was the pretty good soccer player, so everybody treated me well, I didn’t have much trouble at all.” In traditional high schools, the positive educational experiences were related to the satisfaction of playing sports and being accepted by their peers and teachers.

The most satisfying educational experiences in high school were described by the five participants who attended early college programs. Alicia described her early college experience as “a wonderful experience.” Margarita expressed, “I was lucky to be in the early college, and do not remember having any issues in there.” Sofia described her early college experience as “I felt really comfortable and accepting” and “I was not judged or looked down.” Tina described her experience as “hard” and that “they were expecting a lot more from us, especially to act more maturely.”

All of the participants were currently taking courses in local community colleges, and the educational experiences at the different rural community colleges have been positive for the majority of the participants. At the college level, the students believed that discrimination was reduced to a few college staff members who knew about the students’ undocumented status. Students who reported their immigration status were not treated well in some community colleges. Jose reported his situation as an undocumented student by stating, “They said there was no way I could get in-state tuition. XYZ Community College has totally denied any help they could possibly give me.” Jose went to a different community college and received better treatment, and was allowed to be sponsored.

Participants who kept the secret of being undocumented did not encounter discrimination or a lack of support at the community colleges. Carlos kept the secret as he said: “Nobody knew that I was undocumented at the time, nobody knew. Everybody, that’s something, that’s a secret that I did not share, I did not want to be labeled.” Carlos enrolled as a citizen, received good treatment, got in-state tuition, and was having a good college experience. In summary, the college educational experience results in a better experience than the K-12 educational

experience, mostly because of keeping the immigration status a secret as well as the opportunity provided by the early college high school.

Sub-question 1. What are the motivations, outlook, and overall attitude about higher education among undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition?

Undocumented Hispanic students who completed high school and aspire to attend college are highly motivated and have a good attitude about education. The participants of this study showed that they valued their college education and were eager to continue college education beyond an associate degree. Yami "always loved school." Even participants who struggled in school considered education as a valuable tool for a better future. Elkin always "wanted a better future for myself and my son," and she is working on this to improve the opportunities for her and her son. In many cases, motivation came directly from the parents, especially those parents who only completed elementary school and did not have the opportunity to pursue further education. Alex's positive attitude towards higher education was cultivated early by his father. Alex remembers his "dad's words that I needed to go to college to change our future because that was the only way." In many Hispanic families, there are two options: work or study. Highly motivated undocumented Hispanic students select the study option. Jose's parents insisted on him attending college because he "needed to pursue a better education, and they wanted us to have a better life than the one they had." Parents who do not know what college means usually change their attitude after learning the advantages of being educated and having a college degree. Alicia's parents "were quite supportive when they learned a little bit more about the program."

Future expectations affected the motivation and attitude of participants towards higher education. Fear of their current undocumented immigration status and the pending cancellation

of the DACA program often reduce the motivation of undocumented students to complete college. Many of the participants agreed with Tina's opinion during the focus group session: "DACA is gone, but I hope that the government will actually do something to at least legalize or find a pathway to become a permanent resident." Sofia has also demonstrated some faith that the future may improve, and she says undocumented students have to be prepared because "You never know what's going to happen in a year or 2." Participants were still motivated to complete their college education even when the DACA situation had not been resolved in their favor.

The shared consensus of undocumented Hispanic students in higher education is that failure was not an option when it came to completing their degrees. Motivated undocumented Hispanic students have no pride in being losers. Elkin dropped out of high school, completed her GED, reorganized, and enrolled in college to work toward her goal. Her encouraging words have helped her not to quit again: "I'd tell them not to give up, just keep working." She kept working even when her situation was not easy. Carlos' advice about failing not being an option because of one's immigration status is clear: "Don't let the immigration status be that much of a depression." Like Carlos and Elkin, the other participants were not quitters and continued to be highly motivated to pursue their college education.

When participants were asked why they decided to attend college, personal satisfaction was one of the most popular answers. Personal satisfaction was a great motivator and had a positive impact on the participants' attitude towards higher education. Mara expressed this feeling when she answered, "I always said that I wanted to do something for myself." Sofia's personal satisfaction involves doing "something different," such as completing a college degree. Margarita wants "be the first one in my family to go to college," and she was currently achieving this goal. Personal satisfaction has been demonstrated to be a positive force for undocumented

Hispanic students in higher education. All these highly-motivated undocumented Hispanic students in higher education currently planned to complete their educational goals during the next few calendar years.

This study has recognized how undocumented Hispanic students face the rejection of the society and the school system. These students had a strong desire to be accepted and included as part of American society. Their desire has served as a motivator to continue to work hard, often harder than their classmates, to reach their educational goals. Carlos stated the feelings of the rest of the participants in their desire to be accepted and included in society: “I really hope that there is a way that I can become legal.” Carlos and the rest of the participants want to be “contributing to society in a positive way, being an educator or being some type of, doing some type of job that is giving back to the community.” In their efforts to be accepted in school and society, most of the students participated in sports and on teams. Those who did not participate in sports took part in school clubs and other school-related extracurricular activities in their efforts to try to belong to the community.

Sub-question 2. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina’s community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition rates, what specific challenges do these students identify as influencing their persistence toward their goal of higher education?

Undocumented Hispanic students in higher education have had to deal with multiple challenges since the day their parents decided to bring them to the United States. The five most cited challenges are the journey into the United States, their young age when they crossed the borders, the family economic situation, their fear of living in the shadows, and paying for college. Other challenges cited during the study include the unfriendly atmosphere in some

schools, discrimination, bullying and rejection, driving without a license, poverty, unfriendly people, and the language barrier. The following is a brief summary of the five main challenges.

The journey into the United States was a difficult first challenge. Most of the participants described a dangerous and hazardous journey. All the participants came to the United States at young ages ranging from 1 to 13 years of age, a significant challenge by itself. Many of them experienced near death experiences. At age 6, Tina experienced a life threatening experience crossing the Arizona desert when the group “ran out of food and then we ran out of water also.” The group continued walking without food or water until “we found a pond with water and so we ended up drinking what we found and that’s how we actually survived.”

Other challenging entries into the United States that required crossing multiple borders were experienced by Alex, Jose, and Yami, ages 10-13. Alex traveled alone at age 13. Jose and Yami crossed with other families. Alex was incarcerated the first time he attempted to cross the Guatemala/Mexico border. Alex described that “Mexican, I guess, agents caught me” and later “Somebody from my family had to come and basically get me out of jail.” When Alex crossed the same border a second time “we got caught again, but we had to pay some money so they will just let us go.” In his attempt to cross the Mexico/US border, Alex “was about two hours in the desert and then we got caught, so we got taken basically to jail.” Once in jail, Alex was “basically sent me to, like, a juvenile detention center. And I was there for about six months probably.” Multiple other examples document the challenges undocumented Hispanic students face when their parents decide to give the family a better life. Facing death at a young age was a common challenge most of the participants experienced. If young undocumented Hispanic children survived the trip coming to the United States at a young age, they can overcome almost any challenge they may face later living in the United States as undocumented residents.

