

APPROVED. CONGRATULATIONS

FACULTY AND STAFF EXPERIENCES OF THE SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED TO  
STUDENTS WITH DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS STATUS AT A  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

by

Juhi Mehrotra Gor

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand community college faculty and staff members' experiences of providing support services to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. The theory that guided this study was Rendon's validation theory - as students are validated and made to feel valuable, they will foster personal and social development. This study explored three of the six elements of validation theory through the following research questions: 1. In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validation agents for DACA students? 2. What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus? 3. How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success? Respondents included ten staff participants and six student participants with DACA status from a community college in South Carolina. Data from participants were obtained through interviews, photovoice, and a focus group. Data analysis resulted in six themes and one subtheme - sympathy and empathy, communication with the subtheme lack of communication, disclosure of DACA status, knowledge of policies, DACA hardships, and equal treatment. Staff recognized ways they validate and engage students. Staff participants and DACA students discussed financial issues. Furthermore, staff participants stated that to support DACA students, they need to be made aware of a student's DACA status, which is not available. A conclusion is that there is a disconnect between the services staff believe they are providing and what DACA students feel they are receiving.

*Keywords:* DACA, validation, support services, undocumented, success, community college

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Each one of you played a vital role. First and foremost, my parents, Motilal and Amita, who migrated to “America” and overcame numerous challenges to create a better life for our family. They instilled the value of education and gave us every opportunity they could. They have been waiting a long time for this day.

I would also like to dedicate this paper to the heart and soul of my life, my daughters, Aanika and Aanya. They are my biggest fans who gave up precious cuddle time so I could work on my paper. The question, “is your paper done yet?” can finally be answered with a “YES!” Do bigger and better things for yourself and this world.

A special thank you to my husband, Nirav, who always supported me in this process. When I brought up the idea of going back to school, his immediate response was, “yes, do it!” Thank you for always working hard so I had free time to follow this dream.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The National Academic Advising Association (NAAA)

Upstate Community College (UCC)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an executive order implemented by former President Obama in 2012, which provides limited legality to undocumented immigrants who meet certain criteria (USCIS, 2018). Many of these individuals are children who were brought to the United States by their parents or families at a young age (USCIS, 2018). DACA provides opportunities to these individuals such as a temporary social security card, work permits, a driver's license, and most importantly, to attend college (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Even with temporary opportunities, DACA students continue to face uncertainty that impacts their mental health, overall wellness, and motivation (Siemons et al., 2017). Price and Mowry-Mora (2020) identified financial barriers, limited social capital or networks, and psychological and social burdens as unique challenges that DACA students faced while navigating higher education. Even though many DACA students showed persistence and motivation, they required support from within the college to succeed (O'Neal et al., 2016). This study focused on the experiences of faculty and staff who provided support services to address the unique needs of DACA students. This chapter will introduce the background of the topic which includes the historical, social, and theoretical context of the problem. There will also be an exploration of the researcher's philosophical assumption followed by a statement and understanding of the problem. Furthermore, the purpose and significance of the study, a discussion of the research questions, and a list of important terms with definitions that were used within the study will also be introduced.

## Background

During the presidential campaigns of Obama, Trump, and Biden DACA has been a controversial topic. Up until June 18, 2020, the continuation of DACA was unknown. The Supreme Court considered the hardships of DACA recipients and voted to keep DACA active (DACA Updates, 2020). Although DACA is not a path to citizenship and can be changed at any time, it is still a temporary path to obtain some of the rights and privileges in America for over 800,000 undocumented youth that is eligible for the program (Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 2020). Due to these stressors and circumstances, DACA students have unique needs that require special support from higher education institutions to improve DACA students' educational experiences (Nienhusser, 2018).

Most American colleges and universities have some basic support services that are available to registered students. Some of the most common support services include advising, tutoring, academic coaching, counseling, career services, and financial aid (Choroszy & Meek, 2020). Some colleges even provide federal programs such as TRIO Student Support Services, a program that serves traditionally disadvantaged students in higher education (Quinn et al., 2019). At some colleges, faculty can also be involved in other areas such as advising, mentoring, and overseeing student clubs (McCoy et al., 2020) As the name suggests, support services assist students in various ways, depending on the area of specialty, as they navigate and adjust to college (Garriott & Nisle, 2018; McCoy et al., 2020). The level of support a college offers is often dependent on its budget (Dahlvig et al., 2020). Generally, the budget is determined by college type, student characteristics, and the governing board's guidelines (Dahlvig et al., 2020). Remenick (2019) noted that many non-traditional students succeeded in college due to the unique services and support they received from their institutions. Remenick's (2019) review

supported the importance of providing specific or specialized support for underserved students that may face unique barriers.

Although four-year colleges may have a larger pool of resources, traditionally community colleges are more appealing for non-traditional students because of the flexibility they offer, being more affordable than four-year colleges, and less of a need to be ingrained into the college culture to succeed (Quinn et al., 2019; Remenick, 2019). Traditionally students worry about assimilating into college but Musoba and Nicholas (2020) found that students from marginalized groups were more concerned with receiving support in navigating unfamiliar systems than about assimilating into college. Four-year colleges tend to have more funding per student compared to community colleges, therefore having more money to spend on various student needs such as counseling services, advising, tutoring, and other supports (Yuen, 2020). Because of this difference in funding, community colleges already have inequitable resources compared to four-year colleges, thus emphasizing the importance of addressing the specific needs of special populations such as DACA students (Yuen, 2020).

### **Historical Context**

Before the 1982 Supreme Court case of *Plyer v. Doe*, undocumented children did not have equal rights to attend public school (Alexander & Alexander, 2012). Undocumented children were either barred from attending public schools or in some areas could attend by paying tuition (Olivas, 2012; Stottlemyre, 2015). The decision from *Plyer v. Doe* extended the Equal Protection Clause to allow all children, including those who are undocumented, to a free public K-12 education (Alexander & Alexander, 2012). This right, however, was not afforded to institutions of higher education, leaving undocumented youth with no higher education options after high school, resulting in a lack of motivation to choose a professional career path, and an

additional barrier to acclimation (Benuto et al., 2018). Undocumented youth often do not realize their legal limitations until they are put in situations that are considered “rites of passage”, such as obtaining a driver’s license or planning for college (Benuto et al., 2018). For some, there is the option of DACA but for others, they are put on a different trajectory than their citizen or documented counterparts and left with fewer options for college (Benuto et al., 2018).

In 2001, The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was proposed to address the issue of students in limbo by providing a path to permanent residency for undocumented youth who met specific criteria (DREAM Act, 2001). The DREAM Act failed to pass several times with the most recent version in 2011 that would have allowed students to attend college, restore states' decisions to provide in-state tuition or not, eligibility for work-study programs, and other student loans at the state level (DREAM Act, 2001). In 2012, the Obama Administration created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that provided temporary legal status to undocumented youth (US Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2018). To meet the criteria to apply for DACA, individuals must have arrived in the United States before the age of 16 years, show continuous presence in the U.S. since 2007, be under the age of 31 years in June of 2012, show good moral judgment based on criminal history, and be enrolled in or graduated from high school or GED certificate (USCIS, 2018). DACA is not a law, it is an executive order that provides temporary relief to recipients from deportation. DACA can be rescinded at any time by the President and requires renewal every two years (USCIS, 2018).

Even with the opportunity to attend college, many DACA students struggled with the college search and application processes in high school, resulting in 75% not attending college (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). For students who did pursue further education, there were

financial barriers that complicated the process (Macias, 2018). Due to their legal status, DACA students are ineligible for federal benefits such as federal student loans and in-state tuition rates (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019). For this reason, along with a lack of network support and mentorship, many DACA students attend community colleges where they can pay lower tuition rates and maintain a flexible schedule that would allow them to work (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Person et al., 2017). Over the last few years, states such as California, Texas, New Mexico, and several others have started to offer in-state tuition and state-level financial aid options to DACA students at public institutions of higher education (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019). As some barriers to higher education are being removed, DACA students are still faced with the stress of navigating college and having a meaningful college experience. Previous studies have explored DACA students' experiences of utilizing support services on college campuses and identified unique needs that DACA students face such as language, financial, cultural, and legal barriers (Mwangi et al., 2019; Siemons et al., 2017). This study will add to the literature by exploring the experiences of faculty and staff who provide support services to DACA students through validation.

### **Social Context**

Many undocumented students feel as though they are hiding because even though they have lived their entire lives in the United States, they are not eligible to receive federal aid or in-state tuition for college (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). One North Carolina youth shared her experience in filling out college applications as confusing because she stated: "I'm not undocumented anymore, but I'm also not a citizen or a resident. So what do I put on those lines? And most of the time, I just, either leave it blank, or, or just something like that" (Sahay et al., 2016, p. 55). With several other students sharing similar experiences, Sahay et al., (2016) compressed the participants' confusion and anxiety as "legally, illegal." Those who qualify for

DACA are provided greater access to higher education, but not without constant fear (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). Although some opportunities are available, DACA students still do not have the security of permanent residency since DACA is not a law. Also, DACA recipients or their families could still be deported if the executive order is ever revoked (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). The insecurities impact students' psychological well-being and make it difficult to fully integrate into society (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Consequently, unique legal, psychological, and financial stressors continue to differentiate DACA students from other non-traditional college students.

With the implementation of DACA, undocumented immigrants were given opportunities that provided some semblance of belonging in the United States. DACA recipients could now obtain a driver's license, a social security card, the ability to open a checking account, temporary protection from being deported, and the opportunity to attend college (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Having the availability of higher education open provided an opportunity to develop a better career path not only for themselves but to have a connection to one's community by being a productive member of society (Becerra, 2019). Siemons et al. (2017) found that DACA provided a smoother integration into US society for immigrants who previously felt limited by what they could do. Encouraging DACA recipients to attend college has a causal sequence that economically impacts society (Benuto & Leany, 2018). Supporting DACA students through college leads them to have higher-paying jobs (Gonzales et al., 2018). In turn, they are more likely to contribute economically by increasing their buying and spending power (Gonzales et al., 2018).

An example that shows the importance of helping DACA recipients to succeed in college and contribute to society is evident in a study conducted by Zaida and Kuczewski (2017) that

looked at Loyola University's Medical College in Chicago, the first medical school to accept DACA students. This opportunity allowed immigrants to contribute their diverse perspectives and talent to the college as well as significantly impact the medical care and needs of the immigrant population through trust and overcoming language barriers (Zaida & Kuczewski, 2017). While DACA recipients are ineligible for federal benefits such as federal student loans, Medicaid, and Medicare, they do contribute to federal taxes, ergo contributing to national resources (Zaida & Kuczewski, 2017).

DACA also affects society because it is a political issue that often divides Americans in terms of conservative and liberal or Republican and Democratic (Sprenger, 2018). Some Americans believe that DACA is a start to addressing immigration reform because it is a humanitarian issue whereas others believe DACA recipients as taking jobs from qualified Americans (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sprenger, 2018). The political divide has led to the assumption that those who speak against DACA are discriminating or have anti-immigrant sentiments (Ayon, 2018; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018). Because of some of the political views, DACA students continue to feel the stigma of their legal status and may not openly share their unique issues with support staff to receive the best advice or support (Caicedo, 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018)

### **Theoretical Context**

This study utilized Rendon's (1994) validation theory which suggests that using validation, defined as intentional and proactive affirmation, in and out of the classroom setting with non-traditional students encourages social and academic engagement. Previous studies related to DACA have explored several other theoretical frameworks. This section will briefly introduce validation theory, the ecological framework, critical race theory (CRT), and liminal

legality.

Validation theory considered the changing student demographics in higher education that were occurring in the 1990s (Rendon, 1994). Rendon (1994) noted more women, adults over the age of 25, and immigrants were entering college. There was also an increase in first-generation students, non-racial minorities such as disabled students, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which was a stark difference from the traditional white male profile (Rendon, 1994). In her study, Rendon (1994) generated five important findings. The first finding showed that traditional students expressed few concerns about succeeding in college where as non-traditional and African-American students expressed doubts about succeeding. Second, non-traditional students may need active intervention from others to help them navigate college (Rendon, 1994). Third, Rendon (1994) found that success in the first year of college correlated with student involvement in campus life and validation from internal and external agents in academic and interpersonal ways. The fourth finding showed that with academic and interpersonal validation from in-class and out-of-class agents, vulnerable non-traditional students could become successful learners (Rendon, 1994). The fifth finding highlighted that involvement in college life is not as easy for non-traditional students and validation may be the missing link that supports involvement to occur (Rendon, 1994).

Ecological framework theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner and suggests that an individual's environment plays an important role in their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Siemons et al. (2017) conducted a study exploring the mental health and well-being of Latino immigrants who were eligible for DACA. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework was used to analyze participant experiences of DACA's influence on the community, interpersonal, and individual-level determinants of mental health and wellbeing (Siemons et al., 2017). Siemons et

al. (2017) found that participants experienced significant mental health challenges related to reduced social integration and lower self-esteem due to being undocumented. DACA provided social integration opportunities and improved self-esteem about one's self, therefore improving overall well-being (Siemons et al., 2017). Although mental health and well-being improved in social environments due to DACA status, negative mental health and well-being were reported in the home environment due to increased responsibilities and mixed legal status (Siemons et al., 2017).

Critical race theory (CRT) is the study of the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado et al., 2017). CRT addresses issues related to race in terms of economics, history, setting, self-interest, and emotions (Delgado et al., 2017). One of the major constructs of CRT is social justice, a factor that is concerned with inequalities of wealth, environment, race, and gender (Delgado et al., 2017). CRT is a framework that may be used in studies that address issues related to minority or marginalized groups in society. Macias (2018) conducted a qualitative study that looked at how DACA recipients navigate barriers such as financial, social, and economic through the lens of CRT. Using this framework, Macias (2018) found that restrictive legislation created many financial barriers such as preventing DACA students from applying for federal loans.

Liminal legality is a concept described by Menjivar (2006) as an in-between category to describe immigration status. Liminal legality is further characterized as being temporary, ambiguous, and multidirectional (Menjivar, 2006). In a study conducted by Nienhusser and Oshio (2020), the theory of liminal legality is used to show how DACA has created a liminal status for undocumented and DACA individuals. Nienhusser and Oshio (2020) portray how DACA provides possibilities and impossibilities that impact higher education experiences.

### **Situation to Self**

My family moved to the United States when I was three years old. Being a child, I had no control over where my parents settled. I arrived in the United States with a Green Card and was a permanent resident until I was 19 years old when I finally became a U. S. citizen. Although my experience cannot be compared to that of an undocumented child, I can relate to growing up in a different country where navigating can be difficult. There are many stressors and social disruptions that are a part of assimilating to a new culture. When one's legal status is added to that, the assimilation process becomes that much more difficult. For me to be successful academically, I recall the support and special guidance of a few select teachers that made an impact on my choices. The most effective supporters were the ones that understood my cultural perspective and did not try to fit me into a box.

Just as the realities for DACA students are subjective, so is the perception of support services provided by those on campus. The ontological assumption states that reality is seen through many different views and can be explored as themes that develop in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several studies have captured the realities of navigating college from the perspective of DACA students, but few have regarded the viewpoint of those who are providing support services (Benuto et al., 2018; Casas, et al., 2019; Ee & Gandara, 2020; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Kwon et al., 2019). DACA students endure difficulties financially, socially, and legally making it difficult to fully assimilate whilst living in fear (Alif et al., 2020; Andrade, 2019a, 2019b; Benuto et al., 2018; Lauby, 2018). Ontological assumptions are often applied to subjective concepts such as the reality of existence and evil (Margolis & Laurence, 2019). The concepts can also be more material or physical, such as actual objects or social concepts (Laitinen & Ikaheimo, 2011). My first ontological assumption is that DACA students have a

reality that may not be known to all the support staff that works with them. My second ontological assumption is that DACA students do not know how long the executive order will last, creating anxiety. My third ontological assumption is that DACA students may be working while in school to help support paying for college. Those providing support services need to understand this reality and the financial burden DACA students face to better support them.

Axiology is the science of values that makes a distinction between what is good as a means and what is good as an end (Bahm, 1993). My axiological assumption for DACA students is that they value education because it is a means to a better life (Sellami et al., 2020). My second axiological assumption is that parents of DACA students risked coming to the United States or leaving their home countries to give their children opportunities; therefore, their children are trying to take advantage of the opportunity that was given to them. It is also important to mention that my parents came to the United States with the hopes of having a better life for our family. My parents highly valued getting a college degree because it not only made the most of their effort to start over in a new country, but it was a step towards a better future.

Epistemology is concerned with the concept of human knowledge and ways of knowing (Hofer & Pintrich, 2002). In a phenomenological study, knowledge and reality will be shaped by participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My epistemological assumption is that those providing student support services should be knowledgeable of the unique stressors and problems that DACA students are faced with. Knowing the unique set of needs that should be considered when providing support services may lead to personal and academic success in college (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Slife & Williams, 1995). My knowledge of this phenomenon will be derived from the subjective experiences of what participants share in their interviews, photovoice, and focus groups.

My paradigm for this study is as a social constructivist. The social constructivist paradigm will help to see how the interactions participants from this study have with DACA students impact their realities related to college success. Constructivism suggests that reality is a subjective matter and there is no single reality. Knowledge is derived from shared experiences rather than individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a constructivist paradigm, meaning is gained through interactions with each other (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The social constructivist paradigm applies to the topic of faculty and staff providing support services to DACA students because each participant has their experience of providing support and gains meaning from their interaction with DACA students. More specifically, an individual working with a DACA student may not realize that the student requires a different level of support than traditional students on campus might. For this reason, the view of validation may be subjective. From my experience, DACA students have expressed that they cannot talk about their status or reach out to certain supports. By improving faculty and staff's ability to provide more focused and validating support to DACA students, it is possible students may feel more included, motivated, and accepted on campus. This validation may increase their likelihood to succeed in their academic goals.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem was that DACA students faced unique legal, financial, and cultural challenges in higher education and it was unknown if they were receiving effective support services that addressed these challenges through validation to elicit interpersonal and academic success (Benuto et al., 2018; Jones, 2020; Lauby, 2018). For reasons of financial difficulties and often being the only one in their family to attend college, many DACA recipients fit into similar categories as low-income or first-generation students, thus risk dropping out of college or not

attending to begin with (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Generally, students who do not complete college are less likely to get higher-paying jobs, feel job satisfaction, and are more likely to turn to criminal activity such as theft (Dennison, 2020). Current studies fall short of understanding the experiences and perceptions of those who are in a position to support DACA students in college (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b; Casas et al., 2019; Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017; Jones, 2020; Mwangi et al., 2019). By having a better understanding of what DACA students need, support service providers can better support DACA students to succeed in college and enter higher-paying jobs. This study fills the gap in the literature by capturing the experiences of how faculty and staff in a community college provided support services to DACA students through the use of validation to improve services offered and training or professional development to better serve the DACA student population.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. At this stage in the research, support services were defined as any help provided by faculty or staff at the college that facilitates a sense of belonging and promotes a sense of pride in their status (Mwangi et al., 2019; Santellano, 2019). The theory that guided this study was Rendon's (1994) validation theory which stated that students who are underrepresented and marginalized do not integrate into college as well as those who are considered more "traditional" (Rendon, 1994). In South Carolina, DACA students are underrepresented and face unique stressors such as financial barriers, legal concerns, and psychological distress (Jones, 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). Since DACA students fall into categories similar to that of non-traditional and low-income students, DACA students may benefit from

receiving in and out-of-class validation to see themselves as capable learners (Rendon, 1994). Validation theory guided this study by gathering information on how college agents who provided support services utilized validation as a form of assistance in working with DACA students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has a practical, theoretical, and empirical significance that will add to the current body of research regarding DACA students and community college supports. This section will briefly address each component as it relates to the current study.