Extreme poverty describes the third most cited challenge participants had to overcome to persist in their education. All the participants and their families were living in rural areas where extreme poverty was the norm. The families had limited incomes and lived with extended family members. All the families had struggled financially in their countries of origin, being the main reason their parents decided to make the family move to the United States. They wanted better living opportunities for their families. Elkin lived in “a small town in an agricultural area.” Maite defined her family situation as “We were poor and my dad lose his job while my mom would sold tamales, but it was not enough for the family.” Unemployment is high in these rural areas. The economic situation for Pedro and his family had a similar pattern: “There were not a lot of jobs and my father was desperate.” Once they were living and working in the United States, the economic status of the participants’ families was better than in their home countries, but they were still considered low income families living in poor rural areas in North Carolina.

Living as an undocumented resident is synonymous with living in the shadows of society. This is a completely different challenge for undocumented Hispanic students in higher education. Living in the shadows of society means keeping the secret of their immigration status while managing to perform daily routines under the radar of the immigration authorities. This challenge is overwhelming because there is the constant fear of being detained and deported for working without a work permit or driving without a license. In their efforts to improve their living conditions, obtain a job permit, get a driver’s license, and live openly in society, undocumented Hispanic students applied for DACA status. Tina had to drive to school with “no license because there was no other choice.” After getting her DACA permit, Tina obtained her driver’s license. Tina also kept secret her status as an undocumented student, adding that “The only one that I have discussed about my status would have probably been you.” Keeping their

undocumented status a secret has been a challenge for all the participants. They fear the knowledge of their undocumented status would bring immigration agents to campus and enforce their deportation. As Carlos said, “I do not feel so much discrimination; I feel a fear of being deported. I feel fear of people finding out my true identity.” Fear of deportation was a challenge that all the participants agreed on during their personal interviews and the focus group session. Undocumented students have no other option than to live in the shadows of society until their immigration status is resolved. Receiving DACA status solved some of the challenges, but the end of the status will cause many of them to return to living in the shadows of society.

Paying for college is the fifth most cited challenge for participants. All participants other than Carlos, who applied to college impersonating an American citizen, were classified to pay out-of-state tuition with no federal financial aid available. Many efforts had been made to pay for college tuition and expenses. Carlos had “to work in the fields” as a farm worker to pay for his expenses. Other participants seized the opportunity of free tuition and textbooks provided by the early college high school program. Margarita received financial aid from her father who was “helping me a lot and he told me just to focus on school right now,” and provided the money to pay for the college expenses. Another group of participants, including Elkin, “ended up getting sponsored by Telamon because I did farm working, so they said I could qualify for them to sponsor me.” The rest of the participants did their homework and applied for and received multiple scholarships to pay for their tuition. These participants also worked part-time jobs and received financial help from their families. The challenges have not being easy to face, but undocumented Hispanic students are willing to work hard and overcome these challenges in order to complete their college education.

Sub-question 3. What cultural or family values do undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition attribute to their persistence to complete a college education?

Undocumented Hispanic students in higher education and their families consider the family and cultural values as an essential part of their lives. In addition, education is an important element of every participant's family. Even parents with limited education place a high value on education and want their children to be well-educated. According to the participants, educational goals are part of the family values for all Hispanic families. Some of the values identified in this research that helped in the students' persistence to complete a college education include family support, appreciation for education, being the first in the family to complete high school and a college degree, and the desire for a better future for every family member.

Family support was by far the most cited family value in this research. Every participant affirmed that their parents and immediate family members support their efforts to complete their college education. Mara gratefully described her parents' attitude to support her during her college experience as they "have always been there for me no matter what I decide to do for my career." In Sofia's case, her parents did not know what college was and how much it would benefit Sofia's future. Like many of the parents of the participants of this study, Sofia's parents had limited education as they only finished elementary school. Many of them wanted more education, but they were happy that their children were able to get that education. Many of those parents, including Sofia's parents, gave money for food and transportation to and from college. Alicia's parents' knowledge about college was very limited and they were "not that supportive because they did not know what college was." After Alicia started the early college program, her

parents learned more about the opportunity of a college education and “they were very supportive.” Parents even made special provisions to help their college students attend and perform well in college. Tina’s mother managed to get her a used car and she drove to classes. Other parents worked multiple jobs to contribute to the educational goals of their young college students.

Some of the parents appreciated education so much that they gave their children no option after school but to get a college education. Some parents, like in the case of Carlos’ parents, “knew the importance of education back in our country, they told me that I had to go to college; I had no choice.” In Maite’s situation, her mother appreciated college education, but her father was reluctant to approve Maite’s education because in his eyes, females were expected to be in the house. Maite explained that her father expected her to do domestic duties. When her parents’ opinions about Maite’s future collided, the mother’s decision for Maite to attend college prevailed. Today Maite is a student pursuing her college education. Elkin’s parents completed college in Honduras and expected their children to attend college when they finished high school. They were expecting Elkin to enroll in college once she completed her GED. The local community college did not allow Elkin to enroll in a curriculum program because of her immigration status. Elkin’s parents “did not support the college decision that I could not come to college” and looked for other community colleges who were willing to accept undocumented students in their programs. Elkin was finally accepted at another community college with sponsorship, and her parents helped with every aspect of her college degree, including child care for Elkin’s son while she attends classes. As noted in these cases, the success of their family members is the most important family value in undocumented Hispanic families.

Hispanic families often celebrate family achievements. Hispanic parents are very proud when their children achieve first places and do well in sports, school, or in being the first in the family to accomplish an educational goal such as graduate from high school or being the first in the family to complete a college education. Most of the participants were the first in their families to complete high school and attend college. Because she attended the early college high school program, Margarita became the first in her family to attend college. Margarita talked about the family celebration: “They were very happy because I was the first one to actually go on to college.” Tina was currently on track to be the first in her family to complete high school and college. She said she “needed to achieve a grade higher than my parents did; both of my parents did not finish primary school and I would be the first one.” Celebrations and recognitions of being the first in the family to go to college was a repeated theme during the interviews.

When parents decided to bring their families to the United States, a college education for their children was not part of their family’s plan. The completion of a college degree is considered an extra benefit in their efforts to give a better future to their children. Every participant concurred that their college education was the beginning of a better future wherever they end up living. All the participants agreed they will be in a better situation than the one they were currently living in within the next 5 or 10 years, thanks to the college degree they will complete. Pedro said, “I see myself in a good job or maybe having my own business,” while Alex expects to be in a better position as “I want to go higher into coaching and maybe work at a college.” Margarita sees a bright future because “I see myself into the medical field, I want to become a registered nurse.” It is clear that all the participants are working hard to have a better future as professionals. The values of family support, appreciation for education, being the first

in their family to get a college education, and the expectation of a better future are helping undocumented Hispanic students to persist in completing their college education.