#### **Practical**

The findings from this study may provide improved support services at community colleges to address the specific needs of DACA students. Most general resources on college campuses are open to all students, but due to the unique situation DACA students are in, it is important they feel understood and have a safe place to receive the help and support required (Caicedo, 2020; Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017). The findings from this study may also impact lawmakers at the state level as well as policymakers at the college and state tech levels to develop programs or interventions to promote success through validation (Hallett et al., 2020). It is also important to mention that the outcomes and findings can also influence community understanding beyond the college of DACA students and those who provide support services to them. The community includes those who reside in the same city the college is located in as well as other students and peers who attend with DACA students.

#### **Empirical**

Previous studies have focused on the perspectives, experiences, and voices of DACA and undocumented students and their challenges in getting into college as well as their experiences in

college (Benuto et al., 2018; Casas et al., 2019; Jones, 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Andrade (2019a) examined DACA students' experiences of validation and support on campus and Mwangi et al., (2019) explored the general responses of university leaders regarding the termination of DACA. Nienhusser (2018) investigated the experiences of institutional agents who impact the implementation of policies at higher education institutions through sensemaking and policy implementers. Even though this study focused on support services from the perspective of institutional agents, it did not use validation theory and focused on how these agents influence policies (Nienhusser, 2018). No study has examined the practice of faculty and staff and their experiences of providing support services to DACA students. Further research is needed to understand how colleges are experiencing interactions with DACA students and to what extent support services are impacting DACA student success from the perspective of those providing support. The proposed study relates to the body of research by providing a specific look at how faculty and staff at community colleges can improve the support they provide to DACA students to help them succeed academically.

### **Theoretical**

Preexisting studies have used validation theory to explore the topic of DACA students in higher education but have done so through the perspective of the student's experiences (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b). In another study conducted by Hallett et al. (2020), validation theory was used to show how a comprehensive college transition program can create an academically validating experience for racially minoritized and first-generation college students. The current study will add to the theoretical research by using validation theory to study how faculty and staff, or validating agents, provide support services to DACA students from the perspective of community college faculty and staff. In a study conducted by Stebleton et al. (2017), validation

theory was used to explore the experiences of immigrant college students at four-year universities. Stebleton et al. (2017) found that students' experience of marginality or sense of belonging was heavily influenced by their interactions with faculty and student affairs staff. By utilizing validation theory to explore the experiences of faculty and staff, the current study may add to the scope of validation theory by focusing on DACA students who attend community college, specifically in a more restrictive state like South Carolina. Restrictive states are those that hold strict or more hostile state policies toward undocumented or DACA individuals' access to higher education (Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020).

### **Research Questions**

Using Rendon's (1994) validation theory, three of the six elements were utilized to understand if support services are meeting the needs of DACA students at a community college in the southeast.

**RQ 1:** In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validation agents for DACA students?

The first research question was chosen to address the concern of responsibility and how much power individuals at the college have to support DACA students. Mwangi et al. (2019) examined statements made by college leaders to determine their level of support for DACA students. Few studies have captured the phenomenon from the perspective of support service providers. The present study fills the gap in research by examining the experience of college employees who provided direct support to DACA students and in what ways they provided validation during the process. Rendon's (1994) theory suggests that as students are validated as valuable members of their college community, they foster personal and social development.

**RQ 2:** What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus?

The second research question allows participants to consider the importance of their roles because trust and understanding of the unique experiences of DACA students are necessary (Stebbleton et al., 2017). DACA students come to college with unique barriers, some of which are based on their financial, legal, and psychological stressors (Siemons et al., 2017). For many non-traditional students, navigating the college process has been difficult because of the lack of role models or friends attending within their communities (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). With little mentorship, institutional validation may be a key factor in attaining a meaningful and successful college experience (Rendon, 1994). The current study adds to the theoretical literature on how validation supports DACA student success from the perspective of those providing support services.

**RQ 3:** How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success?

The third research question was chosen because it highlights the importance of not only doing well academically but focusing on the supports outside of the classroom to help develop the whole college experience (Rendon & Munoz, 2011; Stebleton et al., 2017). In Rendon's (1994) seminal work, it was founded that interpersonal validation from in and out-of-class agents played a big role in fostering college success. Students who felt supported and validated by friends, staff, faculty, and family in more social and interpersonal areas felt more capable and socially adjusted (Rendon, 1994). Most importantly, Rendon (1994) noted that non-traditional students did not perceive involvement as themselves reaching out or taking initiative, but expected others to take an active role in assisting them.

These research questions focus on helping those who are providing support to DACA students consider if they are truly addressing the unique needs of the students or providing the same support they would for a more traditional student that may not be facing the same challenges (Rendon & Munoz, 2011).

### **Definitions**

1. *DACA* – The acronym for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that provides limited legal status for undocumented immigrants who meet a certain criterion (Casas et al., 2019).
2. *Support Services* – Targeted programs and services at a college to support students (Mwangi et al., 2019). These can be in the form of emotional support or practical assistance (Kwon et al., 2019).
3. *Undocumented* – Individuals who arrived in the United States without legal authorization and do not hold legal status (Benuto et al., 2018).
4. *Success* – Completing set academic goals based on one's desired outcomes (Cachia et al., 2018)
5. *Educational opportunities* – Access to higher education so individuals can become contributing members of the community by entering the workforce (Becerra, 2019).
6. *Validation* - Validation is the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in-class and out-of-class agents (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011).

### **Summary**

The recent increase in undocumented immigrants has brought with it many children who are greatly impacted by the choices and policies that are made for them. The development of DACA provided undocumented youth with the opportunity to dream and create a future for

themselves by having access to higher education. With the temporary nature of DACA, many students live in fear of not knowing what to expect. DACA students face unique challenges that require effective support. Previous studies have shown how DACA students perceive the support they receive in college (Casas et al., 2019; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Kwon et al., 2019; Vaquera et al., 2017). The gap in the research pertains to how providers of support services perceive their ability to address the unique needs of DACA students to help them be successful in college. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand community college faculty and staff members' experiences of providing support services to DACA recipients. For this study support services were defined as any help provided by faculty or staff at the college that facilitated a sense of belonging and promoted a sense of pride in their status (Mwangi et al., 2019; Santellano, 2019). The theory guiding this study was Rendon's (1994) validation theory which stated that students who are underrepresented and marginalized do not integrate into college as well as those who are considered more "traditional" without intentional and proactive affirmation. This chapter will further expound on validation theory and explore the current literature on DACA.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The premise for Rendon's validation theory suggests that higher education institutions must change their culture to better meet the needs of a more diverse student population (Rendon, 1994). Validation is the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in-class and out-of-class agents (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). In Rendon's original work, an agent is described as an individual who provides validation either in the classroom setting or out of the classroom setting (Rendon, 1994). In-class agents can be faculty, classmates, lab instructors, and teaching assistants (Rendon, 1994). Out-of-class agents can be family, significant others, friends, college staff including faculty that may meet students outside the classroom, counselors, advisors, tutors, those in financial aid, career services, or any other area of the college (Rendon, 1994).

According to Rendon (1994), when external college agents took the initiative to validate students academically or interpersonally, the students began to believe they could be successful. In a 1994 study, Rendon explored the responses towards validation that occurred in and out of the classroom of traditional and non-traditional students that include minorities/non-White, women, immigrants, adult students over the age of 25, low-income, first-generation, and non-race (disability, sexual orientation, and lifestyle) individuals. Rendon (1994) found that validation that occurred out of class was equally as important as the validation that occurred in class in fostering academic and social success.

### **Elements of Validation**

Validation theory has six elements that are needed to fully develop students academically and interpersonally to succeed in college (Rendon, 1994). The first element suggests that validation is an enabling, confirming, and supportive process that is initiated by validating agents in and out of the classroom to foster academic and interpersonal development. The second element states that when validation is present, students not only feel capable to learn, but they experience self-worth, acceptance, and feel valuable. If validation is lacking, students feel crippled, silenced, subordinate, and mistrusted. The third element identifies validation as a prerequisite to student development. The fourth element of the theory states that validation can occur both in class and out of class. In-class validating agents are faculty, mentors, aids, and classmates. Out-of-class agents can be significant others, family, friends, or college staff which sometimes includes faculty. The fifth element suggests that validation is not an end, but rather a developmental process; therefore, the more validation a student receives, the richer the academic and interpersonal experience. The sixth element proposes that validation is most effective when offered early in the college experience and should continue throughout (Rendon, 1994).

Rendon posited that traditional students were more likely to seek support when needed and get involved on campus on their own, whereas nontraditional students were more reluctant to reach out to support services and access resources (Rendon, 1994). Students who were passive or not familiar with how the system works required active validation from in and out-of-class agents (Rendon, 1994). Students who do not get in-class validation may rely on their out-of-class validating agents to get through, but not all students received out-of-class validation (Rendon, 1994). Rendon (1994) identified some non-traditional students as being a vulnerable population because they may be discouraged by family and friends to attend college for various reasons. This lack of validation from out-of-class agents can negatively impact a student's college experience if they also feel they are not getting validation from in-class agents (Rendon, 1994). Rendon (1994) refers to these students "as among some of the most fragile who, in the absence of both in- and out-of-class validation, will likely leave college" (p. 46). As a result of her study, Rendon (1994) found that faculty and staff could transform vulnerable students into learners excited about college by better training faculty and staff in working with diverse populations, training faculty to validate students, creating a validating classroom, and creating a therapeutic college community.

### **Types of Validation**

Rendon (1994) identified two types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs when in and out-of-class agents deliver assistance to students in a way that provides the student with confidence to learn (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). Within the classroom, academic validation can be achieved in several different ways such as, when faculty help students to identify their strengths, invite successful guest speakers who have similar backgrounds to the students, or other experiences that affirm the possibilities that students can be

successful or seen as powerful learners (Rendon & Munoz, 2011). In validating classrooms, attention is given to the curriculum so that students with various backgrounds can relate it to their histories (Rendon & Munoz, 2011). Validating classrooms offers support from faculty and encouraging comments among peers (Rendon & Munoz, 2011).

Interpersonal validation occurs when in and out-of-class agents help to foster a student's personal development and social adjustment (Rendon & Munoz, 2011). Interpersonal validation can be accomplished when agents accept students for being themselves outside of their role as college students rather than expecting them to disconnect from their past (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). One way this can be done is to host campus events that encourage family participation, foster cultural pride, meet students' interests, use past experiences as a source of knowledge, and teach various coping, stress management, and decision-making skills (Rendon, 1994).

Validation theory has been grounded in studies that examine the college experience for minority students such as Hispanic, LGBTQ, and other underserved student populations (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Hallett et al., 2020; Sterzing & Gartner, 2020). Validation theory has also been used to explore how foreign-born immigrants interact with college staff to provide insight into their experiences and how higher education professionals can help these students feel included and strengthen their connection to the institution (Stebleton et al., 2017). In a study conducted by Andrade (2019a), validation theory was used along with socioemotional development to study community college students' reactions to whether or not college administrators and instructors provided validation after President Trump's 2016 victory. Although validation theory was used, it was explored from the perspective of students and not from faculty or staff.

The current study contributed to validation theory by extending the theory to DACA students in community college as they possess unique needs based on their legal circumstances that other nontraditional students may not identify with (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018; Caicedo, 2020). This study also explored the validation that was provided through the perspectives of college faculty and staff, which other studies have not done. Validation theory was applied to how faculty and staff provide support services to DACA students at a community college. Rendon (1994) found that non-traditional students identified the experience of involvement as others taking the initiative to assist. Based on Rendon's observations, even if a DACA student seeks support services, the initiative of validating and supporting the student must be provided by college agents. This study explored how college agents were incorporating validating elements in their interactions with DACA students.

### **Related Literature**

According to the Pew Research Institute, the United States has over 10 million undocumented immigrants (Budiman, 2020). Up until 2012, undocumented youth did not have much of a future in the United States beyond high school as college was not a legal option. As of 2016, approximately 700,000 undocumented youth were approved for DACA, 200,000 of which enrolled in higher education (Casas et al., 2019). The majority of DACA recipients reside in California, Texas, Illinois, and New York. These states have passed legislation allowing undocumented youth to qualify for in-state tuition at public institutions (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2019). As these states encourage access to higher education, they are also more apt to provide supports to DACA students (Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). At present, Virginia is the only state in the South that offers in-state tuition to DACA recipients. In South Carolina, undocumented youth are not permitted to attend public colleges, but DACA recipients

are (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016; u Lead Network, 2020). Even though DACA students have access to higher education in South Carolina, they continue to face many barriers and possess unique needs that may require additional supports (Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020; Siemons et al., 2017).

The preexisting literature on DACA students has delved deeply into shedding light on the barriers that DACA recipients face in trying to access and apply to college (Lauby, 2018; Negron-Gonzales, 2017; Sahay et al., 2016). These studies have addressed the experiences that DACA students face in their pursuit of higher education. This section will explore some of the literature that looks at financial barriers, legal concerns, political ramifications, and psychological distress that DACA students face upon entering higher education. Understanding the unique needs that DACA students struggle with aligns with understanding the experiences of faculty and staff who provide support services to DACA students. This section will conclude with an overview of relevant literature related to student services, particularly in community colleges.

### **Financial Barriers**

Much like other nontraditional, first-generation, or low-income students, DACA recipients struggle with the costs associated with attending college (Lauby, 2018). Since DACA's enactment, several states have passed legislation allowing DACA students more opportunities to attend college by offering in-state tuition, state-level loans, and other scholarships (Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Jones, 2020; NCSL, 2019). Although it seems that it is easier for DACA students to attend college, much of the research on DACA students are focused on states like California and New York due to the larger undocumented immigrant population (NCSL, 2019; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). Presently, only 18 states offer in-state tuition to

DACA recipients and even fewer states allow undocumented immigrants to apply to public colleges (NCSL, 2019). Southern states continue to be more restrictive to DACA recipients compared to states like California, Illinois, and New York as they do not offer in-state tuition rates (NCSL, 2019; Ngo & Astudillo, 2019; Person et al., 2017). States such as California have not only created policies to allow in-state tuition, but they also provide DACA students the opportunity to apply for various types of financial aid (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019). Even if some students can overcome this barrier by attending a community college where they are likely to pay less per credit hour, DACA students must still manage this financial burden with other livelihood obligations (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Macias, 2018). One of the biggest challenges is balancing work and school schedules; students need time to study but also often need extra hours at work to make enough to cover tuition, books, and transportation (Klobodu et al., 2021). Another obligation for many DACA students is family responsibility and their role in the family. Many DACA students may live in mixed-status families, meaning they live in a household with different legal statuses that can include undocumented members, those with DACA status, and those who are permanent residents or have citizenship (Abrego, 2019). In mixed-status families, a large portion of the financial and daily responsibilities may fall on the DACA student when other members do not have legal status because they can obtain a work permit or a driver's license to run errands and drive other family members (Abrego, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2019). Another responsibility for children of immigrants may include language brokering, where bilingual children and adolescents serve as translators for the family because parents do not speak or understand English as well (Lopez, 2020). Consequently, important discussions and decisions may fall on DACA students who become unofficial translators for their parents, unlike many of their more-traditional counterparts (Tuttle & Johnson, 2018). Some studies suggest that

language brokering correlates with higher academic success (Simon, 2019; Tuttle & Johnson, 2018) whereas other studies highlight issues such as depression and anxiety that may develop from the stress that comes with language brokering or even how it can strain academic development (Crafter et al., 2017; Rainey et al., 2021; Weisskirch et al., 2021).

Attending a community college also provides the flexibility for DACA students to work so they can earn money while attending school (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Ngo and Astudillo (2019) found that offering financial support to students increased enrollment and improved student outcomes in college. Although these results are specific to California, they highlight how reducing one barrier can improve the overall college experience. Previous studies highlight the issue of financial barriers and even how colleges have addressed those needs, but they cannot be generalized to all areas of the United States (Lauby, 2018; Ngo & Astudillo, 2019; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). The present study adds to the current research as it is conducted at a community college in South Carolina, a more restrictive state in terms of the financial burden for DACA students and limitations. One example of this restriction is that South Carolina community colleges allow DACA students to apply for admission to the college but the state does not allow DACA students to apply for Federal Financial Aid (NCSL, 2019). This restriction makes it financially more difficult for students to consider attending college (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019). Also, even if a student can pay for tuition, South Carolina charges out-of-state tuition to DACA recipients, regardless of how long they have lived in the state (NCSL, 2019).

### **Legal Concerns**

One of the primary goals of DACA is to reduce the fear of identifying oneself as “undocumented” (Becerra, 2019). DACA provides a period of temporary legal status as individuals are given a social security number and a deferral from being deported (Jones, 2020).

Even though individuals who receive DACA are temporarily unnoticed by immigration enforcement, applying for DACA publicly identifies that these individuals are in the country illegally (Becerra, 2019). Many recipients fear applying for DACA because they believe it will also put their families in jeopardy by “outing” their illegal status (Becerra, 2019). For many DACA recipients living in a mixed-status family is not unusual (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Mixed-status families are those where some members may be undocumented, some with DACA, and some may even be U. S. citizens (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). DACA recipients may be safe from deportation but their DACA status does not apply to their family members who may not have DACA (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). This issue explored by Becerra (2019) and Patler and Pirtle (2018) aligns with Roth’s (2019) study that shows having liminal legality creates a contradictory message for DACA recipients. Sofia, a participant in Roth’s (2019) study states:

My life has changed, but we still struggle. There are so many things that I can’t do, even though I have DACA. Even though I have DACA doesn’t mean that I cannot be deported. I still feel anxious about it. (p. 3554)

Roth (2019) identifies the contradictions of DACA as a form of legal violence against these individuals. The beneficiaries of DACA are permitted to work and attend school while having a social security number, but with the underlying message that these opportunities can be revoked at any time (Roth, 2019). As some forms of integration are provided into society, DACA recipients are blocked from fully assimilating (Becerra, 2019; Roth, 2019). The purpose of DACA was to legally help individuals to progress but with so many uncertainties, they are left in a state of limited legality (Roth, 2019).

Another consideration regarding legality is that those who have entered the United States without following the legal processes are breaking the law (Farrell, 2018; USCIS, n.d.).

Although this study is not intended to take any political view or opinion on DACA, it acknowledges there are different perspectives regarding the sensitive nature of the topic (Farrell, 2018). Other studies do not discuss these natural differences in opinions, but they are important to mention because a DACA student may not know the views of faculty or staff that they interact with regularly. Some may take the view that since undocumented immigrants did not follow the legal process, they should not be afforded benefits as many immigrants did enter the United States through the naturalization process (Farrell, 2018). Others take a different view and see those who qualify for DACA as innocent because they arrived as young children who were brought to the U.S. by their parents or guardians and not of their own will (Farrell, 2018). Consequently, Patler and Pirtle (2018) found that many DACA students do not disclose their status to others on campus for the fear of being found out and possibly deported. This study was conducted in California where several supports have been identified and legislation exists to help undocumented students. This is not the case in many other states including South Carolina where students may not have as much legal support (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016; u Lead Network, 2020). This unique need would be important for college agents to understand when providing support services to DACA students.

### ***Stigma***

Amuedo-Dorantes and Puttitanun (2016) suggested that programs such as DACA may encourage more illegal immigration, thus further increasing the number of undocumented individuals in the United States. However, they found that after DACA was instituted, the number of undocumented immigrants declined (Amuedo-Dorantes & Puttitanun, 2016). Several possible factors were mentioned that are not directly related to DACA that may have impacted the change. Amuedo-Dorantes and Puttitanun (2016) did not, however, account for the change in

administration in 2021 and other immigration policies that played a part in the last two presidential elections. Amuedo-Dorantes and Puttitanun's (2016) study also concurs that there are various views on DACA and some of those views could be present on college campuses. Some DACA students have expressed worry that others think of them as being criminals or taking seats and jobs from those who are citizens or permanent residents (Sprenger, 2018). A study conducted by Kam et al., (2020), found that many youths perceived their identities differently after learning of their undocumented status. One of the major themes that emerged in this study was being more cautious (Kam et al., 2020). Participants reported they felt more cautious of their status because of the undocumented stigma and the threat of detainment or deportation, leading them to conceal their status (Kam et al., 2020). One female participant from this study stated, "I was afraid of speaking about the topic, and you know, I was mostly under the shadows pretty much most of the time" (Kam et al., 2020, p. 276). These types of reactions may come from other students, faculty and staff, or the community (Amuedo-Dorantes & Puttitanun, 2016; Kam et al., 2020). For those who are in the position to provide support services to DACA students, being aware of the stigma and legal stressors they face highlights the unique needs they have that other students may not when they arrive at college.