Sub-question 4. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and who pay out-of-state tuition rates, what role does earning a college degree play in their visions for the future?

For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges, earning a college degree is considered vital for their future. Participants agreed that the value of a college degree may depend upon their immigration status, necessitating they be prepared with alternative plans if they are deported. Most of the participants saw a college degree as the first step for their main goal - to become educators.

The role of a college degree is positive because it is considered to be a key to open doors of opportunity that may be unreachable without the preparation offered in college. Pedro described college education as a positive "opportunity to continue in college to do your best and try to do better for you and your people." Yami was also optimistic about her college education as she asserted that "There is nothing better than having an education." All the participants agreed that the role of a college degree is positive, while none of the participants provided any evidence of college education having a negative role. Tina recaps the positive role of college education with her quote: "Prepare now, oh yeah, and the future will be better."

Undocumented Hispanic students do not consider having a college degree to carry any negative consequences. Uncertainty is perceived as not being able to perform the career or complete a higher college degree. This claim resulted in a shared concern of the participants, especially if the DACA status is eliminated. If that happens, DACA students would currently see their permits expiring during the next 2 years. If Congress fails to provide an alternative

plan, the uncertainty levels will grow exponentially. Tina was nervous about her uncertain DACA status: “I do not know what is going to happen after I finish college or how a college degree will benefit me if I cannot work.” Tina was on track to complete her associate degree but may not be able to work as an information technologies specialist. Sofia is also uncertain about her future because of DACA. “I am not sure what I will be facing,” expressed Tina. Carlos is another example of uncertainty; his “biggest concern is to graduate and not being able to find a job and not being able to be a professional.” Uncertainty will remain a major concern for undocumented Hispanic students in higher education until their immigration status changes.

Every undocumented Hispanic student interviewed expressed the fear of being deported. This uncertainty was looming in their future and it was a certainty that they need to be prepared for if this becomes a reality. Yami still believes that a college degree does not guarantee your future, but it is like insurance. “Even if you cannot get papers in the United States, you will have your diploma and you can take it with you somewhere else,” Yami optimistically expressed. Tina was working on what she recommended to “prepare now and finish your degree, you just do not know what the future holds.” Elkin was realistic about the possibility of moving out of North Carolina. She had no roots that would keep her stuck in a place. If Elkin has to “move out of state,” she will just “move out of state” and keep trying to reach her goals wherever she goes. Deportation is feared among undocumented Hispanic students, but it has not diminished their determination to complete their degrees.

Almost half of the undocumented Hispanic students who participated in this study declared their ultimate goal was to become an educator. This is surprising because many education programs are losing students, or people are losing interest in education because it is not well-paid. Jose expressed his hope to “have a Ph.D. in math and teach at a college.” Carlos

wanted to contribute to the community by “being an educator,” while Pedro wanted to be “a bilingual teacher assistant in school or something related.” These students experienced firsthand the challenge of being in school without knowing the language and without a bilingual educator who would help them navigate the challenges in school. Education in rural schools with large concentrations of Hispanic students would benefit from having these trained bilingual educators. If the DACA situation is resolved soon, this may contribute to an increase in bilingual educators in North Carolina schools.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the 12 participants of the study using the data collection instruments. The chapter continued presenting the results of the research by themes and codes with rich descriptions from the data collection instruments. The five themes described are educational experiences, motivation/attitude, challenges, cultural/family values, and the role of a college degree. Finally, the chapter answered the research question and the four sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition while enrolled at community colleges in eastern North Carolina. This chapter starts with a summary of the findings. The chapter continues with a discussion of the findings and the implications based on relevant literature and the emerging adulthood theory. After discussing the methodological and practical implications of the study, the chapter continues with the limitations and delimitations of the study. This chapter ends with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This section provides a summary of the findings by answering the research question and sub-questions.

Central Research Question

What are the shared educational experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition and enrolled in a rural North Carolina community college with restrictive in-state tuition laws?

Undocumented Hispanic students paying out of state tuition in rural community colleges in North Carolina have experienced multiple situations that are different from documented Hispanic students' experiences (Gonzales, 2011). First, undocumented Hispanic students in this study started United States' schools in a range of grades from kindergarten to eighth grade, where they experience great stress and frustrations for not being able to communicate and understand the language (Lee & Ahn, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Second, the language barrier continued for multiple years until they learned the English language

and the school culture (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Third, undocumented Hispanic students lose school years by often being placed a grade lower than they attended in their home countries.

Fourth, undocumented Hispanic students are forced to create alliances with other Spanish-speaking students as a strategy to navigate the school system.

Fifth, undocumented Hispanic students commonly express the perception that the public-school staff and faculty are often unsupportive along with native English-speaking students and other Hispanic students with United States' citizenship (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Herrera et al., 2013; Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Sixth, playing sports at school helps undocumented Hispanic students to focus on their education and to adapt to the school culture. Seventh, most undocumented Hispanic students complete high school because failure is not an option to them. Eighth, undocumented Hispanic students who enroll in community college courses receive support and mentoring from dedicated high school teachers and advisors who motivate them to obtain a college education, including the option of early college high school, scholarships, and sponsorships. Ninth, the educational experience at rural community colleges is perceived to be more positive than the K-12 educational experience, mainly because of reduced discrimination, keeping one's undocumented status secret, and a friendlier atmosphere (Hartley, 2012; Taylor et al., 2014).

Sub-Questions

Sub-question 1. What are the motivations, outlook, and overall attitudes about higher education among undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition?

All undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in rural community colleges in Eastern North Carolina that participated in this study were highly motivated, valued their education, and

expected to continue their higher education beyond the associate degree. Even participants who struggled in school considered education to be a valuable tool for a better future. In many cases, motivation came directly from the parents, especially those parents who only completed elementary school and did not have the opportunity to pursue further education. In many Hispanic families, there are two options: work or study. Highly motivated undocumented Hispanic students often select the study option.

Future expectations affect the motivation and attitude of participants towards higher education. Fear of the current immigration situation, being undocumented, and the cancellation of the DACA program often reduce the motivation of undocumented students to complete college (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). However, most participants were still motivated to complete their college education even when the DACA situation had not been resolved in their favor. The consensus of undocumented Hispanic students in higher education was that failure was not an option when it came to completing their degrees. Motivated undocumented Hispanic students have no pride in being unsuccessful. Personal satisfaction has also been demonstrated to be a positive force for undocumented Hispanic students in higher education. They have a strong desire to be accepted and included as part of American society (Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014). This need serves as a motivator for them to work harder to reach their educational goals. In their efforts to be accepted in school and society, most of the students participated in sports and on teams as a motivation force (Arnett, 2004). Those who did not participate in sports took part in school clubs and other school-related extracurricular activities in their efforts to try to belong to the community.

Sub-question 2. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition rates, what specific challenges do these students identify as influencing their persistence toward their goal of higher education?

Undocumented Hispanic students in higher education have had to deal with multiple challenges. The five most cited challenges were the journey into the United States, their young ages when they crossed the borders, the family economic situation, their fear of living in the shadows, and paying for college. Other challenges cited during the study included the unfriendly atmosphere in some schools, discrimination, bullying and rejection, driving without a license, poverty, unfriendly people, and the language barrier (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Nienhusser et al., 2016; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

Sub-question 3. What cultural or family values do undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and paying out-of-state tuition attribute to their persistence to complete a college education?

Undocumented Hispanic students in higher education and their families are often characterized as having strong family and cultural values as an essential part of their lives. Education was an important element of every participant's family. Even parents with limited education placed a high value on education and wanted their children to be well-educated. Educational goals are part of the family values for all Hispanic families. Some of the values identified in this research that helped in the students' persistence to complete a college education included family support, appreciation for education, being the first in the family to complete high school and a college degree, and the desire for a better future for every family member (Pérez et al., 2010).

Sub-question 4. For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges and who pay out-of-state tuition rates, what role does earning a college degree play in their visions for the future?

For undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in North Carolina's community colleges, earning a college degree was considered vital for their future. These students considered that the value of a college degree might yet be uncertain. Undocumented Hispanic students considered the role of education as positive as it opens doors to professional opportunities that require being academically prepared. The value of their degree was considered uncertain because undocumented Hispanic students did not know if they will be able to complete their college education and work as professionals. They also realized the importance of being prepared with alternative plans in case of deportation if the DACA program is eliminated and if Congress failed to provide an alternative plan (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Uncertainty remained a current major concern for undocumented Hispanic students in higher education until their immigration status changes. Undocumented Hispanic students did not consider having a college degree to be negative or a waste of time and resources.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition while enrolled at community colleges in eastern North Carolina. Twelve participants enrolled in community colleges were interviewed about their experiences during their educational years, motivation and attitudes, challenges, cultural and family values, and the role of the college degree in their future plans. The theoretical framework of the study is emerging adulthood theory that covers the age span from 18-29 years of age (Arnett, 1998). During this stage of life, young adults develop the

foundations and skills that will allow them to live independently and self-sufficiently (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adulthood is the time to explore future possibilities, set goals, embrace change, and make commitments (Arnett, 2004; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010).

Study Confirmations and Corroborations

Previous researchers have documented that the transition period of emerging adulthood from high school to college is marked by high stress, anxiety, and depression, forcing many emerging adults to abandon their college education (Hartley, 2012; Taylor et al., 2014). If the transition from high school to college was problematic for students who had a normal school experience, the transition from high school to college experienced by undocumented Hispanic students in this study was exponentially more stressful and depressing as other researchers reported (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales, 2011; Hallett, 2013; Herrera et al., 2013; Perez, 2010). This study confirmed that to successfully transition from high school to college, students must have a strong motivational commitment, and the school and college must provide a positive environment (Clark et al., 2013; Heckhausen et al., 2013). In the case of the undocumented Hispanic students in this study, personal motivation was high. However, the schools and some colleges failed to provide positive environments to help this sub-group of students to make a successful and stress-free transition into higher education. Even by having a stressful disadvantage, undocumented Hispanic students in this study endured the obstacles and did not abandon their college education. All the participants were in good academic standing and on track to complete their educational goals at the community college level. Most of the participants shared their goal to continue studies at the university up to graduate school. Other

participants expressed their goals to be being able to complete a nursing or education degree or to become business entrepreneurs.

Previous research on the topic of undocumented students in higher education listed multiple challenges and barriers these students face while in school, including discrimination, learning a new language, poverty, low-quality education, low expectations from teachers, over-punishment, and high dropout rates (Lee & Ahn, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). This study corroborates these barriers and adds other barriers, including the dangerous journey into the United States at a very young age, living in the shadows while hiding their immigration status, bullying from other Hispanic students with undocumented parents, and the uncertainty of being deported if the immigration dilemma is not solved. Undocumented Hispanic students have to overcome challenges recognized in this study and other research studies including insensitive behaviors from high school and college officials, denial of admission because of immigration status, and the withholding or ignorance of college staff to possible financial aid alternatives for undocumented students seeking to enter the public college system (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales & Ruiz, 2014; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Nienhuser et al., 2016; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). This study corroborates previous research that Hispanic students are underrepresented in higher education and adds that undocumented Hispanic students are the largest sub-group of Hispanics underrepresented in the North Carolina community college system (Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

The literature documents that many Hispanic students are the first in their families to complete high school and attend college while working to supplement the family's income (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). This study corroborates that most undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in higher education are the first

in their families to complete high school and earn a college degree. In 11 of 12 cases, the participants' parents did not finish high school or attend college. Many of the parents had no idea of the requirements of a college education. All of the participants had to navigate the college application process by themselves without the help of their parents. All of the participants in this study had a DACA authorization to obtain a job and contribute to the family's income. However, most of the parents took the financial burden from their college attendees, and the students did not have to work to attend college.

Arnett (2004) highlighted the importance of commitment to goals during the emerging adulthood stage. Other researchers concluded that emerging adults who followed their motivational commitment to complete their college education before obtaining a job and establishing a family reported higher levels of satisfaction and well-being than emerging adults who opted to work and have a family (Heckhausen et al., 2013). This study confirmed previous research. Participants in this study were highly motivated to complete their college education before going to work and establishing a family. Only one of 12 participants in this study worked after school and established a family before attending college. Participants of this study expressed being very satisfied with their decision to attend college during their emerging adulthood years. All of the participants expect a brighter future if their DACA status is solved and they are able to perform as professionals in their fields of study.

Study Divergences and Extensions

This study filled a gap in the area of undocumented Hispanic students during their emerging adulthood years. Researchers have highlighted the need for additional research on undocumented Hispanic emerging adults enrolled in rural community colleges in states with restrictive in-state tuition policies (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Heinz, 2009; Hendy & Kloep, 2010;

Nienhuser et al., 2016). This study focused on undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in rural community colleges in a state with restrictive in-state tuition policies. In North Carolina, undocumented students can enroll in public institutions of higher education paying out-of-state tuition rates (The University of North Carolina, 2011). No previous research involving undocumented Hispanic students in rural community colleges in North Carolina had been done, making this study unique. With the increase of the Hispanic population in rural North Carolina, mostly attributed to low wages in agricultural, restaurant, factory, and construction job opportunities, it is important to have trained bilingual professionals in the areas of education, social work, health, and services (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014). Some participants stated their goal to become bilingual educators in their communities to help future bilingual students to succeed. Other participants aspired to become health professionals, while a few participants aspired to become business owners and contribute to the economy of their communities.