Getrich (2021) conducted a study that took a different approach to stigma regarding undocumented and DACA individuals. Previous studies have shown how many DACA students hide in the shadows in fear of their status being disclosed and the stigma of being "illegal" (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018; Caicedo, 2020; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sahay et al., 2016). Getrich (2021) built on her previous study from 2016 by looking at the different levels of political engagement by DACA recipients. Getrich (2021) noted that starting in 2001 when the DREAM Act movement began, one million immigrant protesters came out,

some of who had never been politically active. With many undocumented or DACA-status immigrants who still did not feel safe to “come out”, more everyday forms of activism were encouraged such as sharing their stories with others (Getrich, 2021). Activists organized campaigns to combat the stigma of undocumented status and move away from the DREAMer label (Getrich, 2021). Rather than using mass mobilizations such as protests and lobbying, these undocumented immigrants were encouraged to openly disclose their status as a way of reducing the stigma and being seen as individuals with identities (Getrich, 2021). Also, local activities were initiated such as these students creating groups in their communities (Getrich, 2021). As political engagement for DACA recipients has shifted over time, it appears that even everyday activism has an impact on the social stigma that these individuals live with (Getrich, 2021).

### **Political Ramifications**

Regarding politics, immigration is a topic that can cause a divide among party lines as it is often assumed that when a republican president is in office, immigration policy is firm compared to when a democratic president is in office (Danieller, 2019; Whitaker & Doces, 2020). Regardless of the political or personal views that individuals may have, DACA recipients are living in American society and attending American colleges. Whether or not individuals believe they should have these opportunities or rights, the fact of the matter is there are over 600,000 DACA students who are currently in these situations with many more that are eligible (Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 2020). One major political ramification regarding DACA is whether or not it will be revoked, become a law, or continue in its current state. Previous studies have looked at how DACA status and politics impact college success. Moreno et al., (2021) found that political outcome expectations played a role in the intent to persist of college students. Specifically, the expectation for DACA to continue and for recipients to remain in the United

States were a positive predictor of higher intent to persist for DACA students (Moreno, et al., 2021). In a separate study, Patler and Pirtle (2018) found that having DACA status significantly reduced levels of distress, negative emotions, and worry about deportation by 76-87% compared to respondents without DACA status.

It is not uncommon for immigrants to feel more secure during a democratic presidency and more threatened about their status and deportation during a republican presidency (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). This, however, is not always the case as former President Obama was known as “deporter-in-chief” by immigrant rights advocates (Hing, 2018). Even though he deported a large number of undocumented immigrants during his presidency, he also worked to enact DACA on behalf of young, undocumented immigrants who grew up in the United States (Hing, 2018). Much of the immigration debate continued as former President Trump took office and initiated building the Border Wall, ICE enforcement, and travel bans (Hing, 2018). The debate regarding welcoming immigrants, limiting how many can enter, or completely banning them from entering America can go as far back as the country’s first president, George Washington (Osborne, 2016). Since DACA is an executive order, it is not permanent (USCIS, 2018). Making DACA permanent will depend on whether a current sitting president will advocate for it to be a law and if congress will agree to pass legislation to replace DACA or make a permanent solution (Volpp, 2019). Until this occurs, DACA students seem to have valid insecurities (Moreno et al., 2021; Patler & Pirtle, 2018) as DACA could be just as easily rescinded, as attempted in 2017 by former President Trump (Volpp, 2019).

It is often assumed that DACA applies to Hispanic and Mexican immigrants simply for the reason that they border the United States (Buenavista, 2018). Although a larger number of immigrants that are entering the United States are crossing the Mexico-U.S. border, DACA

applies to immigrants from all countries and nationalities the same (Buenavista, 2018; USCIS, 2018). Asians are the second-largest immigrant group entering the United States (Buenavista, 2018; Lee, 2015). Looking back to the start of the Dreamer Act in the late 1990s into the new millennium, many Asian Americans were also impacted by immigration laws (Lee, 2015). The Immigration and Nationality Act increased highly skilled workers who were granted an H-1B visa, allowing them temporary residency in the United States while they worked for companies that required their specialized skills (Lee, 2015). Jose Antonio Vargas, an undocumented immigrant from the Philippines, was brought to the U.S. at a young age and grew up in California. In 2011, when he publicly announced his status, became a leading figure in the immigrant rights campaign and was invited to speak before the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2013 on immigration reform (Lee, 2015). Often other minorities, in particular Asians, are labeled “model minorities”, giving them a positive stereotype compared to Latinos, whose stereotypes characterize them as criminal and “living off the system” (Buenavista, 2018). The model minority construct creates a false notion that Asian Americans achieve success solely on strict values and hard work. There may be times when these contexts are true, but generalizing the model minority context is problematic for Asians and other minorities as it assumes those who are not model minorities are “bad” immigrants (Buenavista, 2018). As these stereotypes are embedded into society, many undocumented Asians who are DACA eligible do not apply, leaving them underrepresented and sometimes invisible to community supports (Buenavista, 2018; Kim & Yellow Horse, 2018; Sudhinaraset et al., 2017).

### **Psychological Stressors**

Results from a study conducted by Patler and Pirtle (2018) indicated that psychological wellness is predicted by DACA status. Immigrants that transitioned from undocumented status to

DACA status showed improvement in their emotional well-being (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). College students who received DACA status reported less distress, fewer negative emotions, and less worry about deportation compared to respondents without DACA status (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Conversely, Mallet and Bedolla (2019) found that announcing the recession of DACA led to negative health outcomes, including anxiety and depression. For DACA students, this is a possibility because it is a temporary status that requires renewal or can be revoked at any time (USCIS, 2018). Both studies concurred with their findings that legal status impacts psychological stressors (Mallet & Bedolla, 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). These researchers also support the need for the current study in that many DACA students' stressors are situational and uniquely differentiate them from other college students. Mallet and Bedolla (2019) recognize that their study was conducted in California, a state that has been more generous in policies regarding undocumented immigrants. They suggest these findings can be further generalized if similar studies are conducted in less hospitable states.

Presently, DACA is still enacted and has not been rescinded, but the future of DACA continues to be uncertain because it is not a law, but rather an executive order that requires renewal from any current president (DACA Updates, 2020; USCIS, 2020). This study does not account for these factors in an educational setting, but rather the general impact on wellness and health. DACA students live with the uncertainty of what may happen to their status as well as the status of their family members (Kwon et al., 2019). Siemons et al. (2017) found that students who had DACA status felt they could better connect with social and peer support, which led to better mental health and well-being. Some respondents reported that having DACA increased feelings of uncertainty, leading to stress and anxiety. This was further explained as fear of making mistakes because then the consequences would be greater, such as deportation for

themselves or other family members (Siemons, et al., 2017). These studies emphasize that DACA students report more positive feelings when they have support systems such as access to mental health services, including peer-led counseling services (Kwon et al., 2019; Siemons et al., 2017). The unique situations that lead to emotional and psychological stressors for DACA students are documented; however, further research is needed to gather the perspective of college faculty and staff who provide support to DACA students and how they respond to those needs.

In a 2021 study, Moreno et al. explored the lived psychological experiences of Latinx immigrants who were DACA recipients during the 2017-2019 political debates. Moreno et al., (2021) referenced Bjorklund (2018) who also found that DACA recipients experienced various psychological and social difficulties on college campuses during the highly visible political debates. Of the psychological experiences found in this study, 100% of the participants expressed stressors during the political debates including financial stress, immigration stress, mixed-status family stress, and academic stress (Moreno et al., 2021). Fear of not knowing what the future holds was expressed by 90% of the participants, specifically the fear of being deported to a country they did not see as home (Moreno et al., 2021). Anxiety was expressed by 70% of the participants and depression by 30% (Moreno et al., 2021). This study also looked at strengths that may have evolved during these debates for DACA students and found that many expressed the motivation to persist through their education and career paths by trying to keep a positive outlook, develop DACA/ethnic pride, family and social support, religiosity/spirituality, and social advocacy (Moreno et al., 2021). Overall Moreno et al., (2021) found that even if the specific psychological experiences may be a little different, 100% of participants felt some form of stress that came with the political turmoil and uncertainty around DACA. As this study

validates the psychological stressors faced by DACA students, further research is needed to explore the campus supports that address these needs for DACA students.

Siemons et al., (2017) found that regardless of immigration status, immigrants face significant stress during and following migration. A significant part of migrating and acculturating to a new country is the identity one develops (Choi et al., 2020). One's racial and ethnic identity can impact their psychological well-being in various ways depending on different factors such as age at the time of immigration, socioeconomic status, and experiences with discrimination (Choi et al., 2020). Paschero and McBrien (2021) add to the current research by studying the identity and sense of belonging in the United States for DACA recipients before and after they obtained DACA status. Some of the experiences that participants faced before they had DACA included language barriers, discrimination, school/financial challenges, and equality; each of these experiences contributed to the shaping of each participant's identity (Paschero & McBrien, 2021). Overall the participants expressed their feeling of being outsiders and isolated from traditional teenage American experiences such as applying for a job, internship, or driver's license (Paschero & McBrien, 2021). Obtaining DACA status brought some level of relief for the participants, but with unique challenges that American counterparts could not relate to such as applying for college with FAFSA or qualifying for health care through the Affordable Care Act (Paschero & McBrien, 2021). Even with DACA status, these students face fear and uncertainty about their legal status and how it could potentially change (Paschero & McBrien, 2021). Having DACA status impacted how each participant's identity was shaped differently. All participants identified as American and felt it was their home. Many did not have any memory of their birth country but did continue to hold on to the culture of their home country (Paschero & McBrien, 2021). Several studies have captured how legal status, being undocumented, having DACA, or

being a resident/citizen, impacts psychological well-being (Moreno et al., 2021; Paschero & McBrien, 2021; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Siemons et al., 2017). Further research is needed to address how support services can better assist DACA students in college by understanding their unique circumstances.

Rosenberg et al., (2020) also conducted a study that explored the relationship between identity formation and DACA. Identity formation for DACA students that comes with normal developmental challenges becomes more complicated as these youth realize their opportunities are narrowed due to their “DACA limited” status and uncertain future (Benuto et al., 2018; Rosenberg et al., 2020). In this study, Rosenberg et al. (2020) use Robles's (2015) five-stage undocumented adult identity development model to understand the lived experiences of DACA recipients and the impact it has on their identity for clinicians to provide better support. The first stage in the model is pre-encounter where there is unawareness of undocumented status or its consequences (Robles, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2020). The second stage is the encounter stage, which brings awareness of being undocumented and the consequences (Robles, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2020). The third stage is the identity integration and alienation stage when feelings of despair emerge to realize the American dream is not for them (Robles, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2020). The fourth stage is the mourning stage when they lose identification with the American dream and the last stage is adaptation, or the process of rebuilding their identity and planning for the future (Robles, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2020). The findings from this study suggested that the older a child was when arriving in the United States, the greater the trauma associated with the journey (Rosenberg et al., 2020). Older children have more memory of leaving friends and relatives, missing home, and the journey itself so do not have a period of “blissful ignorance” compared to younger children who do not have as many traumatic memories (Rosenberg et al.,

2020). Children who came at a younger age had a stronger sense of security and being American, but a more difficult time in the encounter stage when they become aware of their legal status since they were not psychologically prepared to deal with the limitations of being undocumented (Rosenberg et al., 2020). Participants described a sense of alienation and disconnect from their peers in stage three as certain rights of passage were denied to them such as obtaining a driver's license, access to federal aid, and travel abroad (Rosenberg et al., 2020). This disconnect resulted in feelings of shame, isolation, and poor school performance (Rosenberg et al., 2020). As participants described stage four they expressed feelings of defeat and a lack of confidence because they may not reach their goals due to an uncertain future (Rosenberg et al., 2020). Ultimately, even though participants reached a level of identity formation, they constantly felt anxious and uncertain about their futures and legal status (Rosenberg et al., 2020). Results from this study provided a valuable source of information for clinicians who work with undocumented or DACA students, but this also assumes that undocumented and DACA recipients have easy access to these services. My study expands on this research by helping support services providers in college be better aware of these unique needs that DACA students have and how to better support them.

### ***Network Support/Mentorship***

Person et al. (2017) conducted a study to explore the experiences of undocumented students in a four-year institution in California and found that 80% of the undocumented students aspired to obtain advanced degrees such as law, MD, Ph.D., or EdD. However, of that 80% only 29% are expected to be able to complete higher-level degrees (Person et al., 2017). The incongruence in their aspirations and expectations was a result of how the students perceived they were viewed by the university (Person et al., 2017). More than 50% of the students reported

never using any resources on campus and 30% of them reported not feeling comfortable approaching campus police due to the fear of their status (Person et al., 2017). More than half of the students interviewed stated their aspirations came from the motivation they received from high school guidance counselors and their parents (Person et al., 2017). This finding correlates with Rendon's (1994) concept of out-of-class agents being influential in academic success. Faculty and staff also reported needing more training and support in working with undocumented students (Person et al., 2017). Even in a state like California, where more laws and resources are favoring undocumented students, there continues to be a struggle in understanding the hardships (Person et al., 2017). This may be somewhat parallel to what DACA students face in more restrictive states where they do not have as many resources and support to manage their needs. This study expands knowledge in this area of research by focusing on DACA students who are considered to have a form of temporary status in a restrictive state like South Carolina. This study further relates to the current study as faculty and staff participated in a focus group where they expressed there is limited information, resources, and mentors for undocumented students (Person et al., 2017).

Mwangi et al. (2019), conducted a study that explored statements made by higher education leaders regarding the possible recession of DACA during the Trump presidency in 2017. The researchers found that college personnel responses varied. Many responses were favorable as they had the correct tone but did not acknowledge what actions they would take to keep DACA students in school if DACA was rescinded (Mwangi et al., 2019). The results of the study discovered the colleges' positive intentions to support DACA and undocumented students through their verbal and written communications but did not find concrete policy changes that matched their sentiments (Mwangi et al., 2019). Colleges should do more to support DACA

students related to their fears and uncertainties by providing an environment that is welcoming and inclusive (Mwangi et al., 2019). The current study further expands on the approach faculty and staff take to support students who deal with the temperament nature of DACA.

In a separate study, Allen-Handy and Farinde-Wu (2018) highlighted ways to support undocumented students during the indecisive state of immigration and education policy. The researchers found that undocumented students feel motivated and hopeful because of their close relationships, including family, friends, educators, and others within the community (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). Participants from this study reported that receiving encouragement and motivation daily was important in their educational process (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). Although this study shared the effects of motivation and support from the perspective of undocumented students, it did not address the perspective of college campus faculty and staff who provided these supports to students. The current study adds to the literature on the importance of support systems by focusing specifically on college faculty and staff.

Katsiaficas et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study to determine the role of campus supports on civic engagement for DACA and undocumented students. The results from the findings suggested that having a safe space on campus and peer supports correlated with undocumented identity. This resulted in increased civic engagement by participants, DACA and undocumented students, by identifying with student organizations on campus (Katsiaficas et al., 2019). These findings concur with previous studies regarding the importance of community and civic engagement for undocumented and DACA students (Kwon et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2016; Salazar et al., 2016). In their study, Katsiaficas et al., (2019) use a controlled variable identified as state climate, which describes how "friendly" or "restrictive" a state is in its acceptance, offering of in-state tuition, and policies for undocumented students. This factor is

important to the current study as well because it has been noted that there are more “friendly” and “restrictive” states regarding college access for DACA and undocumented students (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019; Person et al., 2017; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). The differing policies of each state impact the barriers that DACA students face and their level of support in access to college once they have entered college (Casas et al., 2019; Lauby, 2018; Macias, 2018; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). To add to the related literature, the present study looked at participants who provide support services to DACA students at a community college in South Carolina. Through the qualitative approach of phenomenology, the research captured the experiences of college agents who provide support to DACA students through the lens of validation theory.

Nienhusser (2018) conducted a study to determine how institutional agents who held relatively prominent positions implemented policies that impacted DACA and undocumented students. The researchers found that some institutional agents who implement policies experienced conflicts in their roles (Nienhusser, 2018). Some institutional agents found vagueness in the policies and saw it as an opportunity to help DACA or undocumented students gain access to higher education, whereas others may have held different beliefs or handled the ambiguity differently (Nienhusser, 2018). A limitation of this study is that all the participants came from states such as California and Wisconsin, which have more favorable laws toward DACA recipients, thus making it difficult to generalize results (Nienhusser, 2018). This study broadened the current research by interviewing participants who are considered more front-line and work with DACA students through campus resources such as advising, financial aid, counseling, and other student support services. This study focused only on a community college in South Carolina, a state that is considered more limiting in college access to DACA recipients,

as more permissive states have already been studied (Nienhusser, 2018; Person et al., 2017; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020).

In a separate study conducted by Mireles-Rios and Garcia (2019), they explored the role mentoring could play on Latinx student persistence in higher education. The purpose of this study was to explore the ideal graduate student mentors for Latinax students based on their perspectives (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). The findings from this study suggested that graduate students can be ideal mentors for undergraduate Latina/o students because they are closer in age and may have had similar, relatable experiences (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). It was also learned that undergraduate Latinax students did not connect with faculty because there was a limitation of racial and ethnic diversity among higher education faculty and they were often geared toward career goals, such as tenure (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Although this study did not address immigration status as a variable, it recognized that many Latinax students may be first-generation college students, come from lower-income families, or come from backgrounds that do not value college education (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). However, this study addressed the unique needs that students from different backgrounds require. My study further explored the unique needs of DACA students, who often come from similar backgrounds as Latinax students, and how support services addressed those needs when working with DACA students.

### **Support Services**

Student support services are often used interchangeably with “student affairs” and are present on most college campuses in some capacity (Choroszy & Meek, 2020). Generally, student services consist of support such as counseling, career services, disability services, tutoring, academic coaching, and veteran support to help students persist through degree

completion (Balzer Carr & London, 2019; Choroszy & Meek, 2020; Remenick, 2019). This section will further explore some of the major support services that are found on community college campuses, how they could benefit DACA students, and why DACA students may not seek out these support services. This section will also reference and discuss previous studies that explored the role of support services.

### *Counseling Services*

The role of counseling services is to provide a confidential space for students to talk about personal issues and provide support as they navigate through college to reach their academic goals (UCC, 2020; Warren & Schwitzer, 2018). The stigma and discrimination that DACA students face regarding their status have led to significant mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and paranoia (Bjorklund, 2018; Moreno et al., 2021). Even in college, DACA students face the daily stressors of managing school, work, and family responsibilities (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Macias, 2018). Furthermore, anxiety about the future of DACA can be a disruption to their education, making it difficult for DACA students to focus on their studies (Quilantan, 2018). The results of these previous studies emphasized why DACA students would benefit from seeking support from counseling services as they worked towards their academic goals. The justification for DACA students seeking counseling support is there, but findings suggested that DACA students do not typically take the initiative to reach out to many support services due to fear and stigma (Kam et al., 2020). Similarly, Shea et al. (2019) developed a scale for college students to identify barriers to seeking mental health or counseling services. Even if the need is there, intragroup stigma, lack of access, cultural barriers, discomfort with emotions, negative attitudes or association with counseling, and a lack of knowledge (not knowing the resources is available) kept Latinx college students from seeking help (Shea et al., 2019).