Katsiaficas et al. (2015) concluded that Hispanic emerging adults who complete high school and want to pursue a college education are most likely to enroll in community colleges. Previous researchers did not differentiate between documented and undocumented Hispanic emerging adults (Arnett, 2015; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). This study concentrated on the sub-group of undocumented Hispanic students. Katsiaficas et al.'s (2015) results are also applicable to undocumented Hispanic emerging adults. Undocumented Hispanic emerging adults and their families often place a high value on college education. It is highly probable that undocumented Hispanic students will enroll in higher education if the opportunity of enrollment is allowed. These students will persist to surpass any challenge to complete their degrees. Undocumented Hispanic students are more likely to complete their

college degrees at community colleges and persist to continue university beyond the associate degree.

Researchers have identified community colleges as the preferred alternative for college education among Hispanic emerging adults (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Scherer & Anson, 2014). Community colleges are less expensive, serve non-traditional students, are conveniently located, and have an open-door admission policy (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Scherer & Anson, 2014). This study extended on previous research on the area of undocumented Hispanic students and rural community colleges. Community colleges are the best alternative for undocumented Hispanic students in rural locations who want to pursue higher education. In North Carolina, undocumented Hispanic students selected community colleges over private or state universities, mainly due to convenience and cost. Five participants in this study attended community colleges by taking advantage of the early college high school program that allowed high school students to attend college with free tuition and textbooks, regardless of immigration status. Three participants were able to attend a community college because of the sponsorship program and getting Telamon Corporation as a sponsor to pay their educational costs. Three participants obtained scholarships that were able to cover the expenses of attending a community college such as textbooks, supplies, transportation, and meals. Overall, 11 of 12 participants selected the community college as their higher education option because of convenience, low costs, and because someone outside the family group was willing to pay for their education. Community colleges continue to be the preferred choice for higher education among undocumented Hispanic students.

Previous researchers had suggested that when undocumented Hispanic students realize they may not have the opportunity to enroll in higher education, they drop out of school and join

the workforce (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). In contrast, only one of 12 participants in this study dropped out of high school, but later completed a GED to attend college. The motivation of undocumented Hispanic participants in this study was very high. Undocumented Hispanic students of this study have overcome many obstacles to complete high school, and they refused to drop out of school. All of the participants expressed that failing was not an option for them. Even the participant who dropped out of school was conscious of her mistake, amended her decision, completed her GED, and enrolled in college. Undocumented Hispanic students in rural North Carolina want to complete their educational goals of attaining a higher degree and becoming educated professionals.

This research contradicts the claim that emerging adulthood theory is universal among countries and cultures (Arnett & Eisenberg, 2007; Fascio et al., 2007; Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernandez, 2007). Undocumented Hispanic students in eastern North Carolina experience emerging adulthood in a different way than their peers who are documented American citizens. In addition, they have had to deal with more difficult life experiences, health challenges, social changes, poverty, different cultural norms, relationships, and educational challenges than many residents in the United States. A strong argument can be made in agreement with other researchers that Arnett's (2004) emerging adulthood theory is not universal for undocumented Hispanic young adults in rural North Carolina (Hendry & Kloep, 2010; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Emerging adulthood theories may not apply to the ethnic minority of undocumented Hispanic young adults (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

Study Contributions to the Field

Arnett (2015) recognized that young adults from working class and poor communities do not experience emerging adulthood the way he explained in his original theory, and

recommended more research on this area. This study builds on Arnett's (2015) study by exploring undocumented Hispanic young adults in poor rural communities. Emerging adulthood is not universal for the sub-group of undocumented Hispanic young adults living in rural North Carolina. This sub-group of the population is very diverse; they experience different life challenges, endures complex educational experiences, and it must overcome multiple barriers that typical young adults never have to confront. More research needs to be conducted to determine the universality of emerging adulthood theories with other undocumented young adults from different ethnic origins living in the United States (Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

Multiple researchers have reported that Hispanic students are the ethnic group with the highest school dropout rates of any racial group in the United States (e.g. Clark et al., 2013; Harpe & Kaniuka, 2012; Kena et al., 2014, 2015; Potochnick, 2014). During this research, it was difficult to obtain participants mainly because there are very few undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in rural community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. Still, the few participants of this study revealed that undocumented Hispanic students place a high value on college education. If undocumented Hispanic students can enroll in college without the barriers some institutions of higher education build to keep these students out, they will enroll, persist, and complete their college education. Dropout rates may decrease in schools because undocumented Hispanic students will see an open door to education that they want to enter. Some of the reasons to support this conclusion include the following: undocumented Hispanic students and their families value education, failing is not an option for them, they want the personal satisfaction of becoming an educated professional, they want to feel accepted and included in society, and they desire to return services to the communities in which they live.

Research has shown that most undocumented Hispanic families in the United States work in low-paying jobs and live in poverty (Crisp et al., 2014; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Perez et al., 2010; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). This study corroborates these claims from researchers. For undocumented Hispanic students, living in poverty means that there are no family financial resources to pay for a college education, and there is no federal financial aid at their disposal. This study documented that there are alternatives to pay for college that are available to undocumented Hispanic students if they perform diligent research. Only one of the participants in this study paid cash for his college expenses. Three participants obtained private scholarships that paid their college expenses after long research and lengthy application processes. Three participants obtained sponsorship from Telamon Corporation, and five participants took advantage of the early college high school program. None of the previous researchers on the topic of undocumented Hispanic students in higher education mentioned these alternatives to pay for college. The payment options of private scholarships, Telamon Corporation, and early college high school programs must be presented to highly motivated undocumented Hispanic students who want to pursue a college education.

Researchers have recognized how much undocumented Hispanic immigrants fear deportation (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). The fear of deportation is more real for undocumented Hispanic students when their safety net disappears after they complete high school (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). In an effort to dissipate this fear in a constructive way, undocumented Hispanic students in this study used their fear of deportation as a strong motivator to complete a college education. All the participants of the study expressed fear of being deported, but they also want to be academically prepared if they must return to their countries of origin and start over again. This study contributed to the field in that participants

accepted the reality of their immigration status, prepared for the worst, but were nevertheless prepared for whatever the future might bring in regard to their immigration status. Previous research mentioned the fear of deportation only as a restrictive force, but this study highlighted the fear of deportation as a motivator for undocumented Hispanic students in eastern North Carolina to complete their educational goals.

Finally, the North Carolina Community College System, with 58 campuses serving 100 counties, operated under an open-door policy through which every student is welcome to enroll and obtain a college education (North Carolina Community College System, 2009). However, the door was not wide open for undocumented Hispanic students who wanted to pursue a college education. This study captured experiences of undocumented Hispanic students who saw how the “open door” shut in their faces when college officials refused to enroll them in their programs. The college admissions officers would often withhold information from these students which could possibly help them find lawful ways they could enroll in college and afford a college education.