Another reason undocumented or DACA students do not easily seek out counseling services is that as children, many undocumented children were raised with the instruction not to talk about their status due to the fear of themselves or other family members being discovered as undocumented (Kam et al., 2020).

### ***Academic Coaching***

Academic coaching is a resource that helps students acquire skills to be successful in college environments (Capstick et al., 2019). The National Academic Advising Association [NAAA] (2017) describes academic coaching as support that helps students become more self-aware, focus on strength building, and through identification of internal and external barriers, develop useful strategies to be academically successful. Specifically, academic coaches assist students in reaching their academic goals by developing study and time management skills, setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based (SMART) goals, and becoming self-regulated learners (NAAA, 2017; Howlett et al., 2021). Much like other non-traditional students (Capstick et al., 2019), DACA students would benefit from academic coaching as many have not had these skills taught to them in the past, mainly due to being first-generation students (Garriott & Nisle, 2018). Continuing-generation students, those who have had at least one parent complete a bachelor's degree, tend not to rely on institutional supports as much as their first-generation peers because they have access to others in their life who may be able to relate to college stressors (Garriott & Nisle, 2018).

### ***Campus Life/Student Clubs/Organizations***

Previous studies have extensively researched the importance of student engagement on campus and experiencing a sense of belonging or connection to the institution as a factor that contributes to student success (Bjorklund, 2018; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020; Tinto, 2012). For

many DACA students, the sense of belonging comes from their civic engagement and contribution to their community through mentorship, translating, helping others navigate the college system, and encouraging other DACA youth (Getrich, 2021; Katsiaficas et al., 2019). Being involved in clubs, organizations, and campus events creates the opportunity for students to have a social life on campus by engaging with other students and college faculty or staff (Hern et al., 2019) as well as feeling connected and a sense of belonging (Garcia, 2020). Although DACA students would uniquely benefit from participating in college campus life as a way to facilitate a sense of belonging (Garcia, 2020), many DACA students continue to be cautious and remain in the shadows to avoid the stigma related to their temporary status (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Kam et al., 2020).

### ***Advising***

The role of academic advising is to help students meet their academic, personal, and career goals (NACADA, n.d.) while helping colleges with student retention (Swecker et al., 2013). Many colleges have both faculty and professional advisors who assist students in registering for classes and choosing a major based on their skills and interests (Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; Martinez & Elue, 2020). Utilizing advising services and having a good working relationship with an advisor can be helpful to DACA students as it provides them with guidance toward degree completion. Additionally, selecting the right classes for a particular degree can prevent students from wasting time and money on unnecessary courses (Lynch & Lungrin, 2018). Much like other first-generation students, DACA students do not have social capital - the ability to seek institutional resources, information, and support through their social networks to rely on in navigating the college landscape (Almeida, et al., 2019). As such, DACA students are less likely to know how much they can trust and disclose to advisors without the fear of stigma

or judgment (Becerra, 2019; Kam et al., 2020). This point is further emphasized by Rodriguez and Rodriguez (2020) as they describe the experience of a participant who directly emailed her advisor asking for help in finding financial assistance as a DACA student but did not get any type of reply. This led the participant to stop sharing her status and story because she felt they did not care and she could not trust others with this information (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2020).

### ***Tutoring***

Many institutions provide tutoring, an academic support service, in several subjects and often consist of a writing center where students can get help in writing papers (Kilgore & Cronley, 2021; Osborne et al., 2019). Information from the University of Tennessee's Student Success Center Comprehensive Assessment Report (2018) suggests that students who utilize support programs such as tutoring perform better academically than students who do not participate in these programs. Tutoring is a support service that could be beneficial to DACA students as it supplements information they have learned in their classes and provides an additional out-of-class agent to help increase their sense of belonging through academic success (Garcia, 2020). Use of the writing center can also be useful to DACA students as English is a second language for many, or they may not be as proficient in it (Punti & Wright-Peterson, 2019). Unfortunately, DACA students do not seek tutoring services when needed for the simple reason that they do not have extra time to focus on their studies because they rely heavily on their jobs, which help to pay for tuition (Macias, 2018). As stated by a participant in a previous study, "My peers get to study all weekend if we have an exam on Monday. I have to work. I can't call off because then I can't pay my tuition and then everything stops" (Macias, 2018, p. 617). Having to work less would allow students to use academic support such as tutoring, which could lead to improved academic performance (Boatman & Long, 2016).

### ***Financial Aid***

As mentioned in other studies, one of the biggest barriers for DACA students is the financial cost of attending college (Casas et al., 2019; Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). Although many non-DACA students face similar financial struggles when it comes to being able to afford tuition for college, approximately 70% of all college students receive some type of financial aid; the difference is that non-DACA students can apply for various forms of financial aid to help pay for college (Boatman & Long, 2016; Gonzales, 2016). The financial aid office assists students in applying for free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and other types of available student loans, grants, and scholarships (Studentaid.gov, n.d.). Very few states offer DACA students some form of state financial assistance (Serna et al., 2017), leaving them with no other option than to pay out of pocket or seek private scholarships and donors (Benuto et al., 2018). This financial burden becomes even more difficult when they are required to pay out-of-state tuition rates (Jones, 2020; Serna et al., 2017). Even though some DACA students may benefit from meeting with financial aid representatives to find out about other possible options to help pay for college, many do not because they are discouraged by their limitations and past responses to how other support staff may have responded regarding their status (Macias, 2018). Additionally, financial aid offices require disclosure of personal information that some DACA students may be afraid to share due to the fear of “outing” other family members without legal status (Becerra, 2019; Benuto et al., 2018; Patler & Pirtle, 2018).

College success goes beyond in-class experiences and is often improved socially and academically by interactions that occur with faculty and staff outside of the classroom, and in other areas of student services (Kilgore & Cronley, 2021). Four-year colleges tend to have larger budgets making it possible to provide more support services on their campuses compared to

community colleges (Choroszy & Meek, 2020). These departments often work with students on the assumption that they are traditional; therefore, they are only open during traditional business hours and do not take into consideration students who take evening classes or those who have responsibilities other than school (Remenick, 2019). These expectations may be appropriate for full-time students at a four-year institute, but the lack of flexibility and understanding of the needs of non-traditional students may lead to a sense of alienation (Remenick, 2019). According to the 2017 American Association of Community Colleges, the enrollment rate of students attending community colleges is approximately 41%, making them a significant sector for postsecondary education (Juszkiewicz, 2017). This statistic highlights the number of students that may fit the non-traditional category in college as many who attend community colleges may be part-time students due to financial hardships, work, and family obligations (Hart & Park, 2021). Remenick's (2019) study illustrates the need to examine support services for non-traditional students based on their diverse needs. My study adds to the literature by recognizing the unique needs DACA students have that other non-traditional student may not, and how support services can better serve those needs.

As previously stated, Rendon (1994) defines non-traditional students are those who come from underrepresented backgrounds such as minorities/non-White, women, immigrants, adult students over the age of 25, low income, first-generation and non-race (disability, sexual orientation, and lifestyle) individuals. Other students that fall into the non-traditional category are those who work while attending school and those who are caregivers for children, parents, or other family members (Brock, 2010). Traditional students are differentiated from non-traditional students in that they do not have these additional life demands along with their role as a student (Cho & Serrano, 2020). DACA students have been identified by previous scholars as non-

traditional students because they fall into many of the defining categories such as being underrepresented, often first-generation, and low-income (Borjian, 2016, 2018; Casas et al., 2019). Many DACA students also work while attending school to help pay for tuition because they are ineligible for federal financial aid (Macias, 2018). The most unique stressor that DACA students face is the temporary nature of their legal status, which plays a significant role in their academic success (Jones, 2020; McCorkle & Bailey, 2016; Roth, 2019;) and adds a layer to their non-traditional status.

Martinez (2018) conducted a study that explored organizational changes within the area of student services at a community college that was broadening its academic services to include baccalaureate degrees. The researcher obtained data through interviews, observations, and a review of documents (Martinez, 2018). Martinez (2018) found that changes in policy and procedures were often slow, difficult, and met with resistance from internal and external stakeholders. Even when services such as advising and counseling were considered some of the most important, they were often areas where students were underserved due to a shortage of staff and lack of permanent funding (Martinez, 2018). Before offering a baccalaureate degree, there were limited support services available at the community college, but as funding increased, leadership changed, and a clearer vision of what support students need and additional student services were implemented (Martinez, 2018). Although support services were not considered a priority until the college began offering a four-year degree, the support services now benefit baccalaureate and non-baccalaureate degree-seeking students (Martinez, 2018). The findings from this study show how leadership and policy change can influence the support services provided to students and benefit various types of students.

In a study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2018), the researchers use Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to examine the availability of resources on campus to LGBTQ+ students. Nguyen et al. (2018) emphasized how community colleges have provided an avenue to higher education for underserved student populations by removing barriers such as standardized tests and providing lower tuition rates. The findings from this study suggest that students seek out identity-specific resources because it helps them feel supported, a part of a community, and a form of advocacy (Nguyen et al., 2018). The relationships that developed with various student services personnel validated them as students and LGBTQ+ people (Nguyen et al., 2018). Although the Nguyen et al. (2018) study did not use the validation theory framework, the findings emphasized the importance of feeling validated and that institutional resources made a difference.

Much like four-year colleges, community colleges are focused on retention and persistence. One major difference between four-year college students and community college students is that community college students are faced with non-academic barriers that impact their retention and persistence rates (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). This may be the case because nearly 40% of community college students are categorized as non-traditional based on their age, employment status, enrollment status, or having dependents they are financially responsible for (Juskiewicz, 2017). In a study conducted by Troester-Trate (2020) the Jefferson Community School program was designed to meet some of the non-academic needs of community college students in the northern part of New York. The resources provided by this program were at no additional cost to students and included services such as transportation, a food pantry, and childcare. The purpose of this study demonstrated the relationship between having non-academic needs met and the persistence and retention rates of community college

students (Troester-Trate, 2020). In Troester-Trate's (2020) study, only three resources were evaluated concerning persistence and retention: food insecurity, transportation, and childcare. This study did not focus on resources already available at the college that was not a part of the Jefferson Community School program such as counseling, advising, and tutoring. This study did however address the need to equalize the opportunity of persisting and retention for lower-income and non-traditional students (Troester-Trate, 2020). The results from this study showed that providing non-academic support to lower-income students did not significantly increase their persistence and retention rates but did equalize their chances compared to those students who did not use the program (Troester-Trate, 2020).

As previous studies have investigated the importance of funding and increased budgets for support services to be more effective (Choroszy & Meek, 2020; Remenick, 2019), Dahlvig et al., (2020) propose that increasing the money allocated to support services does not necessarily correlate with improved services or increased retention rates. In their study, Dahlvig et al., (2020) wanted to determine how departments were utilizing their budget and how the increase in money affected student retention and six-year graduation rates at a Counsel for Christian Colleges & Universities member institution. The researchers' findings differed from other studies in that there was a negative relationship between student services and student retention (Dahlvig et al., 2020). As spending increased on student services by \$1,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, retention and graduation rates decreased by 1% (Dahlvig et al., 2020). This finding does not indicate that student services are not necessary or helpful but suggests that some student services may need to be revamped or facilitated differently to meet the social and academic needs of students (Dahlvig et al., 2020). Although this study looked at a private

institution that may have a significantly different student population than a community college, it highlights the importance of how student services impact retention and overall student success.

Elliott (2020) conducted a literature review on one specific support service, academic advisors, and the importance of their role in student retention. Because academic advisors are sometimes the frontline faces in that they are presented with questions and concerns outside of their specialty they need to be able to answer questions about things other than degree completion (Elliott, 2020). Based on their interactions and experiences with academic advisors, sometimes students would not seek further support and base their desire to leave or remain in college on that experience (Elliott, 2020). Elliott (2020) argues that this happens most often when an advisor meets with a first-time college student who has an undecided major or a more advanced student who wants to change their major. During these pivotal times, advisors need to be knowledgeable, professional and provide further referrals to other support services to avoid a student departing from the school or taking much longer to complete their desired degree (Elliott, 2020). Although Elliott (2020) focuses on academic advisors and his review is important to the general influence various support services have on student achievement, he does not differentiate how different student populations may be affected.

Similar to Elliott (2020), in a study conducted by Tevis and Britton (2020), they identified faculty members and student services administrators as “gatekeepers” and “frontline” staff. Seeing these gatekeepers and frontline staff as positions that support first-year students in transitioning to college, Tevis and Britton (2020) focused their research on understanding why there may be a disconnect between the expectations of frontline staff and first-year student retention. The disconnect is referred to as the integration information gap, meaning a gap caused by what frontline staff expects of first-year students and what the students know (Tevis &

Britton, 2020). Using hidden curriculum as a framework for this study, the researchers found inconsistencies between the expectations of frontline staff and what first-year students know (Tevis & Britton, 2020). Furthermore, they found that the faculty and student services administrators who participated in the study did not openly discuss their expectations of first-year students, leading to students' inability to connect, be self-reflective, and ineffectively seek out help. Ironically, frontline staff reported being concerned that first-year students could not communicate effectively, but students reported they did not see issues in their communications but did see shortcomings in faculty and staff communication (Tevis & Britton, 2020). Students found that frontline staff either did not communicate much information at all or they used jargon that students were not familiar with (Tevis & Britton, 2020). These results leading to the information gap made students feel isolated and disconnected from the information and resources available to them (Tevis & Britton). As mentioned by past studies that students require support in navigating resources and adapting to college life (Means & Payne, 2017), Tevis and Britton (2020) also showed that support received from frontline staff is crucial, but can be ineffective if there is a disconnect among the staff and students.

### **Summary**

A review of the related literature illustrates how validation theory has been explored through the perspective of DACA students as participants (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b). Validation has also been studied to show how it supports various minority groups to feel included on college campuses (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Hallett et al., 2020; Sterzing & Gartner, 2020). The current study expands on the theory to incorporate how college agents (faculty and staff) perceive the support they provide to DACA students. The related literature on DACA recipients in college clearly describes the various barriers these students experience as a result of their

status. The known barriers are related to financial stressors, legal concerns, and psychological stressors that have been expressed from the perspective of DACA students (Becerra, 2019; Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Jones, 2020; Mallet & Bedolla, 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Person et al., 2017; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). With these explored barriers and understanding of community college support services, this study adds to the literature by studying how faculty and staff support DACA students as they face their struggles.

Furthermore, many studies on DACA recipients are focused on states that provide broader educational opportunities such as in-state tuition and financial aid (Nienhusser, 2018; Person et al., 2017; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). There has been little research on DACA community college students in more restrictive states such as South Carolina. This study expands the literature to include an exploration of the experience college agents have in providing support to community college students in South Carolina.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. This chapter focuses on the specific research design, a statement of the research questions, a description of the research setting, a description of the participants, the process used to conduct the study, and the role of the researcher. Additionally, this chapter describes the data collection methods used in this study, the data analysis of each method, the procedures used to address trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations of the study.

### **Design**

I conducted this study using the qualitative method. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated the qualitative method is useful for researchers who desire to explore a social or human problem. A qualitative method also allows for rich data and meaningful perspectives from participants of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a quantitative method of study, data is collected systematically and analyzed to find patterns, predictions, and relationships between variables (Leavy, 2017). Although quantitative research allows for a large number of subjects, resulting in increased generalizability of the study, it does not provide perspectives from the participants that could potentially lead to new insights (Leavy, 2017). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study as the problem was explored through the perspectives of community college employees who provide support services to DACA students. This design was also useful to study the commonality experienced by those individuals providing support to DACA students through the lens of Rendon's (1994) validation theory.

Creswell and Poth (2018) define phenomenology as an approach to research that

describes the common meaning for individuals who experienced the same concept or phenomenon. In phenomenology, individuals who have experienced the phenomenon are asked to provide data (van Manen, 2014). Another type of qualitative approach is narrative inquiry. This type of method is used to learn about cultures, historical experiences, lifestyles, and identities (Butina, 2015). The narrative approach takes experiences as told by individuals and uses their stories as the raw data (Butina, 2015). The third approach to qualitative research is the grounded theory design. Grounded theory research looks to generate or discover a theory for a process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher generates a theory for why a process or action is occurring based on the responses of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another form of qualitative research is the ethnographic approach. Ethnography focuses on an entire culture-sharing group in which the researcher describes and interprets the values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of that group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research typically has a large participant sample and the researcher is absorbed in studying and observing the daily lives of the group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The fifth approach to qualitative research is case study research. The case study approaches a real-life case or cases over a period of time, through in-depth and detailed data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After exploring the different types of qualitative research designs, the phenomenological approach seemed to be the most fitting for this study. The phenomenological approach was used to capture the lived experiences of faculty and staff around the phenomenon of providing support services to DACA students.

As there are two types of phenomenology, this study used Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology focuses on describing the experiences of participants in the study. Moustakas (1994) attributes transcendental phenomenology to Husserl because he emphasized analyzing experiences as they appear.

Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes subjectivity and the discovery of the true essence of an experience because it uses textural and structural descriptions to examine how participants experienced the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). To understand the whole phenomenon, each individual's experience needs to be captured and richly described (Moustakas, 1994). To understand the lived experiences, the researcher must be aware of and state his or her own biases and assumptions about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). To achieve objectivity for this study, the personal opinions, interpretations, and experiences of the researcher were bracketed out from the study to focus on those that have directly experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology was selected because only those who have directly worked with DACA students to provide support can offer their experiences within that context. DACA and immigration are sensitive topics so it was important to keep any bias or researcher views from affecting participant responses, data collection, and analysis.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ 1:** In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validating agents for DACA students?

**RQ 2:** What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus?

**RQ 3:** How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success?

### **Setting**

This study was conducted at a large community college located in a growing metropolitan city in South Carolina that has a main campus, three satellite campuses, a

manufacturing training facility, and a worksite training facility (UCC, 2020). For this study, the community college is referred to as Upstate Community College (UCC) to maintain anonymity for the study participants. UCC offers several majors including a transfer track option, a co-op program, and several online and hybrid courses (UCC, 2020). The city UCC is in is home to many manufacturing and business centers as well as a large hospital system for internships (Community College Review, 2020).

The enrollment at UCC is approximately 10,000 students (Community College Review, 2020). The student population is representative of the population of the city it is located in (Community College Review, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Being one of the oldest community colleges in the area and located in a metropolitan city that is home to many minorities and immigrants, UCC is the ideal setting to learn and understand the impact of support services for DACA students. At UCC 5% of the student population is Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 6% identifies as more than one race (Community College Review, 2020). The DACA student population is about 1% to 2% at UCC, with approximately 10-20 DACA students.

Another reason the study was conducted at UCC is that many DACA students choose to attend community colleges for financial reasons (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Community colleges are typically less expensive than four-year colleges, but DACA students are still required to pay out-of-state tuition (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Community colleges also tend to provide more flexibility with credit hours and schedules than four-year institutions, allowing students to work while attending school (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Current state law dictates that UCC and other state institutions are restricted from enrolling undocumented students, but they may admit students that are DACA recipients (u Lead Network, 2020). At UCC the admissions process for DACA recipients is similar to that of other students with the exception that DACA students must submit

a declaration of legal presence form (Enrollment Steps for DACA Students, n.d.).

UCC's governance is similar to that of many other American colleges. At UCC, there is a board of trustees, the college president, and the president's cabinet, which is made up of vice presidents of various divisions at the college, department heads presiding over academics, and directors presiding over student services/affairs (UCC, 2020). There are approximately 460 faculty, over 100 staff, (non-faculty positions), and an offering of over 100 academic programs (Community College Review, 2020; UCC, 2020).

The institution's website highlights some of the student services and programs that are offered. Some resources mentioned include financial aid, career services, tutoring and academic coaching, disability services, counseling services, professional and faculty advising, veterans' assistance, and collegiate recovery (UCC, 2020). Some of these resources are listed in the resources for students section, whereas others require delving further into the website. UCC (2020) also has student clubs and organizations and an active campus life. Financial aid and academic advising are large departments with the resources to assist a high volume of students (UCC, 2020). Some of the other services such as career services, tutoring, disability services, counseling, and collegiate recovery have fewer employees but provide services to all UCC students, mostly by appointment (UCC, 2020). There are also federally funded programs such as the TRIO program and the STAR program, but DACA students would not qualify for support from federally funded programs (UCC, 2020; Zaida & Kuczewski, 2017). UCC is one of the few community colleges that have on-campus housing available, again another resource that is not available to DACA students because one qualification to reside in housing is receiving Federal Financial Aid (UCC, 2020).

## Participants

The sample for this study was comprised of two groups of participants. The first group was the staff and faculty and the second group was DACA students. The faculty and staff participants were those who provided resources and support services through programs such as advising, counseling services, tutoring, career services, financial aid, and campus life. Each of these support services is available to any UCC student and works with various students across a broad spectrum of services by assisting to help students achieve their academic goals. I sought a pool of 20 UCC employees. From this pool of 20, I selected 10 participants that met the criteria of working with DACA students in the last 24 months. The second group of participants was selected to participate in a focus group for this study. The focus group was comprised of currently enrolled DACA students at UCC. I sought a pool of 10 DACA students to participate in the focus group that consisted of six to eight participants to address attrition.

Participants were initially identified by contacting informants, or those who have personal knowledge or influence (Patton, 2015). In this study, the key informant were administrative assistants who could provide information regarding which employees or departments work with DACA students. After the initial information was provided, the process of criterion sampling was used. Criterion sampling involves identifying participants who meet a certain criterion that is relevant to the research topic (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling will help to assure that all participants have had experience working with DACA students. To further identify appropriate individuals, the researcher also used snowball sampling – the process where one or a few respondents identify additional participants of interest (Patton, 2015). If one employee has worked with DACA students, he or she may be aware of others who have also experienced working with that same student or other DACA students. This type of sampling also

assisted in including different areas of the college and helped see a spectrum of how support is provided. The sample size for a phenomenological study can range from three to 15 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The desired sample size for this study was 10 participants to address for attrition. To recruit DACA students, a slightly different method was used. Flyers were posted around campus; announcements were posted online and through word of mouth by faculty and other staff who have direct contact with students.

The potential participants for this study were contacted via email. I went to the college's website and searched for the Vice President (VP) of Student Services and the VP of Academics. I contacted the VP's administrative assistant and informed her of the study and my request to have her send an email on my behalf to employees at the college who have worked with DACA students. Upon request, I forwarded a copy of the Institution Review Board (IRB) approval letter (see Appendix G) and a permission letter from the college (see Appendix B). The VPs provided me with a list of names and emails for staff in the Student Services division and faculty advisors. I created an email with information about the study, the questionnaire, and the consent form. I asked respondents to reply to the email stating their interest, completion of the questionnaire (Appendix E), and sign the IRB consent form (Appendix C). This email was approved by the informant, in this case, the VP's administrative assistant. An informant may help obtain access to people, settings, and events that researchers could not obtain on their own (Hatch, 2002). Once the IRB consent form was signed and returned, the participants were scheduled for an in-depth, semi-structured interview. An email was sent to confirm the appointment date and time. I assigned pseudonyms to all participants to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the data provided.

## Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, I piloted the interview with a small group outside of my study sample to ensure clarity of questions. Subsequently, I worked to obtain site approval from the appropriate authorities at UCC (see Appendix B). Upon site approval, I sought approval from Liberty University's IRB (see Appendix G). Once approval was obtained, I began recruiting and sampling participants. I first looked on UCC's website for who the administrative assistants are for the VP of student services and the VP of academics. I asked each VP's administrative assistant to provide a list of email contact for individuals or departments at the college that would meet the criteria of providing support services to DACA students. With the information provided, I emailed a pool of 20 UCC employees to briefly describe the study and ask them to respond to the email if interested in participating in the study. In their initial response, they were asked to email the completed questionnaire and signed consent form. Once respondents expressed interest, through snowball sampling, I asked them to identify any other faculty or staff they may know at the college who work with DACA students and might be interested in participating in the study. Once a minimum of 12-15 respondents were identified, I offered to call, meet virtually, or face-to-face to answer any questions and discuss the consent form. Since this study was being conducted during a time when Covid-19 cases were increasing, all participants were given the option to participate virtually or in person. If participants met in person, they were given the option to wear masks and social distancing was maintained as an ongoing safety protocol. I also took into consideration any guidelines that UCC had at that time as well.

After answering participant questions and reviewing consent, I scheduled interview times with participants on the UCC campus for their convenience or through Zoom. For participants

who expressed interest, but did not return a signed consent for the questionnaire, I followed up with an email reminder. I also offered to collect the consent in person if they did not have a way to electronically sign the form. Participants were given the option to choose their pseudonyms beginning with a letter that was provided to them on their questionnaire. If they did not select one, I provided them with a pseudonym of my choice. This step was intended to help participants make the process more personable and feel confident with the anonymity process.

At the scheduled interview, I conducted semi-structured interviews either face-to-face or virtually using open-ended questions. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the transcription of the first interviews, I offered to meet with each participant again to conduct member checking to make sure participant responses were accurately recorded. Most participants declined this offer. Once interviews and member checks were completed, I began looking for important statements within the responses to find themes. Verbatim examples and statements are used from the transcriptions when identifying themes (Moustakas, 1994).

At the end of each interview, I asked participants to capture photographs or select images to show how they see their level of validation in providing support to DACA students. This process is known as photovoice or photo-elicitation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were given two prompts and were encouraged to use their phones or cameras to capture the photos or could select an image that they already had. Participants were asked to email me the photos or images with an explanation of how the images answered each prompt. After explaining the process, I offered to schedule an appointment with each participant to further discuss their photographs. The discussion appointment was also audio recorded to help transcribe the descriptions provided about the photographs. The photographs were all submitted via email or

text. During the discussion appointment, I used memoing by taking reflective notes on the comments made regarding photovoice. After conducting the discussion appointment for the photovoice, I used a similar analysis process of reviewing explanation transcripts and finding significant statements and patterns to create themes for the photographs.

### **The Researcher's Role**

Creswell and Poth (2018) define the researcher's role in a study as being essential to data collection. The researcher is the facilitator of the study and must collect and absorb the data from the various methods of data collection without bias, influence, or assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Owens (2006) describes the role of a qualitative interviewer as being able to create a conversational space that allows respondents to feel safe and share their experiences concerning the phenomena. As a counselor who practices person-centered approaches in therapy, my role in creating a safe space for participants during in-depth interviews may come naturally.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the human instrument as the primary instrument of scientific inquiry in a qualitative study. For this study, I was the human instrument as I conducted in-depth interviews with each participant, transcribed, and analyzed the data. I also facilitated photovoice discussions and used memoing throughout the data collection process. I am currently employed at UCC, the community college where I conducted the study at. I do not have any authoritative or supervisory role over other employees at the college. Although I separated my role as an employee and researcher, I was still able to relate to staff who are often in positions to provide support to students. As a counselor at the college I have come across students who felt that even though support services were available to them, their situations would

not be understood by those providing support. Having this experience and being able to “talk shop” allowed me to build rapport with other staff members who are in similar positions.

It is also important to mention any biases that I have. I can relate to students who are not originally from the United States and can understand the struggles that come with acclimating to a new culture. I am not able, however, to compare my experiences to those who battle with their legal status daily because my migration to the United States was with a Green Card, which provided me with much more social inclusion. By bringing this perspective to the interview, it elicited more in-depth responses and discussions.

Politically, I am more conservative in my views and as an immigrant whose family followed legal channels, there is some bias regarding immigration policy. I have found it hard to feel the same bias towards children and youth who were brought to the United States because it was through no fault of their own. Understanding how hard it can be to fit in and acclimate to a completely different culture, I believe it is important to help these young immigrants feel at home. To keep my biases from influencing what my participants may believe or share, I will use Moustakas's (1994) method of bracketing, the process of putting aside one's view or belief about the phenomenon that is being investigated (Chan et al., 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Much as I do in my counseling sessions, I had to be self-aware of my affect and responses to avoid influencing the participants (Rogers, 1961). Another method I used to address my biases was to share this information with my committee and seek feedback. A third method to confirm I was not including my assumptions or biases was to review the data after analysis with the participants to confirm it accurately depicted their expressions from the data provided.

## Data Collection

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data collection as a series of interrelated activities. The purpose of data collection is to gather information that answers the emerging research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before any data was officially collected, each respondent that participated in the one-on-one interview completed a short questionnaire. Those participating in the focus group were not given a questionnaire. This study utilized three data collection methods that provided data for analysis: in-depth, semi-structured interviews, photovoice, and a focus group in that order. This section will go into further detail about each data collection method including what it is, how it was used, and why it was appropriate for this study.

Before conducting interviews, each participant was provided with a short questionnaire by email (see Appendix E). The questionnaire asked demographic questions to get descriptive data on each participant as well as some basic information about the participant's role at the college. Emailing the questionnaire to participants allowed for accuracy and saved time during the interview process. Having the questionnaire completed in advance also allowed the researcher to have some prompts to build rapport and initiate conversations during the interview that led up to the specific interview questions (Hatch, 2002).

The questionnaire asked some basic questions such as participants' age, gender, where they are from originally, how long they have worked at UCC, job title, how many years they have worked in student services, and how many years they have been in their current position. The questionnaire also provided a letter of the alphabet and allowed the participant to choose their pseudonym starting with that letter. For example, if a participant got a questionnaire with the letter "A", they can choose any name beginning with that letter.

## **Interviews**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in-depth interviews are the primary process of collecting data in a phenomenological study. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews is to gather detailed answers with rich thematic material (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To capture depth, detail, and richness, Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest structuring interviews with main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. Follow-up questions require the researcher to listen hard and closely to participant responses, then ask additional questions to better understand certain themes or ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Probing can also be a helpful technique in that it keeps the conversation going on a particular topic and seeks to get more information or clarification on the topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Once interviews were scheduled, I offered to meet participants on campus at locations that are convenient and confidential or via Zoom. I made sure space was reserved for extra time so the interview can be conducted without interruptions. Some participants preferred a virtual interview so I made the necessary accommodations. The interviews were expected to last between 30 minutes to 60 minutes. The questions were open-ended with some follow-up questions as needed to further explore certain ideas or statements or further engage participants. Probing was also utilized for clarity and to elicit more details. The use of semi-structured questions allows the researcher to guide the interview but also the flexibility to add questions based on the interviewee's responses (Hatch, 2002). Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. The recordings were kept in a locked desk drawer that only the researcher had the key to. I used reflective memoing throughout the interview process. The reflective memoing process allows the researcher to keep notes and ideas that occur as data is being collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) encouraged researchers to stop what they are

doing if a thought occurs and write a memo.

### Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please share how you reached this field/position.
2. Please describe your role and responsibilities at UCC.
3. Discuss your personal motivations in working with students.
4. How do your personal motivations match that of UCC?
5. Please tell me what you know about the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.
6. Please share your first experience in working with a DACA recipient student at UCC.
7. What policies are in place at UCC regarding DACA students?
8. Please describe your implementation of support as related to the policy regarding DACA students.
9. Please describe ways in which DACA students have received support.
  - a. In what ways have you found their needs have been met?
  - b. In what ways have you found their needs have not been met?
10. What are some additional steps that you have taken to meet the needs of DACA students?
11. What are some ways you build rapport with DACA students?
12. In what ways do you validate, or proactively affirm, DACA students when you meet with them?
13. Please describe any challenges you face when working with DACA students and how you address these challenges.
14. What differences have you found in working with DACA students versus non-DACA students?

15. Please share anything else that might be important for me to know regarding your work with DACA students.

Questions one through five were designed to learn about the participants' background, develop an understanding of their motivation in the field, and understand their general awareness and knowledge about DACA (Hatch, 2002). These questions helped to answer the first research question: In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validation agents for DACA students? The first question helped to get the interview started and was non-threatening, sometimes called a "background" question, to help the participant feel comfortable and get the conversation started (Hatch, 2002). Question two allowed the participant to talk about themselves and further delve into their job and duties. This descriptive question provides information to the researcher about what the participant does at UCC and how the participant sees themselves as an agent at the college (Hatch, 2002). Questions three and four encouraged the participant to take a deeper look at themselves and their role in helping students. Question five is a type of background question that helped the researcher to see what the participant knows about the general topic of DACA and provided an understanding of what the interview would be like (Hatch, 2002).

Question six is where the main questions started with the purpose to bring what the participant knows about the phenomena into their work and began the conversation of how they experience working with DACA students (Hatch, 2002). Question six provided a retrospective glimpse of the support staff's experience in working with DACA students, an outcome of interviewing known as reconstruction (Hatch, 2002). According to Patler and Pirtle (2018), many students do not disclose their status out of fear. This makes it difficult for support staff to provide DACA students with the right type of assistance. Being a main question, question six addressed

research questions one and two. Question seven further led to the essential questions that helped to get to the core of the research (Hatch, 2002). Question seven helped answer the second research question: What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus? Question seven provided information about the college's efforts in working with DACA students. This question helped to understand the college's policies and a general understanding of the needs of this student population. This question also provided insight as to how much validation the institution is providing when working with an underrepresented population (Rendon & Munoz, 2011).

Questions eight through 13 are main questions designed to learn about support staff's experiences in working with DACA students (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). These questions supported the data for the level of validation provided to DACA students and if it is any different than what is provided to non-DACA students (Hatch, 2002; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). This set of questions helped to answer the second and third research questions. More specifically, question eight looked to further explore how the participant views their style of working with DACA students and their specific actions. Question nine helped to elicit depth and detail from the participant and led to examples (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This question delved deeper into the role of the participant in helping to support DACA students. This question also urged the participant to acknowledge the unique barriers DACA students may have that impact their needs being met (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b). Question 10 is a here-and-now construction type of question, it provided participant explanation of events, activities, feelings, and concerns (Hatch, 2002). This question is descriptive and allowed the participant to share what their typical process is when working with DACA students. Question 11 was designed for the participant to be cognizant of their actions and evaluate if they are taking time to get to know DACA students and understand

their needs. This type of question is described by Hatch (2002) as a projection question and will also encourage the participant to answer the following question with more insight. Question 11 was the first main question that looked to answer research question number three: How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success? Part of validation begins with building rapport with students and getting to know them and their situation (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). Question 12 also supported answering the third research question because it looked specifically at how validation from support service agents is impacting DACA students in their college success. Question 12 went back to obtain essential information about the study as participants were asked to look at their actions and behaviors regarding validation. Rendon and Munoz (2011) emphasize that the impact of validation on students who have experienced powerlessness or doubts can help them to acquire a sense of confidence and motivation. Question 13 is essential but also helped to take some pressure off of the participant because they could share what things may be out of their control or what they would change to provide a deeper level of support (Hatch, 2002). This question supports answering the first and second research questions.

Question 14 was another essential question in that it distinguished the needs of DACA students from non-DACA students, but in a more general sense to gauge if participants recognized the need for more validation with DACA students (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). This question helped to address the first and third research questions as it encouraged participants to look specifically at how they interact with DACA students and recognize the importance of the validation they provide. Hatch (2002) describes question 14 as a contrast question because it helps to see how the participant makes meaning in their social world. Question 14 encouraged some reflection for the participants to consider if they were providing

additional support to students who may be feeling marginalized compared to non-DACA students (Rendon & Munoz, 2011). DACA students reportedly deal with more isolation and stigmatization, thus increasing the need for targeted support services (Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017; Katsiaficas et al., 2019). Question 15 was to help close out the interview and allowed the participant to share anything that may have come to their mind but did not have prompts to share (Hatch, 2002). This was also where I will provide some closure and thank the participant (Hatch, 2002). At the end of the interview, I explained the next set of data collection and provided instructions and the prompts for photovoice.

### **Photovoice**

The second form of data collection was the qualitative method of photovoice (see Appendix H). This is a process that involves participants taking pictures to express their experiences (Jason & Glenwick, 2016). Photovoice fits with the transcendental phenomenology research design as it allows participants to meet with the researcher and discuss their photographs from their perspectives to tell their story (Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Participants were given the prompt to take photos of anything they like as long as it is not hurtful to themselves or others and did not break the confidentiality or the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) for any of the students. This included not taking pictures of students, documents, or locations that may contain identifying information. The photos could be representational or symbolic to the participant as they related to their work with DACA students. The pictures they took answered the following questions:

1. How do you show validation to DACA students (Rendon, 1994)?
2. What is the impact of the support services you provide to DACA students (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b; Nienhusser, 2018)?

Participants were allowed to take as many pictures as they liked but were asked to pick one photograph to represent each question for discussion. Participants used their cameras or devices, as most phones have photo-taking capabilities. Some participants selected to use pre-existing images if they were unable to take a picture. Once participants selected their two photographs for discussion (one per prompt), they emailed the photographs to the researcher with an explanation for each one. I scheduled a convenient time to speak individually with participants to discuss the contents of their photographs. This interaction was audio-recorded and transcribed. I used memoing here as well to capture any new thoughts, themes, and ideas that developed.

The first prompt addressed the first research question because it encouraged participants to express their perspectives on how they are acting as validating agents to DACA students. This was an essential and descriptive question as it directly asked participants about their interaction with DACA students (Hatch, 2002). The premise of Rendon's (1994) validation theory in education is that the culture in higher education must change to meet the needs of a diverse and unique student population. To accomplish this, validating agents must be aware of the unique needs that various student populations have (Rendon, 1994). One major finding from Rendon's (1994) study showed that many non-traditional students need active intervention in which agents reach out to students. This form of intervention is what is considered a type of academic or interpersonal validation from out-of-class agents (Rendon, 1994).

The second prompt in the photovoice data collection helped to answer the second and third research questions. It addressed the second research question by linking the impact of support services to what steps or initiatives are present on the college campus. It addressed the third research question by connecting the impact of services on academic and social success at the college. Andrade (2019a, 2019b) found that undocumented and DACA students are open to help

and support from instructors and other school staff. Participants expressed that schools could be a sanctuary for DACA and undocumented students so they feel safe and can focus on academics without the fear of being deported (Andrade, 2019a, 2019b). To reduce the misinformation and insensitivity that DACA students face in their interactions with support services agents, it is important to understand the role support services agents have and know the policies that are implemented for DACA students in higher education institutions (Nienhusser, 2018).

### **Focus Group**

The third form of data collection was facilitated through a focus group. Focus groups allow for data collection in a group setting and can be influenced by interpersonal factors, individual differences, and environmental factors (Stewart et al., 2007). Focus groups can be considered enjoyable in that they can encourage discussion that creates a sense of cohesiveness among participants by sharing common experiences and difficulties (Stewart et al., 2007). There are also times when focus groups may not be an appropriate choice for certain groups of participants as they can feel pressured or uncomfortable expressing their opinions (Stewart et al., 2007). In working with community college support staff and faculty, a focus group may not be the best choice because of the sensitivity of the topic. Also, this type of focus group could come across to employees that they are not doing their job well. For this focus group, the participants were DACA students who were enrolled at the community college during the time of this research. The group was split into two sessions with three participants each; in total it was composed of six participants. Stewart et al. (2007) stated that most focused groups consist of six to 12 people.

Participants for the focus group were recruited through the use of flyers in the student center, at various club meetings, via the information provided to freshman seminar classes during

scheduled class visits, and by email with the help of the informant. This allowed those who were interested to reach out to the researcher and obtain information. Upon initial contact, participants were briefed on the study, given a consent form to complete either in person or electronically, and a chance to ask questions. Once the focus group was scheduled, participants were allowed to confirm their desire to continue and sign the consent and permission for the focus group to be audio-recorded and later transcribed by the researcher if they had not done so already. The focus group questions were set up similarly to interview questions in that they were semi-structured and there to guide the conversation. Data collected from focus groups can help generate impressions of services as well as potential problems with the service (Stewart et al., 2007).