I personally encountered college administrators who refused to allow me to conduct my research on the topic of undocumented Hispanic students on their campuses or ignored my requests to contact participants. If I, as a Hispanic researcher and a professional, felt unwelcome on some campuses, I shared the feelings of Hispanic participants who were not well received on these campuses when they stated they were undocumented on their admission applications. It is up to state legislators and college administrators to address how they will treat undocumented Hispanic students on open door campuses. But the experiences, to date, have been disappointing for many of the participants. The indifference and mistreatment of Hispanic applicants by college staff and administrators may be why Hispanic students account for only 3.5% of the total

student population in North Carolina's community colleges, and less than 1% in undocumented Hispanic students, with no significant enrollment growth in either population (Harpe & Kaniuka, 2012; Oseguera et al., 2010).

Implications

This section addresses theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. The section includes recommendations for various stakeholders in higher education.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides information about the universality of emerging adulthood theory among undocumented Hispanic students living in rural North Carolina (Arnett, 2004). While Arnett (2004) considered emerging adulthood theory as a universal concept, emerging adulthood is not universal for the sub-group of undocumented Hispanic young adults living in rural North Carolina and attending community colleges. This sub-group of the population is different in that Arnett's (2004) subjects were from urban areas and wealthy families (Arnett & Eisenberg, 2007). North Carolina's undocumented Hispanic emerging adults live in poor conditions, have different ethnic backgrounds, experienced life-threatening challenges during their emigration, encountered and endured complex educational challenges, and have overcome barriers unseen by wealthier young adult classmates. Undocumented Hispanic emerging adults become autonomous earlier in life; for example, they have learned to navigate school without the help of their parents. Undocumented Hispanic emerging adults have often faced life or death situations, so they have developed independence and strong survival skills early in life. In addition, this group embraces change earlier than their peers. More research is needed to understand the psychology of undocumented Hispanic emerging adults, including the possibility that the emerging adulthood stage starts earlier than 18 years old in this sub-group. If emerging adulthood is marked by the

acceptance of responsibility, independent decisions, freedom, employment, and financial independence (Arnett, 2000), surely emerging adulthood may start earlier, even as early as age 15, for undocumented Hispanic students in rural North Carolina. Most participants had to work performing farming jobs after school hours and weekends to supplement family income, pay their own school expenses, perform home household tasks while parents were at work, take care of younger siblings or their own children.

Empirical Implications

This study documented the difficult situations undocumented Hispanic students in rural eastern North Carolina experienced while they struggled to complete their educational goals. Previous research has concentrated on urban areas in states with laws that allow undocumented students to enroll and pay in-state tuition rates at public institutions of higher education (Crisp et al., 2014; Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014; Herrera et al., 2013; Nienhuser et al., 2016). No previous studies have been conducted in a state that does not allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. This original contribution to the literature may help school and college administrators in North Carolina and other states that do not allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition to understand the situation their students are in and to be proactive and inclusive with this population of students. Instead of discriminating against and not serving this population, school and college administrators are encouraged to attend sensitivity training to better understand and serve these students. Participants in this study want to have someone at the higher education level that makes undocumented Hispanic students feel welcome, and who will guide them to success. This is a historic opportunity for school and college administrators to start creating friendly atmospheres on their campuses. Administrators need to consider and promote with college staff that immigration status is not a factor to consider when allowing enrollment or

providing services to students. Administrators also need to remember that every student is important and needs to be educated, including undocumented Hispanic students. The principle of *no child left behind* must include undocumented Hispanic students.

Practical Implications

Research has recognized that Hispanic students account for the lowest educational attainment of any racial group, with undocumented Hispanic students being the group with the most dropouts (Saenz, 2010; Schuets & Carranza, 2012). However, not many solutions to the problem have been suggested. Gonzalez and Ruiz (2014) found that when undocumented Hispanic students realize they have no access to college education, most of them decide to drop out of school. This study documented the struggles and obstacles undocumented Hispanic students dealt with to complete high school and attend college in rural eastern North Carolina. Most undocumented Hispanic students are highly motivated to complete high school and attend college if the opportunity to enroll and receive financial aid is provided.

A possible solution to the higher dropout rates among Hispanic students relies on giving undocumented Hispanic students the opportunity to enroll and attend college without discrimination or biases because of their immigration status. Beginning in their elementary and middle school years, undocumented Hispanic students should be informed about options for getting a college education. The early college high school program should also be presented as an option, and Hispanic students and their families should be informed about sponsorships, such as the Telamon Corporation, which may pay for college tuition. By informing students of their choices early in their school years, the probability that they will attend college could increase. In addition, more students will likely complete high school knowing college is an option, and dropout rates among Hispanics may decrease. Undocumented Hispanic students should also be

exposed to college possibilities early, during their elementary and middle school years. With early planning, undocumented Hispanic students and families can make obtaining a college education a reachable goal.

College administrators and staff should remember that they are not immigration agents. If state legislators allow the lawful enrollment of undocumented Hispanic students in community colleges and state universities in North Carolina, administrators and staff members must comply with the law. Public institutions of higher education must welcome undocumented Hispanic students who are highly motivated to complete their college education without biases or discrimination from the colleges.

Enrollment in many community colleges is dropping nationwide (Juszkiewicz, 2015). Community colleges struggle to bring new students to their programs, especially in career and technical education programs. Enrolling undocumented Hispanic students could be the answer to increasing enrollment in community college programs. College recruiters must inform prospective students about all possible opportunities and programs available for college enrollment and payment. High school guidance counselors and college admissions staff should inform students, not withhold information from them. By understanding the struggles undocumented Hispanic students encounter in their lives, college administrators can create mentoring, retention, and completion programs for this student population which will foster better relationships with them. Mentoring programs can be used to improve the college experience for undocumented Hispanic students in higher education.

I recommend that K-12 schools and college administrators hire bilingual faculty, staff, and support personnel in their efforts to understand and better serve undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in their institutions. Bilingual staff can help create a friendly and welcoming

atmosphere for these students and motivate them to perform better in school and complete their educational goals. Participants in this study mentioned feeling unwelcome at their schools and colleges because they were not provided with adequate help to understand the school culture. Bilingual staff can help create a welcoming atmosphere and help undocumented students to learn the school culture and to feel a sense of belonging within the school.

All the participants in this study had DACA status. With the ending of the program and the uncertainty created by this decision, undocumented Hispanic students in higher education were currently stressed and nervous. Students were uncertain if they would be able to complete their degrees and go to work. Legislators must find a solution to the immigration status of this population. These young students are productive members of society and need a final solution on their status. Many of them were preparing in case they must leave this country and return to a country they really do not know or remember. Legislators must make a final decision while taking into consideration the experiences and struggles undocumented Hispanic students with DACA status have had. Whatever decision they make should be well informed with data from research like this one. Legislators will hopefully make the best decision for these students and for the communities.