The focus groups were conducted through Zoom due to some participants not having childcare and living further away from campus. Two participants expressed their preference for meeting virtually due to having a family member sick with Covid-19. Each focus group lasted about forty-five minutes. Since the focus groups were conducted virtually, there were no snacks or refreshments offered. Due to the increased Covid-19 cases at the time, the focus groups were offered through Zoom. I began with ice-breaker-type questions to engage the participants and create a feeling of cohesiveness (Stewart et al., 2007). Once the respondents were comfortable, I presented open-ended questions to learn their collective group experience on the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions focused on how DACA students themselves perceived the nature of support services that were provided. Follow-up questions were utilized as needed for more detailed descriptions or clarification (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stewart et al., 2007).

#### Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. Please share your experience in the college application process.

2. What supports (in or out of college) were available to you throughout the application process?
3. What made you choose this school over others you may have applied to or considered?
4. What support services have you used since you started your educational journey here?
5. Please share your experiences in using the support services available to you.
6. What did you find helpful in working with support services?
7. What things would you change in how support service agents work with DACA students?
8. In your own words, how would you describe the overall tone the college has towards DACA students?

The first question addressed the first and second research questions by understanding the different experiences students had during the application process and the barriers to college (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). This question also created cohesiveness among group members as they shared their experiences (Stewart et al., 2007). Question two further engaged DACA students to share their experiences and begin exploring the impact support services had on their educational journey (Mwangi et al., 2019; Siemons et al., 2017). This question also helped to address the first research question as it asked students to look at supports within the college as well as outside of the college. The third question looked to engage the group to talk about reasons or even barriers that may have contributed to choosing a community college versus other postsecondary options (Jones, 2020). Question three helped to answer the second research question as it explored what the college provides as a whole or through policies and initiatives for DACA students. Questions four, five, and six delved into the experiences DACA students had with using support services and how supported and understood they felt (Caicedo, 2020). These questions also helped to gather information on how validated DACA students felt when utilizing support services at the

college (Andrade, 2019a; Rendon, 1994). This set of questions helped to answer the second and third research questions as it looked at support services individually and at the specific steps validating agents took to support DACA students. Question seven gave participants a chance to share what they needed and how they believe college agents could better support them based on their unique needs (Caicedo, 2020; Jones, 2020; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). This question helped to answer the third research question as it gave an idea of how well students feel supported or whether there is a disconnect between what supports students need and what they are being provided with. Question eight was the final question in the focus group that further allowed students to share their opinions on how the college has been addressing their needs and the level of support they are getting. Question eight helped to answer the second research question in their own words. This question also gave participants a chance to bring up anything that they may not have been asked about in previous questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves taking the raw data from interviews and converting them into evidence-based interpretations (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). After collecting all the data from participants, including the questionnaire, interviews, photovoice documents, and focus groups, I organized the data in charts and prepared for triangulation. The Delvetool software and hand coding were used to analyze and shape the data to help with coding and developing themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data was transcribed using rev.com, a transcription service, and Zoom transcription. Interviews, photovoice, and the focus group were coded to find themes and then shared with respondents to verify through member check. Reflective memoing notes were taken into consideration during coding to help develop themes but were not a part of the member check.

To analyze the textural description of participants' experiences, Moustakas (1994) states the researcher must first group the transcripts from each participant. In the second step, known as horizontalization, the transcription of each participant's response should be exactly as stated, including every expression made (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization leads to the third step in which reduction and elimination are used to determine if the expressions are necessary and sufficient for the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Through this process, the researcher highlights important statements, quotes, or sentences that help to understand the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Once horizontalization is complete, clusters or themes are created, using verbatim examples from the transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Next Moustakas (1994) states the themes are used to write the textural and structural descriptions. From this process, the researcher then writes a composite description, or the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Horizontalization**

In this process, I reviewed the data and highlighted the significant statements, words, or quotes that emerged from participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In this first round of analysis, I looked for emergent patterns and use in vivo coding. In vivo codes are based on the actual language used by the participant and put in quotes (Saldana, 2011). I then used reduction and elimination to remove unnecessary information or redundancies. From the significant and identified words and statements, I conducted a second round of analysis and developed clusters of meaning by using descriptive codes. Descriptive codes are words, usually nouns that summarize the data (Saldana, 2011). Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) regard the second round of analysis to help generate new insights and patterns that may have been missed in the first round. During the second round of analysis, I also looked for new codes and categories. After this

process, I developed themes that emerged from both rounds of analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This process was done manually and with the use of the Delvetool software. During the second reading of the transcripts, I made personal notes to the side on other emerging codes (Moustakas, 1994). Once the codes were identified for the interviews I organized them on a spreadsheet in order of themes that emerged the most. After completing this process manually, I used Delve to compare which codes emerged and developed category names. Saldana (2011) stated that category names umbrella responses that are coded similarly. These steps were repeated for the photovoice themes as well. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest examining what is present in the findings and what is missing to help generate initial themes from the findings. I also highlighted common demographic information from the questionnaire that was provided to see if responses could be sorted and compared based on background characteristics. Category names were identified for themes that were identified from each data collection method.

### **Bracketing**

Before any of the data could be analyzed, I made note of my personal experiences throughout each of the data collection processes. In transcendental phenomenology, bracketing is an attempt for the researcher to put aside personal experiences to focus on the experiences of the participants in the study (Moustakas, 1994). I documented my personal and political views regarding immigration. I also documented the personal experiences I had with students who expressed frustrations about attending college due to their legal status, the stressors they faced while in college, and the lack of understanding they received when working with college employees. I believe my personal experiences of migrating to the United States may impact my views and level of empathy for DACA students. I am also aware that my role as a counselor

plays a part in providing validation and nonjudgment to students who present with similar stressors and experiences.

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is judged by three criteria: credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To a large degree, trustworthiness is determined by the confidence that readers have in the findings of the study and is often used interchangeably with the term validity (Hays & Singh, 2011). This section will evaluate the trustworthiness of the study by looking at each of the four standards. Methods for increasing trustworthiness include member checks, triangulation, and peer review.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings of a study accurately describe reality (Hays & Singh, 2011). Member checking and triangulation of multiple data sources are two types of credibility mentioned by Creswell and Poth (2018). In member checking the researcher asks participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the first interview was transcribed and analyzed, I offered to meet with participants individually to review the transcriptions for the accuracy of the data they provided and the accuracy of analyses made (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although most participants from the interview did not accept the follow-up, the three that did were informed that if there were any errors or inaccuracies found by participants, I would make the necessary changes and conduct a further review. Those that met for member checking did not find any inaccuracies.

Triangulation is the other form of validity that was used in establishing credibility. Triangulation involves corroborating information or evidence from different sources to highlight a theme or perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To achieve triangulation, three different

methods of data collection were utilized and analyzed in this study to capture rich data. The information from the questionnaire along with themes that emerged from the interviews, the photovoice, and the focus group was compared. This process showed corroborating evidence through the use of multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability refer to the consistency of results and are addressed through rich detail about the context and setting of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability is being able to show that findings are consistent and can be repeated or replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is being able to establish neutrality or that the study is not shaped by the researcher's bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address dependability in this study, I utilized Lincoln and Guba's (1985) technique of internal audit. An internal audit is when a researcher who is not involved in the study reviews the process and results of the study. I asked a fellow researcher with an earned doctorate to review this study to determine if the findings, interpretations, and analysis are consistent. To address confirmability, similar to bracketing, I maintained a reflexive journal. A reflexive journal is a type of diary where the researcher can record thoughts, decisions, and personal values and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Transferability**

Transferability allows researchers to transfer information to other settings or contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2011). To achieve transferability, rich and thick data descriptions are provided and detailed in writing about the process and study. This will allow other researchers to easily replicate the study by having a strong description of the setting, participants, procedures, and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

When researching with human participants, Mertens and Ginsberg (2009) mention four federal guidelines that researchers should follow. The first protects the participant by providing informed consent which explains the nature of the research study, potential consequences, and the right to withdraw. The second guideline is for studies that require deception as part of the research design. These studies must end with a full debriefing of the study (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). The third guideline assures the researcher must maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality for their participation (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). The final guideline, known as the right to privacy, protects participants' records from being opened without consent (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). Every effort was made in this study to maintain each of these ethical considerations, except for deception as it was not required.

Specifically, I made sure consents address participants' right to withdraw from the study if there is any level of discomfort. Participants were made aware of the confidentiality of the information they shared and that a flash drive was used to store data. This flash drive was kept in a locked desk with a key that only the researcher had access to. Participants were also assigned pseudonyms to keep their identities safe and ease any tension there might have been in speaking freely during interviews. In case any participants had concerns about communicating via email, I provided an alternate method such as phone conversation or face-to-face. This was also an option for participants if they did not feel comfortable emailing photographs. After photographs were received, analyzed and checked by members, the originals were destroyed by deleting them.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast.

Phenomenology was used to gather rich data through semi-structured interviews, photovoice, and a focus group, which allowed participants to express their perspectives openly. The three different methods of data collection helped to capture rich and credible data. The data were analyzed by identifying themes that answer the three research questions presented in the study. The findings from this study could help colleges in the southeast develop trainings for support service providers to implement validation in their interactions with DACA students and better understand their unique situations. On a larger scale, opportunities include community and college leaders to develop policies that help with financial aid or other programs that address barriers to better support DACA students' college experience.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. The study captured the phenomena from the perspective of support services providers at Upstate Community College (UCC) and compared it to the experience of services received by DACA students as shared in the focus group. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Rendon's (1994) validation theory. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ 1: In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validation agents for DACA students?

RQ 2: What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus?

RQ 3: How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success?

### **Participants**

All participants in this study were given a pseudonym to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. Data were collected using two groups of participants. The first set of participants was faculty and staff who provide support services to DACA students. Data were collected from faculty and staff through semi-structured individual interviews and using photovoice. The second set of participants were current DACA students at UCC who were interviewed in focus groups. Due to conflicts in schedules and other restrictions, two focus groups were conducted virtually through Zoom. Each focus group session consisted of three participants.

## Faculty and Staff Participants

Table 1 presents an overview of staff participants who partook in one-on-one interviews. The table shows the area each staff member works in, the length of time they have worked at the college, and the number of DACA students they have interacted with in the last 24 months (about 2 years).

**Table 1**

### *Faculty and Staff Participant Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Area of Support Services</b>	<b>Length of time at college</b>	<b>Number of DACA Student Interactions (last 24 months)</b>
Alice	Library Services	18 years	2
Bianca	Advising	21 years	4
Carl	Faculty Advisor	5 years	2
Devon	Student Advocacy	16 years	2
Elsa	Counseling Services	6 years	2
Frida	Admissions	21 years	3
Greg	Admissions	6 years	4
Hannah	Admissions	10 years	4
Isha	Student Advocacy	1 year	1
Julia	Faculty Advisor	20 years	3

**Alice**

Alice has worked at the college for over 18 years in Library Services. Her main duties include assisting students with library needs and support for technical services. Alice reports having contact with students from a variety of backgrounds due to her role at the college and enjoys helping students. Alice has interacted with two DACA students that she is aware of in the last two years.

**Bianca**

Bianca is an advisor who has worked at the college for over 20 years. She initially was in admissions where she worked with mostly early college students and then moved to advising where she has been helping students for over 12 years. She acknowledges having more interactions with DACA students when she worked in early college but has had at least four interactions over the last two years.

**Carl**

Carl is a mechanics instructor who also advises students for classes within that program. He has been at the college for five years and is motivated by watching students learn. Carl is aware of having interacted with two DACA students within his classes and through advising.

**Devon**

Devon works in the area of Student Advocacy, which is a part of Student Services. He has been employed with the college for 16 years in various roles. Devon reports working with two DACA students in the last 24 months, although he has interacted with several during his 16 years at the college. Since Devon has started working with TRIO, a federally funded program, he no longer sees DACA students because they do not qualify for any federal programs.

**Elsa**

Elsa is a counselor at UCC who has been working with the college for almost seven years. She has worked in various areas of mental health and with clients ranging from childhood to adulthood, including individuals with disabilities. During her time here at the college, Elsa has interacted with two DACA students that she is aware of, based on their disclosure to her of their status. Elsa provides short-term counseling services to any UCC student to provide support and encourage emotional and mental well-being.

**Frida**

Frida is the assistant dean of enrollment services and has worked for the college for 21 years. She has worked with students face-to-face in admissions and behind-the-scenes running reports and training new staff. Frida has worked with many DACA students over several years but has interacted with about three in the last 24 months. Frida's position is unique in that she knows about a student's immigration status from the beginning, as it is a requirement to apply to the college.

**Greg**

Greg has been an academic advisor at UCC for six years. He also refers to himself as a student advocate because of the close work he does with DACA students and Black male students. Greg has worked in other areas of higher education at different colleges around the country. Greg is well known among DACA students as he became the first point of contact for them in the admissions process as well as a liaison between the college and high schools.

**Hannah**

Hannah has been employed with the college for 10 years in various roles. She began as an adjunct instructor and then assisted in starting the college's ESL program. She left to pursue

other goals and then returned to do academic coaching and is now working in admissions with mostly the international student population.

**Isha**

Isha has been at UCC for one year now and works in student advocacy. She mostly interacts with students who may be dealing with academic hardship and requires some support and engagement to get back on track academically. Isha's background is in academic coaching and advising, which helps her in her current role.

**Julia**

Julia is a faculty advisor and has worked at UCC for 20 years. She initially worked as a nurse at a local hospital system, went back to school to get her master's degree, and then returned to UCC as an instructor and advisor for her program. During her time at the college, Julia has come across several DACA students, but only three in the last 24 months.

### *DACA Participants*

Table 2 presents an overview of the DACA focus group participants. It shows the students declared major, self-reported academic goal, and current job status. Student goals that say “transfer” mean that the student plans to transfer to a four-year college after completing pre-requisites, a possible change in their legal status, or an improved GPA. Students who are “full-time students” do not have jobs.

**Table 2**

*Student Participant Information (Focus Group)*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Student’s Academic Goal</b>	<b>Job Status</b>
Raul	Associate in Science	Transfer	Working full time
Layla	Business/Accounting	Transfer	Working full time
Amelia	Associate in Science	Transfer	Working full time
Sofia	Nursing	Associate in Science	Full-time student
Alba	Graphic Design	Associate in Arts	Working full time
Clara	Engineering	Associate in Science	Working part-time

### **Raul**

Raul is currently a full-time student who graduated from a nearby high school and is pursuing an associate in science, with the intent to transfer to a four-year college. Up until the focus group session, Raul has been taking two classes per semester so he could work to pay for his classes. At this time Raul is unsure of his major but knows it will be in the area of sciences. Raul also works full-time and often takes fewer courses in the spring semester to be able to work more hours to save money.

**Layla**

Layla, a DACA student who has completed her degree requirements, will be graduating at the end of the fall semester with an associate in business. Layla plans to transfer to a four-year college to earn her bachelor's in accounting. Layla is working full-time and hopes to get a better job with her degree.

**Amelia**

Amelia is a part-time student who is pursuing her associate in science. She enrolls in one to two classes a semester so that she can keep working full-time to pay her tuition. Amelia wants to become a nurse and plans to apply to a nursing program at a four-year college out of state where she knows she can eventually be licensed.

**Sofia**

Sofia is a nursing major who grew up and attended high school in a town not far from the college. Sofia alternates between being a full-time student and taking a semester off to work. This allows her to earn money to pay for her classes but also prolongs her graduation date. She plans to complete her degree and take the nursing licensure exam in another state where she can be a licensed practitioner.

**Alba**

Alba is a graphic design major and currently taking two classes and working full-time. She plans to complete her associate degree and enter the workforce where she can have a career and make a better living for herself.

**Clara**

Clara is majoring in engineering and also working part-time to help pay for her classes. She is currently taking two classes and expects to graduate at the end of the fall semester. Clara

was raised in a city not far from the college where she attended high school and still resides with her family.

## **Results**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. Data were collected from interviews, photovoice, and focus groups. There were ten faculty and staff who participated in the semi-structured interviews. Of those ten participants, nine faculty and staff provided images for photovoice. Six DACA recipient students participated in the focus group. Once all the information was gathered and transcribed, I carefully read and created codes manually and also used Delvetool. Codes and themes were organized on a spreadsheet for the interviews. The codes were further developed into themes and participants were allowed to verify through member check. These same steps were repeated for the photovoice and focus groups. As a result, I identified six themes and one subtheme from the data analysis process.

### **Codes and Themes**

Table 3 presents an overview of the general codes that developed into themes from the photovoice data collection. Under each photovoice prompt, there is a description of the image submitted by each staff participant, a verbal description of the meaning, and the codes. Photovoice was only conducted with faculty and staff participants. Table 4 presents the open codes, themes, and sub-theme that developed across all data sets.

**Table 3***Photovoice Prompts and Their Descriptions that Developed into Themes*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>1. How do you show validation to DACA students</b>	<b>2. What is the impact of the support services you provide to DACA students</b>	<b>Codes that developed into themes.</b>
<b>Alice</b>	No response	No response	None
<b>Bianca</b>	Image of hands in the middle; shows a diverse group of people in agreement	Image of a bright yellow sun that has a cartoonish look	1. We support all students 2. Happy to help find resources
<b>Carl</b>	Image of news reporter	Image of students from various backgrounds graduating	1. Staying up to date on DACA issues and sharing with others. 2. Providing free education for all.
<b>Devon</b>	Image of immigrants outside the Lincoln Memorial holding signs saying “Immigrants are here to stay”	Image of a college degree and graduation cap	1. DACA students belong here 2. Educational success
<b>Elsa</b>	Image of a stuffed animal	Image of a colorful butterfly	1. Empathy toward the DACA situation 2. Provide a safe place for students to soar
<b>Frida</b>	Image of a welcome mat in front of a doorway with the door wide open	Image of someone drawing stairs on a chalkboard with a student walking up the stairs	1. Open door policy 2. Various support services help students to work their way up
<b>Greg</b>	Image of the earth from space	Image of students at graduation throwing their caps in the air	1. Provide equal rights for all in the world 2. Make sure students know what they are paying for and what they will get at the end of their journey
<b>Hannah</b>	Image of a group of people standing in front of a school holding signs that say “welcome students”	Image of students from various backgrounds at graduation with their degrees	1. Welcome all students regardless of their status 2. Assist students by providing as many resources as possible to lead to graduation
<b>Isha</b>	Image of different hands (of all races) shaping a circle	Image of a tree where the trunk is two strong arms and the leaves are made of handprints of different colors and sizes	1. Empower others to be acknowledged, heard, and respected 2. Allowing growth (leading to their goals)
<b>Julia</b>	Image of someone stamping “approved” on a stack of papers	Image of four signs pointing in different directions with the words “success, happiness, opportunity, fortune” with a clear sky background	1. Show students they are worthy of the same opportunities as others. 2. Helps DACA students be successful

**Table 4***Theme Development*

<b>Open Codes</b>	<b>Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Extra attention	4	Sympathy and Empathy	
Understanding student situation	16		
Provide safe zone	3		
Relate through personal experience	5		
Be friendly	10		
Non-judgmental	3		
Ask questions	3	Communication	Lack of communication
Learn student's goals	7		
Connect to resources	12		
Don't feel understood	2		
Don't always know if DACA	7	Disclosure of DACA status	
Notification of student status	3		
No need to disclose	5		
College policies	7	Knowledge of policies	
State policies	3		
DACA policies and knowledge	6		
Financial barriers	28	DACA hardships	
No mentor/support group	8		
Legal issues regarding status	2		
Same access to resources	3	Equal Treatment	
No financial aid	13		
Limitation of major/degree program	9		

## **Theme Development**

In Moustakas's (1994) data analysis process of theme development, transcripts are grouped and horizontalization is used to find codes that later become themes. Through the data analysis of participant interviews, photovoice images, and focus groups, six themes were identified, and one subtheme. I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten faculty and staff participants via Zoom or in person based on their preferences. Each interview was audio recorded with the participant's approval. At the end of each interview, I provided each participant with an explanation of what photovoice is and the two prompts they were expected to capture. Participants were asked to email their images to me within the next three weeks. During these three weeks, I transcribed the recordings. I reviewed and examined each transcript to find patterns and codes. Nine out of the ten participants returned their photovoice images to me and set up a time to discuss it via Zoom so the interaction could be audio recorded. Based on the participants' explanation and member checking, I used the same process as with interviews of identifying codes by manually creating a table and with Delvetool (see Table 3). Looking for patterns, finding meaning, using member check, and memoing are all important processes in data analysis before presenting themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Member checking allows participants to make sure their sentiments are being expressed correctly, therefore improving the credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation is another form of validity that helps to establish credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Corroborating data from the interviews, photovoice, and focus groups provided triangulation for this study. The focus groups were conducted with six students who were enrolled in classes and identify as DACA recipients. Due to the difficulty in meeting each participant's scheduling needs, two focus groups were conducted with three participants each. Participants agreed to be

recorded and showed a willingness to engage in a discussion that answered the semi-structured questions. After conducting both focus groups, I transcribed the recordings and offered participants to member check. I read the transcriptions and looked for patterns and the codes that developed. The codes that developed from the focus groups were compared to those that developed from the interviews and photovoice. This process helped identify themes for the data collected from the focus groups.