North Carolina legislators and the general public need to become well informed on this topic and consider adopting the in-state tuition provision other states have adopted, allowing undocumented Hispanic students to pay in-state tuition rates (Kim & Diaz, 2013b; Nguyen & Serna, 2014). If undocumented Hispanic students can pay in-state tuition as DACA recipients, more students will complete high school and enroll in community colleges, increasing enrollment (Kim & Diaz, 2013b). Also, by allowing undocumented Hispanic students to pay in-

state tuition rates, community colleges will truly have an open-door policy that will benefit students and the local communities in rural North Carolina.

Delimitations and Limitations

Some research delimitations must be acknowledged in the scope of this study. In an effort to comply with the ethical consideration that participants must be competent to give consent and capable to understand the risks and benefits of the research, only college students who are 18 years old or older could participate (Whitley & Kite, 2013). Another important delimitation of the study was the requirement for participants to be exclusively undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum programs in Eastern North Carolina community colleges and classified to pay out-of-state tuition rates. *Undocumented* is defined as a person who (a) was born outside the United States or its territories, (b) is not a legal resident, (c) entered the country illegally, (d) or entered legally and overstaying their visa (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). A third important delimitation was related to the theoretical framework of the study. Participants were selected as young adults during the emerging adulthood age range of 18-29 years of age (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

There were several limitations in this study. First, the desired number of 15 participants was not reached. Only 12 participants were interviewed in the study. Many prospective candidates were afraid to participate because of their fear of deportation after the DACA provision was canceled and their fear of being identified as undocumented. Second, many of the community colleges in the immediate area refused to invite prospective participants to the study. Administrative personnel contacted at these colleges refused to cooperate or simply ignored multiple requests to participate. Third, most participants were females because of the low number of Hispanic males who complete high school and attend college (Clark et al., 2013;

Heckhausen et al., 2013). Fourth, there is a potential limitation of transferability with undocumented students in states where they can pay in-state tuition rates. These findings may not be applicable to undocumented Hispanic students living in states banning undocumented student enrollment in public higher education. Fifth, the results may not be indicative of the general population of undocumented Hispanic students in the state because of the diversity of the participants and the nature and characteristics of those who volunteer to participate in research versus those who do not. Eight participants were from Mexico, three participants were from El Salvador, and one participant was from Honduras. These countries comprise the largest Hispanic groups in eastern North Carolina (U. S. Census Bureau, 2014). A sixth limitation was the language weakness of some participants; as a result, they were limited in expressing their thoughts and feelings in the English language. In many cases, participants had to take more time to organize their answers to express their experiences in English because it was more natural for them to express themselves in Spanish. Seventh, because most participants only have 1 or 2 years of college experiences; their college educational experiences were proportionally fewer than their K-12 educational experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

After completing this study, I want to provide recommendations and directions for future research based on my findings, limitations, and delimitations. This study was delimited to currently enrolled undocumented Hispanic students at rural community colleges. Qualitative research is needed regarding the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students who have already completed their studies at community colleges. A future study may include undocumented Hispanic students who have already passed their emerging adulthood years but were enrolled in college during their emerging adulthood years. Second, a qualitative

longitudinal study on the current participants may be conducted as a follow-up study to determine if the experiences of these students attempting to continue college studies after an associate degree compared to their experiences before and during their associate degree studies. Third, a qualitative longitudinal study of undocumented Hispanic students from their initial grade starting school in the United States to 10 years after completing high school may be conducted to determine if the participants were able to complete their educational goals beyond high school, and to assess their work as professionals after completing their college education goals. This future study may also identify how many participants were able to solve their immigration status and how they solved it.

This study was delimited to rural community colleges in eastern North Carolina. A fourth recommendation for future research might include a qualitative study that reaches undocumented Hispanic participants from all 58 community colleges in North Carolina. This study can compare and contrast the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students in rural and urban community colleges are similar or different. Based on the limitation that only participants from three Hispanic countries were willing to participate, the fifth recommendation is to repeat this study with the goal of having representation of undocumented Hispanic students from every country of origin living in the study area.

A sixth recommendation is based on the limitation of the number of participants in this study. The research included interviews with 12 participants. A qualitative study with a larger sample is recommended to determine a larger transferability of the results. The seventh recommendation for future research is based on the finding that multiple participants want to become educators. A qualitative longitudinal study is recommended to determine how many undocumented Hispanic students reach their goals of becoming educators. Eighth, a quantitative

study of college grades, GPAs, degrees completed, and professional licenses obtained by undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in the 58 community colleges in North Carolina is recommended, based on the grades and degrees the participants in this study shared. Finally, I recommend that more research needs to be done to determine the universality of emerging adulthood with other undocumented young adults from different ethnic origins living in the United States.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students paying out-of-state tuition while enrolled at community colleges in rural Eastern North Carolina. The study also examined the degree to which Arnett's (1998, 2000, 2004) emerging adulthood theory was valid in this population.

The research question was: What are the educational experiences of undocumented Hispanic students who are enrolled in community colleges, paying out-of-state tuition rates in the state of North Carolina, living in rural areas, and experiencing restrictive in-state laws? Twelve participants enrolled in community colleges were interviewed about their experiences during their educational years, their motivation and attitudes, their challenges, their cultural and family values, and the importance of a college degree in their future plans.

The study indicated that emerging adulthood theory did not adequately describe the developmental characteristics of undocumented Hispanic students in higher education. The analysis of the results revealed the overwhelming nature of challenges to these students and their families. Undocumented Hispanic students' familial backgrounds were unrelated to those typically found among American-born adolescents in the same age cohort. The need to meet the

basic economic needs of their families, the challenge of immigration, and the need for language and cultural acquisition dominated their development.

The study group revealed that undocumented Hispanic students are aspirational. They and their families strongly desire the completion of higher education. When given the necessary economic support and access to programs of study, this population will accept the challenges of academic programs and complete higher degrees. Students often expressed the desire to complete a degree without consideration for the financial benefit that might accrue from their education. In fact, many of the degree programs undocumented Hispanic students want to complete were not associated with high paying jobs.

Institutions of higher education in North Carolina are constantly searching for talented students from other states and countries in their effort to serve a more diverse population. Several of these colleges and universities have not developed outreach programs, have failed to provide access to financial aid, and often seem indifferent to the aspirations and potential of undocumented Hispanic students. Younger American citizens increasingly pass up the opportunity to enroll in institutions of higher education. Undocumented Hispanic students who want to attend college comprise a growing population of potential students who could benefit from these same opportunities improving their individual and family futures as well as strengthening the economic growth of their communities. Many undocumented Hispanic students may become professionals who provide invaluable service to their growing communities. Surely, the benefits of allowing undocumented Hispanic students to enroll and participate freely as college students without immigration barriers and insurmountable economic challenges should guide college administrators and lawmakers to address legislative and

institutional policy hurdles that limit the enrollment of undocumented Hispanic students in higher education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Demographics Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This questionnaire will help institutions of higher education to gain a better understanding of your experiences. Please answer all questions. The survey may take 5-10 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential.