### **Theme 1: Sympathy and Empathy**

Sympathy and empathy was the first theme to emerge as participants were asked direct questions about their methods of validating DACA students. Sympathy is a feeling of concern for someone who is experiencing something difficult or painful (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand and vicariously experience what others feel (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). Eight of the 10 participants from the staff and faculty category brought up how they show validation through sympathy and empathy and the impact it has on DACA students. One staff participant, Frida expressed in her interview that she shows sympathy by “fussing over them [DACA students] a little bit more than regular students because I feel bad that they have some sort of barrier that I can’t help with.” Frida also said she shares with students that she grew up in a military family and has lived abroad as a way of empathetically connecting to their experience

Hannah, a staff participant, shared that she showed sympathy and empathy by taking extra time to explain what she can and cannot help students with. She makes sure DACA students know who their advisor is and where they are located. She also gives them her card and encourages them to contact her directly rather than other people because she knows their

situation and is staying on top of the updates regarding DACA. She further explains that this helps keep DACA students from getting mixed or incorrect information.

Devon, a staff participant, reported in his interview that he validates students by listening to their stories and stated, “DACA students are like any other student to a certain degree, but they need just a little bit more.” He described “a little bit more” to mean extra care and understanding. On the same note another staff participant, Bianca quoted, “when they self-disclose as DACA, immediately that nurturing part comes out more like I want to make sure they are comfortable and that they know that I want to help them.” Greg, an academic advisor who has worked closely with DACA students shared in his interview that he gives his personal cell phone number to DACA students because he understands they may need extra supports. Furthermore, Greg felt he could relate to DACA students because he is also an immigrant. In his interview, Greg stated that if he met a DACA student, he would say, “being a first-generation immigrant, I understand what you go through to settle down here.”

Elsa, a counselor, stated in her interview that her method of validating DACA students in counseling is to remind them that anything they share is confidential. She also shows empathy for their situation and provides a nonjudgmental and safe zone and stated, “It’s always good to be nonjudgmental and give a little extra attention to what they are saying so if they need to come and talk about what’s going on without any fear of retaliation, they can do that.” Elsa also expressed in her interview, “I relate to these students because I had no one to ask for advice and I remember it was hard for me, so I want to see these students succeed.”

Sympathy and empathy was also a theme that was evident in photovoice. Elsa’s image of a stuffed animal showed her “empathy towards DACA students’ situation.” Her second image of a colorful butterfly represented providing a safe place for students to soar. Hannah also described

her first photovoice image of a group of people standing in front of a school holding signs that say “welcome students” to represent acceptance of all students regardless of their status. Isha described her photovoice image of hands from all different races in the shape of a circle as “empowering others to be acknowledged, heard, and respected.”

## **Theme 2: Communication**

The second theme to emerge was communication. Communication is the interaction and conversation that staff participants initiated to try to connect to DACA students. Most participants said that communication started by asking questions or using self-disclosure to initiate a dialogue about what the student’s goals are and their current circumstances. Often, by knowing this, staff were better able to connect with students and understand their needs or refer them to a resource that could better serve them. In his interview, Devon stated “I would have a conversation with them [students] to understand what next steps they want to take. If they needed to go to another office, I would walk them there as support.” Isha is another participant who felt she could connect with DACA students by engaging in conversation. Isha shared, “I was thrust into college and did not know how to navigate it.” By disclosing her experience of college, she could connect with students and encourage them to openly communicate with her. Isha stated, “Once I know what they need, I can help connect them to someone that can help them.”

The theme of communication also emerged in photovoice. The second photovoice prompt asked, “what is the impact of the support services you provide to DACA students?” Four out of nine participant responses had to do with communication (See Table 3). In Bianca’s explanation of her photovoice image, she shared that the bright yellow sun portrayed that she was “happy to help find resources” for students. Similarly, Frida submitted a picture of someone drawing stairs

on a chalkboard portraying the different resources on campus and stated she sees the impact as “helping students work their way up.” Hannah shared an image of students from various backgrounds at graduation holding degrees. She described this image as showing how she “assists students by providing as many resources as possible to lead to graduation.” Isha’s second image was a tree with two arms as a trunk and hand prints of different colors and sizes for leaves. Isha described this image as “allowing growth.” These images depicted how staff participants viewed their efforts to support DACA students.

***Subtheme: Lack of communication***

Among the student participants, the theme lack of communication emerged from the focus group. The DACA students did not feel like the staff was able to connect, understand, or help them. During the focus group student participants talked about their experiences and the interactions they had with the support staff at the college. Five out of the six focus group participants stated that everyone they interacted with was always nice and had good intentions to help but did not necessarily know how to help. Sofia, a nursing student, said that she was referred to the Hispanic Alliance, but “there was never any DACA-specific group to reach out to.” Sofia also said, “I feel like I’ve been alone in my journey and had to figure things out alone, like where do I go? What do I have to do?” She further reported, “My advisor didn’t understand why I was only taking one class at a time at one point. I had to tell him that I pay out of pocket and it’s expensive.” Most students did not fault any single individual because they understood that it was a bigger issue. Raul shared “I mean they try to help me when it comes to payments and stuff like that, but when they find out I’m DACA, there is nothing much they can do because that’s just how the system is set up.” Amelia reported, “they didn’t really have like any resources where I could get help in, say financial aid. Honestly, they just kind of told me what I already

knew.” Even if staff wanted to further connect students to resources, they seemed to be limited in the realm of financial aid and often relied on the Hispanic Alliance, a local organization that works to advocate and advance the Hispanic community. In regards to DACA, the Hispanic Alliance offers help to any DACA student, even if they are not Hispanic.

**Theme 3: Disclosure of DACA status**

Disclosure of DACA status is an important theme that emerged from staff participants in various departments. DACA status is not marked or identified in a student's profile. Disclosure of status occurs when students self-disclose to a staff member of their DACA status. The only staff who have this information are typically those who work in financial aid or admissions. Many participants stated that if a student does not disclose this information at the beginning of their interaction, they do not know and cannot assume that he or she is a DACA recipient. In her interview, a staff participant, Elsa, shared that in two separate instances, DACA students felt comfortable enough disclosing their status to her. Elsa said, "Well, I've had a couple that identified themselves because of course I wouldn't have known they were or not." Carl, a faculty advisor, stated in his interview, "It would probably be beneficial if we were notified that they are DACA students, then we could advise them better." Similarly, in her interview, Isha stated that she works with all types of students, but the DACA students do not come in and say, "I'm a DACA student." Having this information was helpful to staff in knowing what resources may be useful.

In talking with DACA students in the focus group, they reported that they did not always find it important to disclose their DACA status. Most DACA students did not disclose to tutors, academic coaches, or even faculty advisors about their status. Amelia, a part-time student who is looking to transfer to a four-year college said in the focus group, "It doesn't really matter, I mean they are going to tell me what I already know." Alba, a graphic design major shared with the focus group that she used tutoring services a couple of times for help with math and did not find any reason to share her DACA status.

#### **Theme 4: Knowledge of Policies**

The fourth theme to emerge was knowledge of policies. Knowledge of policies is knowing about DACA - its limitations and knowing the college's policies in working with DACA students. Many of the staff participants expressed not knowing what the college's policies were in working with DACA students. Some staff participants also stated they knew of DACA, but were not fully knowledgeable of all the details. Staff participants felt there should be more training, communication, and resources for them to be able to better interact with DACA students. Frida, Hannah, and Greg, all staff members who work in admissions, felt different from the other seven participants. In her interview, Frida stated, "I think we're very good at explaining the law and letting students know when they can start and the things they can do in the meantime." Hannah stated in her interview, "We need to follow whatever guidelines they send us from the State Office. So, we know what forms are required and we can let the students know what they can and cannot register for." During his interview, Greg also said, "I try to keep up with the DACA news and make sure the students I talk to know what their limitations are."

The other staff participants reported not knowing if the college even had policies related to DACA students. Some were not very familiar with DACA at all. For example, Devon shared in his interview, "My challenge is that I don't know enough about what DACA is. I'm trying to educate myself." Julia related to Devon as she stated in her interview, "I don't think there is any specific policy about DACA at the college, at least not that I know of." Elsa shared a similar sentiment in her interview, "I'm not sure about what policies there are. That's really something we should have more training on or something."

Knowledge of policies also emerged from the photovoice images. Carl submitted an image of a news reporter and described it to show the importance of "staying up to date on

DACA issues and sharing with others.” Greg provided an image of students at graduation throwing their caps in the air. He described this image as representing that students should know exactly what they are paying for and what they will get at the end of their journey. These images not only spoke to staff knowing policies about DACA but also to students being made aware of the college’s policies.

DACA students that participated in the focus groups could sense which staff were aware of what DACA is versus those who were not as familiar with it. Five of the six students stated they expected more clarity regarding what programs they were limited to and the financial information. Alba stated, “I think they [college and college staff] need to be a lot more transparent.” Amelia’s experience was similar. She shared, “Whoever I call, even in the financial aid department, is either not familiar with DACA or does not understand that we cannot file a FAFSA (Free Application for Student Aid).” Layla reported, “I just got discouraged and it may have just been that one person who didn’t know about DACA students.” Sofia stated, “It would be nice if the information was on the website so there is easy access and you know before you start your classes or pay.” Raul was the only student in the focus group who felt differently. Raul showed more understanding regarding the limitations that support staff had. He stated, “Everyone was really helpful with what they could do. They knew what they couldn’t do for me and that’s not their fault.”

### **Theme 5: DACA Hardships**

Both sets of participants seemed to acknowledge the hardships that DACA students face. The issues of financial barriers, mentorship, legal concerns, and stigma were mentioned the most. Most support staff provided what resources they could because staff recognized that DACA students were paying their own way through school. Although most participants

mentioned the financial barrier in their interviews, only two staff members expressed this in their photovoice image. Hannah shared an image of students from various backgrounds at graduation with their degrees in hand. She said this image shows how “we assist students by providing as many resources as possible to lead to graduation.” Carl submitted an image of a group of students from various cultural backgrounds which represented there should be free education for all. This code overlapped with the equal treatment theme as well as recognizing the financial hardships that DACA students face. Most staff reported that they realized DACA students had more hurdles to cross than their non-DACA counterparts.

All six students in the focus group discussed financial hardships and how they either took one class per semester or would work one semester to save money and attend school the next semester. This process seemed to prolong their time in school and their expected graduation. Layla brought up not having a support group or mentor as a hardship that she experienced. “I think there was supposed to be a group to support DACA, but I don’t know what happened to that so it was hard to navigate because I didn’t know what I was supposed to do.” Amelia stated, “I went to like one or two meetings of this DACA support group, but I’m not sure what happened because I had to take a couple of semesters off.”

Alba talked about having legal issues that other students may not understand or have to deal with.

I had my first renewal come up and even though it was in the middle of the semester, I could not start my classes until I reapplied for DACA and it was approved. Then I was allowed to register for classes. If our DACA expires in the middle of the semester, those classes do not count. This did cause delays for me. But I know that’s not anyone’s fault here.

Sofia shared an experience regarding the stigma of being a DACA student. She said, “I feel like I have a different experience when I call financial aid regarding questions about payment than my brother, who is a citizen and just started college.” Sofia explained that his calls get answered faster and her issues do not seem to get resolved. Unfortunately, this experience has kept Sofia from trying to reach out again. No students reported they felt discriminated against by any other person at the college, but related the lack of understanding about DACA with some of the stigma they experienced.

### **Theme 6: Equal Treatment**

Equal treatment refers to treating all students the same and providing the same steps and level of support based on their needs. Many staff participants stated that they treat all their students the same and took pride in not differentiating services. Their intentions are positive to demonstrate equality and fairness. Hannah, a staff member who works in admissions, shared her view on equal treatment of DACA students.

Other than you know, paying the out-of-state tuition, I mean they’re treated just as other students are; we don’t treat them any differently. I mean everyone has to do a legal presence, but for them, it’s just a little bit more of a hassle. I think overall their needs are met because they can use any resource on campus, it’s just they are limited in terms of financial assistance.

Another participant, Carl, stated in his interview, “I try not to do anything out of the way for any particular student that I wouldn’t do for all my students.” Isha shared a similar sentiment during her interview stating, “I make sure I’m not discriminating against any student so if a student is not doing well, I’m going to support them and say what we can do to assist.” This reaction is further emphasized by Elsa who reported, “...the services are equal for all.”

Equal treatment was also expressed in photovoice. Greg showed an image of the earth from space and stated, “there should be equal rights for all in the world.” Julia also submitted an image of someone stamping “approved” on a stack of papers. She described this image to show, “all students are worthy of the same opportunities as others.” Hannah’s photovoice image was a group of people standing in front of a school holding signs that say “welcome students”. Hannah described this image to represent that “...all students are welcome regardless of their status.” Frida’s image was of a welcome mat in front of a doorway with the door wide open. She described this image to represent her belief in “an open-door policy.”

The student participants in the focus group also recognized that they were treated kindly and fairly by staff and identified inequality only in terms of tuition cost and limitations in being able to participate in certain programs. Clara, an engineering major, shared similar feelings about equality and engagement. “The application was an easy process and I mean, I had to wait for an advisor but then it was a pretty easy and friendly process.” Sofia, however, felt different than others in the focus group. She shared that as a nursing student she was discouraged to enter the program because she was told that legally, she could not get licensed in the state of South Carolina. Sofia’s experience led her to believe that many staff did not take her or her situation seriously. Other than Sofia, the DACA students felt the only inequality they experienced was in regards to paying higher tuition rates than residential students and lack of access to financial resources, such as financial aid and loans. These financial issues were not tied to how they were treated by individuals at the college.

### **Research Question Responses**

The responses to the research questions for this study came from two groups of participants. The first group of participants was faculty and staff who work with students in

various types of support services. This group provided data in the form of individual interviews and through photovoice. The second group of participants was DACA students, who provided data by participating in a focus group.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question was, “In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validating agents for DACA students?” The themes of sympathy and empathy and communication addressed this question. Faculty and staff acted as validating agents by sympathizing and empathizing with DACA students to understand their situation. This was shown by giving them extra time and attention. Some staff shared that if they were working with a DACA student, they would extend themselves by providing their personal cell phone number, something they did not do for all students. DACA students also recognized that most support staff they interacted with were being as helpful and as understanding as they could be. Students were able to identify those who did not know about DACA or understand the details of it and often felt they had to figure things out for themselves. DACA students seemed to respond differently based on whether they had interactions with a staff member who showed sympathy and empathy versus those who did not. Communication was another way that faculty and staff acted as validating agents. Support staff asked meaningful questions to learn about students’ goals and current situations. They also tried relating to them by sharing their own experiences.

### **Research Question Two**

The second research question was, “What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus?” The themes of communication, knowledge of policies, and disclosure of DACA status answered this question. The steps validating agents took to engage with DACA students on campus was to share their own experiences through

communication. If a DACA student self-disclosed their status, support staff were able to listen and show non-judgment. Elsa said in her interview, “I try not to assume anything and show no judgment so they feel comfortable talking to me.” Knowing college policies and knowing about what DACA is and what limitations it has for students allows faculty and staff to better provide support and resources for DACA students. Support staff that understood that DACA students are paying out-of-state tuition showed more understanding of why many of these students take semesters off to work and earn money to pay their tuition. Being aware of the college's policies is also a necessary step for validating agents because it keeps students from contacting multiple people and getting different responses. When DACA students are more willing to disclose their DACA status, it allows for support services providers to better engage by knowing what resources are available to students. It also lets staff know what their limitations are in helping with financial or other barriers. Often students do not disclose their status simply because they do not think it will be helpful or they believe there is no new information. There is also no notification for most staff (other than admissions and financial aid) to know if a student has DACA status. For these reasons, support staff needs to make sure they are making efforts to connect with their students by asking questions and trying to understand their circumstances. Often, engagement occurs through communication. Many staff could think back to their struggles in college and use that to better relate to what DACA students may be experiencing.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question asked, “How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students’ academic and social success?” The themes of DACA hardships, sympathy and empathy, communication, and equal treatment answer this question. Participants in the focus group reported financial concerns as their biggest barrier to education followed by

the lack of mentorship, feelings of stigma, and legal concerns. Validation from out-of-class agents may not have removed all barriers, but it helped DACA students to find some resources within the college as well as in the community. When support staff showed sympathy or empathy, DACA students received more individualized support and felt more connected. The theme of communication also answers this research question because by knowing what the DACA students' circumstances and needs were, staff were better able to provide the correct resources and showed more support. Communicating with the student provides a connection and motivation because some DACA students reported feeling like they were navigating their college journey alone. The theme of equal treatment showed that staff treats all students the same in terms of how they try to help support students. Hannah stated in her interview, "I think overall their [DACA students] needs are met because they can use any resource on campus...." For some students, it can be construed as not understanding their unique situation, whereas for other students it is seen as not stigmatizing.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. South Carolina is considered to be a restrictive state in that it has stricter laws for DACA recipients in higher education, thus creating barriers. Receiving validation from support services is a form of positive reinforcement and helps DACA students see themselves as capable learners by creating a sense of belonging.

The study consisted of ten staff and faculty respondents who participated in one-on-one interviews and photovoice. Of the ten staff and faculty participants, nine participants provided photovoice images. There was only one participant who did not provide a photovoice image. The

staff and faculty respondents work in areas of student support services and provide support to students outside the classroom. These staff participants have worked at the college for between one and 21 years. Six student participants with DACA status took part in a focus group. Five of the students were part-time students, in that they had full-time jobs along with the responsibility of school. There was only one DACA student, Sofia, who was a full-time student and did not have a job. Six themes and one sub-theme emerged from the data analysis. They were sympathy and empathy, communication, disclosure of DACA status, knowledge of policies, DACA hardships, and equal treatment. The sub-theme under communication was lack of communication.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. The study was designed to answer three research questions to understand if support services are meeting the needs of DACA students using the theoretical framework of Rendon's (1994) validation theory. This chapter presents a summary of the findings and a discussion of the implications concerning the relevant literature and Rendon's (1994) validation theory. This chapter also addresses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. This chapter will end with the delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

Findings from the one-on-one interviews, photovoice, and focus group interviews revealed six themes and one sub-theme that answer the three research questions for this study. The themes that emerged were sympathy and empathy, communication with the sub-theme lack of communication, disclosure of DACA status, knowledge of policies, DACA hardships, and equal treatment. The three research questions for this study were: In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validating agents for DACA students? What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus? How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success?

I interviewed ten staff participants who provide support services at the college and captured their perspective of validation for DACA students. Three of the staff participants work in admissions and seven of the participants work in the areas of library services, advising, student advocacy, counseling, or as faculty advisors. Staff participants took part in semi-

structured interviews and provided photovoice images. The second set of participants were six DACA students who took part in a focus group.