1. Name and pseudonym - _____
2. College classification: ___ In-state tuition ___ Out-of-state tuition
3. Age - ___ Below 18 ___ 18-20 ___ 21-23 ___ 24-26 ___ 27-29 ___ Over 29
4. Gender - ___ Male ___ Female
5. Employment status - ___ Employed Full-time ___ Employed Part-Time
___ Unemployed
6. Obtained any immigration documentation? ___ Yes ___ No
 - a. If yes, list documentation: ___ DACA ___ Visa ___ Residency ___
Other _____
7. Country of origin - _____
8. Yearly family income – ___ Under \$20,000 ___ \$20,000-\$40,000 ___ \$40,000-\$60,000
___ Over \$60,000
9. Number of family members living in the same household - _____
10. When did your relatives enroll you in a US school?
 - a. Age _____ Grade level (K-12) _____ Calendar Year _____

11. What was your grade level when you left your country? (K-12) _____
12. High school graduation year - _____
13. Did you attend an Early College High School program? Yes No
- a. If yes, did you complete an associate degree? Yes No
- i. If yes, degree completed? _____
14. Did you participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes during school? -
 Yes, ESL Courses Yes, ESL Program No
15. Have you been identified with any of the following labels?
 IEP (Individualized Education Program) At-risk student
 Discipline problem Special Education
16. Did you take honor level courses at high school? - Yes No
- a. If yes, list courses: _____
- b. If no, why? Low grades ESL Counselor's decision Not interested
17. Graduated high school with honors? - Yes No –
18. High school class rank? _____
19. High school pathway: CTE College STEM Other
20. Took AP level courses during high school? Yes No
- a. If yes, list courses: _____
- b. Did you pass any AP tests? Yes No
- c. Please list which AP tests you passed: _____
21. Took college courses during high school? Yes No
- a. If yes, on campus online How many? _____
22. Participated in school clubs? Yes No

- a. If yes, list clubs: _____
23. Participated in extracurricular activities? Yes No
- a. If yes, list activities: _____
24. Completed college entry tests? Yes No
- a. If yes, which test? SAT ACT Accuplacer Other
25. Are you a first generation college student? Yes No
- a. If no, who in your family has a college education?

26. Financial aid recipient? Yes No
- a. If yes, type? FAFSA Grants Scholarship Sponsorship Other
- b. Name of grant/scholarship/sponsorship: _____
27. Expected college completion year: _____
28. Current program of study: _____
29. Completed college credits at this stage (excluding developmental courses):
- a. under 10 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 Over 50
30. Did you have to take developmental courses? Yes No
- a. If yes mark all that apply, Reading English Math Science
- Current college GPA? 4.0-3.5 3.49-3.0 2.99-2.50 2.49-2.0
 Below 2.0
31. Would you participate in the focus group session using your pseudonym with other participants? Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Undocumented Hispanic Students in Higher Education:^[1]_{SEP}A Phenomenology of Students
Struggling to Obtain Educational and Career Goals
Marvin Rondon Liberty University School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study on undocumented Hispanic students enrolled in curriculum courses at community colleges in Eastern North Carolina. You were selected as a possible participant because you are of Hispanic origin, enrolled in a curriculum program at an Eastern North Carolina community college, classified as an out-of-state student for tuition purposes, considered an undocumented resident under federal residency laws, and in the age range of 18-29 years of age. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Marvin Rondon, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students enrolled at select community colleges in North Carolina. This study is important because it addresses the problem of purging undocumented Hispanic students from higher education and has the potential to help increase the number of Hispanics in higher education to become professionals in different areas. This study can provide faculty and staff working in colleges and universities with a better understanding of the struggles undocumented Hispanic students encounter in their efforts to pursue and to complete their higher education goals.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following tasks:^1 Complete, sign, and return this consent form (5-10 minutes). (2) Complete the demographics questionnaire, select whether you wish to participate or decline to participate in the focus group session, and return the questionnaire (5-10 minutes). (3) Participate in one face-to-face individual interview for approximately one hour at a location convenient to you. (4) Bring to the interview copies of documents, pictures, report cards, homework assignments, student handbooks from the schools and colleges attended, class syllabus, newspaper articles, college policy manuals, or other documents related to your experiences in your home country and in the US that will help to describe your experiences that you want to share. (5) From the group of participants who are willing, I will invite 6 to 12 students to participate in the focus group session. The focus group will meet for approximately one hour at a location and time convenient to all participants. (6) With your consent, the interviews will be audio recorded for transcription. (7) A follow-up interview may be necessary if the participant wants to add more information about lived experiences (less than an hour if needed).

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The study is considered minimal risk, which means the risks are no more than what you would encounter in everyday life. Some participants may encounter some discomfort answering questions that relate to difficult lived experiences. College counselors are available to help students to address any discomfort experienced during the interviews.

There are no direct benefits in knowledge or skills to the participants.

Compensation: Participants will receive a \$25.00 gift card compensation for their participation in the interviews. Snacks will also be offered during the interviews and focus group sessions.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any report or article that I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant in this study. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

The researcher will not identify participants by name and only by an alias that the participant selected. Personal identifying information will not be reported in any surveys, interviews, or reports. A participant's confidentiality in this study will remain protected by the researcher.

While I agree not to share information outside the focus group, I cannot assure other participants in the focus group will not share what is discussed outside the focus group. Faculty and administrators from participating campuses will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent any individual comments from having any negative repercussions on participants of the study. Data will be stored in a secure external hard drive in the researcher's office, and documents will be locked in a file cabinet. Once the study is finished and approved, study data will be kept for 3 years. After 3 years, documents will be shredded and electronic documents will be erased.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision, whether or not to participate, will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the North Carolina Community College System. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without any negative effects to you as a current or future student.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately

and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Marvin Rondon. You may ask any questions you have prior to the study. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at mrondon@liberty.edu. His advisor's name is Andrea Lee, Ed.D., who can be reached at andreelee1216@yahoo.com.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions about the study and my participation and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/8/2017 to 9/7/2018 Protocol # 2934.090817

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

If you agree to be audio-recorded during the interview and video-recorded during the focus group, please check this box.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 8, 2017

Marvin Rondon^[SEP] IRB Approval 2934.090817: Undocumented Hispanic Students in Higher Education: A Phenomenology of Students Struggling to Obtain Educational and Career Goals

Dear Marvin Rondon,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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