The first research question was “In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validating agents for DACA students?” This question was answered with the themes of sympathy and empathy and communication. Sympathy and empathy were reportedly shown in several different ways by various support staff. Sympathy was described as giving extra attention to DACA students whereas empathy was shown by taking extra time to understand their situation and limitations. Sympathy was also shown by staff providing DACA students with their direct phone extension or cell phone number. Participants also showed empathy by creating a safe zone of no judgment and confidentiality to listen to DACA students’ stories. Sympathy and empathy also emerged as a theme from three of the nine participants that responded to the photovoice prompts. Both of Elsa’s images from the photovoice fit with the theme of empathy. Her first image was a picture of a stuffed animal that represented her sympathy toward DACA students. Elsa’s second image was a drawing of a colorful butterfly, which showed empathy because it represents a safe place for students to soar. Elsa described her office space as a safe zone for students and whatever they shared was confidential and judgment-free.

Communication was the second theme that answered the first research question. Communication was described by participants as the interaction and conversation they had with DACA students. The conversations involved staff asking questions of DACA students to better understand their goals, situations, and challenges. Many staff used self-disclosure of their own life experiences to relate to the students. One example of how some staff participants thought they could relate was by sharing their own experience of being an immigrant who migrated to the United States and the difficulties they had. Some staff said they would disclose the difficulties

they experienced navigating college, whereas others talked about not having a mentor or being a first-generation college student themselves. Although staff perceived their efforts of communication as validation, the sub-theme, lack of communication, emerged from the DACA student focus group. Most DACA students said in the focus group that they found the staff to be kind and genuine in their efforts, but also stated they did not feel that the staff could relate to or understand their circumstances.

The second research question was, “what initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus?” This question was answered by the themes of communication, knowledge of policies, and disclosure of status. By asking questions and sharing their own experiences, staff participants expressed their efforts to engage with DACA students. These forms of communication were used to engage DACA students so they feel comfortable and know that staff wants to provide helpful support and resources. According to the DACA student participants in the focus group, staff members who showed knowledge of policies regarding DACA were the most helpful to them. Many staff participants shared in their interviews that they were not aware of the policies the college had regarding DACA. Some staff members stated the only policies they knew of were those at the state level. Disclosure of status also answered the second research question because most staff participants that work in support services do not have access to this information on a student’s profile. By asking questions about goals and circumstances, staff may also engage students to share their status, allowing staff to provide more specific support. Knowing a student’s status could even save time by knowing what limitations staff have in providing support. It seems that being aware of a student’s DACA status would play a factor in being able to validate a student and provide services accordingly

The third research question was “how does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students’ academic and social success?” The themes of DACA hardships, sympathy and empathy, communication, and equal treatment answered this question. Staff members who understood DACA hardships related to their status made more meaningful referrals and provided more specific support services. Staff members in the individual interviews recognized that DACA students had more financial barriers than other students. DACA students in the focus group agreed that the financial burden of paying out-of-state tuition was one of the biggest barriers they dealt with. Empathy influenced academic and social success because it validated DACA students’ experiences and showed them that the college recognizes their situations. Empathy was a theme that emerged from the staff interviews and photovoice. The various forms of empathy that staff show to DACA students play a role in their feeling accepted and understood at the college. Communication is also an important theme that influences DACA student success. Staff expressed various ways they communicated with DACA students but often, DACA students did not see the communication as helpful. Even though DACA students may see this as a lack of communication, for staff this helped them to get more information and be able to provide need specific resources and information to DACA students. With equal treatment, staff expressed in their interviews and photovoice that they treated all students equally and fair. DACA students corroborated this in the focus group and acknowledged that they know staff is limited in what they can do to help with certain issues. The equal treatment does, however, show students they belong and are seen as any other student on campus.

### **Discussion**

The following section will discuss the research findings concerning the empirical and theoretical literature discussed in Chapter two. The empirical evidence from this study explains

how faculty and staff at a community college in the southeast perceive how they provide validation to DACA students. This section will go on to explore how the findings from this study compare to the related literature, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

### **Empirical Literature**

The findings from this study gave insight into the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA students at a community college in the southeast. Considering the empirical significance of this study, few studies explored the support services DACA students are receiving from the perspective of staff who are providing the services (Benuto et al., 2018; Casas et al., 2019; Jones, 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Most qualitative studies are from the perspective of the DACA student. Of the studies that do exist from the perspective of college staff, they were conducted in areas of the United States that have a large DACA population and more favorable laws where DACA students pay in-state tuition such as California, Texas, and Illinois (Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020).

The existing research confirms that the hardships DACA students encounter are a factor in their academic success (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019). The results from this study confirm the research as five out of the six DACA students from the focus group stated the financial barrier of out-of-state tuition and lack of aid limits the number of classes they can take. Many students take semesters off to work and save money to pay for the next semester. This process prolongs their time in college. Statements related to the hardships seemed to match much of the research that is already published regarding what DACA students experienced in other regions of the US before some of the state legislatures changed (Lauby, 2018; Negron-Gonzales, 2017; Sahay et al., 2016). These issues have not improved much in South Carolina, which is still considered a more

restrictive state (Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020; Siemons et al., 2017). Price and Mowry-Mora (2020) found that because states have different policies regarding DACA students in higher education, the barriers and level of support would be impacted. The findings from this study concurred with Price and Mowry-Mora (2020) in that there are limitations in what staff participants reported they could do to help DACA students. DACA students also recognized that although they had access to various resources on campus, they did not have resources that could help with tuition costs.

The findings from this study also concurred with Katsiaficas et al., (2019) who found that community supports, safe spaces on campus, and civic engagement correlated with DACA students feeling accepted. The findings from this study showed that DACA students vocalized not having mentors or a group on campus they could relate to, making them feel like they had to navigate the college experience alone. Allen-Handy and Farinde-Wu (2018) found that daily motivation and support are important to the success of DACA students. Staff participants reported showing empathy to DACA students which student participants corroborated in the focus group when they described that staff was kind and nice to them. Most DACA students did not feel connected to any staff but also did not blame them for the limitations in providing resources.

The theme of communication concurs with the findings of a study conducted by Tevis and Britton (2020). These researchers found that staff often perceived themselves as communicating clearly to students; however, students viewed their communication as lacking information that would have been vital to understanding expectations. In the same regard, staff participants from this study perceived their efforts of communicating as a way to connect and

engage with DACA students, but DACA students did not always find it to be helpful, leading to the sub-theme lack of communication.

### **Theoretical Literature**

Rendon's (1994) validation theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. Validation refers to the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in-class and out-of-class agents (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). In this study, out-of-class agents were faculty and staff who provide support services to DACA students outside of the classroom, such as advisors, counselors, tutors, etc. Rendon (1994) proposed that college agents who took the initiative to validate students fostered academic and social success. The current study extends validation theory to the DACA student population who are underrepresented at the community college. In this study, staff participants, who were validating agents, did incorporate validating elements such as empathy and communication into their interactions with DACA students. Since most support staff at the college did not know if a student was a DACA recipient without the student disclosing it, there may not be consistent validation provided to DACA students.

Rendon (1994) discussed two types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation focuses on college agents helping students in ways that give them the confidence to learn. Interpersonal validation focuses on agents accepting students for who they are beyond their role as college students (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). The current study addressed the perception support staff had on how they validate DACA students. Rendon (1994) theorized that nontraditional or more passive students were reluctant to seek services, therefore the initiative of validating students must come from college staff. There is also a chance that if students do not feel validated or supported they may not return, making it important for the first interaction to be meaningful.

## **Implications**

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

### **Theoretical Implications**

Rendon's (1994) validation theory found that faculty and staff played a strong role in transforming underrepresented or vulnerable students into learners who were excited about college and felt accepted. Previous studies have used validation theory to show the experiences DACA students had when they were validated by faculty and staff. The current study expands on validation theory in that it looks at the perspective of faculty and staff by understanding how they perceive they are validating DACA students. Staff participants in this study described empathy and communication as methods of validating DACA students. They also shared methods of engaging students to provide more detailed and valuable support. For students, accepting support and feeling validated was impacted by how they perceived communication from staff. Students also showed some judgment if staff were not knowledgeable about DACA or college policies regarding DACA. The biggest challenge in supporting DACA students was knowing whether or not a student had DACA status. Rendon's (1994) theory assumes faculty and staff know upfront if they are working with DACA students making their efforts to validate more meaningful. In this study, most staff did not know a student's status unless they disclosed it.

A recommendation for the college may be to implement a student-centered model that addresses each student with a foundation in validation theory. Training support staff on how to engage and validate specific populations could be helpful. Another recommendation is to create a team that is trained to work with DACA students. This will help DACA students feel supported

by those who know their status and other policies. This team model will also help develop a staff that is specialized to help an underrepresented group on campus.

### **Empirical Implications**

The empirical implications of this study fill the gap in the literature as few studies explore support services provided to DACA students in a more restrictive state, like South Carolina (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019; Person et al., 2017; Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020). This study also provides a different perspective as it looks at the experiences support staff have on the validation they provide to DACA students. This study also compares the staff perspective to some of the views DACA students provided from the focus group. Staff reported feeling limited in what resources they could offer DACA students. Staff expressed various ways they show validation and engagement to students. Staff that showed knowledge of DACA and the college's policies were better connected to students even though there were no financial resources for them. The findings from this study may help college administrators to work on programming that helps DACA students feel included. Administrators may consider making information more easily available on what DACA students can and cannot expect upon admission. This would limit the confusion for students and provide more of a protocol or guide for staff. College administrators may also consider collaborating with others in the community to help set up scholarships or grants that DACA students can apply for. Administrators could consider lobbying at the state level to implement legislation that allows DACA students to pay in-state tuition.

### **Practical Implications**

The reality is that there are undocumented immigrants in the US with an estimated 800,000 youth that could be eligible for the DACA program (Migration Policy Institute [MPI],

2020). DACA students can attend college, but in some states, such as South Carolina, they are required to pay out-of-state tuition (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016). There are also some programs that DACA students are discouraged to enter because they cannot get licensed, such as nursing. Although there is opportunity in other areas of the US, such as California, Texas, New York, and Illinois to attend college and pay in-state tuition, this is not the case in more restrictive states such as South Carolina (Price & Mowry-Mora, 2020; Siemons et al., 2017). DACA students are also ineligible for Federal aid and private loans due to their temporary status (Ngo & Astudillo, 2019). This creates a financial barrier for many students, especially those who are academically sound and cannot get a scholarship. Due to this unique circumstance, DACA students require support to address their needs in a validating way. The barriers DACA students have to manage to getting into college create stressors and play a role in about 75% of DACA students not applying to college (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2018). This statistic alone emphasizes the importance not only of individuals at the college level showing validation but there needs to be a systemic change that shows acceptance and equal treatment on a higher level. Another recommendation would be for colleges in South Carolina to consider visiting DACA students while in high school to prepare and inform them of expectations. It may also be beneficial to provide comparisons to other schools or even other states where DACA students may have more opportunities if laws do not improve.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Some delimitations are important to note for this study. Staff participants were required to be current employees of the college. It was also required that staff participants had some interaction with DACA students where they provided a level of support services within the past 24 months of their scheduled interview. For the focus group, it was required that the students

who participate were actively receiving DACA at the time and were enrolled in classes at the college. Focus group participants were required to be 18 years or older to participate.

Some limitations of this study are important to recognize. First, the participant pool for faculty and staff was only from Upstate Community College. Including staff from other community colleges in the state would have provided a more robust participant pool with more data to analyze. Another limitation was the small number of DACA student participants in the focus group. Many DACA students did not respond to the request and it was later learned that many DACA students take semesters off to work, making them ineligible for the study. A third limitation was that most of the focus group participants were females. A fourth limitation of this study was that the number of prospective staff participants could have been greater, but many staff at the college did not know if they had worked with DACA students. A fifth limitation could be that staff participants provided responses that the researcher wanted to hear due to the sensitivity of the topic at hand. A final limitation to acknowledge is that the interview questions for staff participants were different from the focus group interview questions for DACA students. This created some complications in analyzing the data.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings, limitations, and delimitations, there are some recommendations for future research. This study was delimited to DACA students who were actively enrolled in classes during the interview. Knowing that some students have to take time off to work and save up money to return the following semester, future studies may want to include those DACA students as well to increase the participant pool and have more data to generalize. In this study, photovoice was conducted with only the staff participants. Future studies may want to include DACA students' perspectives as a comparison. A third recommendation would be for future

studies to include more community colleges from South Carolina for stronger transferability of the results. A fourth recommendation would be for future studies to utilize a scale or assessment tool that measures validation. This type of data could also encourage a quantitative study if desired. In this study, some students expressed frustration about being discouraged from certain majors. A fifth recommendation could be to study DACA student responses based on their majors or degree programs. Future researchers should consider comparing DACA students to non-DACA students regarding achievement and validation. A final recommendation for future research would be to conduct a qualitative study with samples from community colleges in the Southeast and compare it to data samples from community colleges in other regions of the US. Highlighting the differences may provide a stronger impact for real change in legislation.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast. The theoretical framework this study utilized was Rendon's (1994) validation theory. The three research questions for this study were: 1). In what ways are faculty and staff at the institution acting as validating agents for DACA students? 2). What initiatives or steps do validating agents take to engage with DACA students on campus? 3). How does validation from out-of-class agents influence DACA students' academic and social success?

Ten staff participants were interviewed about their experiences in working with DACA students and how they show validation. Staff participants were also asked to provide photovoice images that answered two prompts. Staff responses gave some clarity on specific ways they show validation, how they engage with DACA students, and how validation helps DACA students succeed. The second group of participants was six DACA students from the college.

They participated in a focus group and shared their experiences of interactions with support staff and the college in general.

The data also revealed that support staff felt limited with what they could do or offer because of the lack of information they had regarding DACA or simply knowing they have to follow what the State implements. This gave some light on the disconnect in what staff may want to provide for students but do not have the means to do so. DACA students saw this as a lack of communication and made decisions on their own because they did not feel connected to the staff. All participants recognized that financial barriers were the biggest concern for DACA students attending higher education. Without any financial resources for DACA students, this became the main reason support staff was not seen as helpful or understanding of DACA students' circumstances.

The findings from this study provided many theoretical, empirical, and practical implications that lead to possible recommendations to support DACA students. At the college level, there could be better training for support staff to understand DACA and know the college, state, and federal policies. A dedicated group of support staff could be identified just for DACA students to make sure there is consistent communication, validation, and overall support. There are also recommendations at the administrative and state levels to encourage policy changes that would decrease the tuition rate for DACA students to pay in-state tuition.

Showing validation to DACA students is important and necessary to create inclusion, acceptance, and motivation. Although Rendon (1994) emphasizes that staff play a vital role in creating successful learners, staff must have the support of the college and lawmakers to provide the resources and supports DACA students require based on their unique needs. As of 2023, DACA has not been fully resolved and issues related to this topic will most likely remain.

Immigration, whether legal or illegal, continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed by the U.S. government. Therefore, research in this area must continue until there is some legislative resolution.

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## APPENDIX A

### Faculty and Staff Recruitment Letter

Dear Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, in a position at the college to provide support services to students, and have worked with a DACA recipient student in the last 24 months. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview that will be audio recorded for transcription (30 minutes – 1 hour). The interview will last between 30 minutes and one hour. A follow up meeting will be scheduled to review the data provided (15 – 30 minutes). During this review, you will be given instructions on photovoice and asked to take pictures using a camera or phone in response to two prompts that will be provided. You will schedule and time to meet with the researcher again to discuss the pictures/photographs you took and they will be used as part of the data (30 minutes – 1 hour). Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please complete the attached survey and return it by email to [REDACTED] or place it in the envelope provided and place it in outgoing mail for mail stop 1055 with your preferred way of being contacted. If you have any questions or concerns, you can call me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]. Once I receive your survey, I will contact you to schedule the interview.

A consent document will be given to you by email upon receipt of your survey. If you prefer, a hard copy can be provided. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Juhi Gor  
Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]

**APPENDIX B**

## Site Permission Letter

 <b>Office of the Vice President of Learning and Workforce Development</b> <b>MEMORANDUM</b>
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**TO:** Juhi Gor  
**FROM:** , PhD, Vice President of Learning & Workforce Development  
**DATE:** 6/24/2021  
**SUBJECT:** Juhi Gor Dissertation

Your study is approved to be conducted at , pending submission of an IRB determination letter.

After receiving Liberty University's IRB determination letter from you, I will review it and approve the study and communicate that decision to you along with any stipulations we may require. At that point, you can begin your fieldwork at .

Sincerely,



 PhD

Vice President of Learning & Workforce Development

## APPENDIX C

### Faculty and Staff Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** Faculty and Staff Experiences of the Support Services Provided to Students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Status at a Community College: A Phenomenological Investigation

**Principal Investigator:** Juhi M. Gor, Liberty University School of Education

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age, employed at UCC, and have interactions working with students who have DACA status within the last 24 months. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of student services employees in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an in-depth interview that will be audio recorded for transcription. The interview will last between 30 minutes and one hour.
2. A follow up meeting will be scheduled to review the data provided lasting 15-30 minutes.
3. As part of the follow up meeting you will be asked to take pictures using a camera or phone in response to two prompts that will be provided.
4. You will meet with the researcher again to discuss the pictures/photographs you took and they will be used as part of the data. This meeting will last between 30 minutes and one hour.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous and kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Data will also be backed up to a flash drive that will be locked in the researcher's office drawer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- Interviews and photovoice meetings will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?**

The researcher serves as a counselor at Upstate Community College. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the participants will receive pseudonyms. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Upstate Community College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Juhi Gor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

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 Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature & Date

**APPENDIX D**  
 DACA Student Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** Faculty and Staff Experiences of the Support Services Provided to Students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Status at a Community College: A Phenomenological Investigation

**Principal Investigator:** Juhi M. Gor, Liberty University School of Education

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age, currently enrolled at UCC, and a DACA recipient. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

**What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of student services employees in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college in the southeast.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a focus group with other DACA students that will be audio recorded for transcription. The interview will last between one and two hours.
2. If the meeting cannot happen in person due to Covid-19 restrictions, participants in the focus group will be given a Zoom meeting link.

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous and kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. The focus group will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Data will also be backed up to a flash drive that will be locked in the researcher's office drawer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and photovoice meetings will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?**

The researcher serves as a counselor at Upstate Community College. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the participants will receive pseudonyms. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Upstate Community College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Juhi Gor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED].

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

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 Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

#### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

**APPENDIX E**

## Questionnaire

1. Pseudonym beginning with: A\_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:  18 – 25;  26 – 35;  36 – 45;  46 – 55;  56 – 65;  Over 65
3. Gender:  Male;  Female
4. Current Position at UCC: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Employment Status:  Full-Time Employee;  Part-time Employee
6. How long have you been employed at UCC? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many DACA students have you worked with? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you worked with DACA students in the last 12 months?  Yes;  No
9. Have you worked with DACA students in the last 24 months?  Yes;  No
10. Have you been trained to work with the DACA student population?  Yes;  No
11. Describe your work with DACA students.
12. Do you find it difficult to support or provide services/resources to DACA students?

## APPENDIX F

## A Study on the Support Services for DACA students at a Community College

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- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient?

If you answered **yes** to either of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in providing support services to DACA recipients at a community college. Participants will be asked to meet as a group to answer some questions that would provide insight into the support services DACA students receive from faculty and staff. Light refreshments will be provided.

The study is being conducted at [REDACTED]

A Zoom meeting will replace the face-to-face meeting if there are any changes to COVID-19 protocols at the time this group is scheduled to meet.

Juhi Gor a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Please contact Juhi Gor at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for more**

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

**information.**

**APPENDIX G**

IRB Approval Letter



IRB Approval  
Letter\_gor\_juhi.pdf