AN UPHILL BATTLE TO A COLLEGE DEGREE: ANALYZING HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN THE U.S.

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By

Kimberly Coughlin, B.S.

Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.
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AN UPHILL BATTLE TO A COLLEGE DEGREE: ANALYZING HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN THE U.S.

Kimberly Coughlin, B.S.

Mentor: Kazuko Uchimura, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Undocumented students face an uphill battle gaining access to higher education in the United States. Undocumented students receive minimal to no funding from the federal, state, and institutional levels to pay college tuition. They face the college search process without the help of counselors, teachers, and parents. Higher education institutions publish little information to guide undocumented students through the application and financial aid processes. So how have undocumented students managed to gain college admission despite these obstacles? Resources utilized to research this question included books, journal articles, college websites, and personal interviews with undocumented students, high school, and college administrators. The findings indicate that undocumented students who receive financial assistance; have help from parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and peers in the search process; and who attain sufficient information about the admissions and financial aid processes are able to gain college access. This thesis concludes that states and higher education institutions must facilitate college access for undocumented students through a series of policy changes.
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CHAPTER 1
WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS AND WHY SHOULD THEY HAVE ACCESS TO U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION?

As the United States readies itself for a presidential election in late 2012, illegal immigration remains a very contentious issue in the United States. Living amongst us are the teenage children of undocumented immigrants. Many of these teenagers were brought illegally to the U.S. at the age of three or under. They have lived their entire lives in this country, attending U.S. public schools and feeling “American” despite the lack of documentation of U.S. citizenship or permanent residency. As these undocumented high school students progress, many aspire to attend institutions of higher learning just like their documented peers.

However, undocumented students face an uphill battle trying to gain access to higher education in the United States. Undocumented students receive minimal to no funding from the federal, state, and various educational institutions to pay for their college tuition. As undocumented students begin their college search process, they often encounter high school counselors, teachers, and even their own parents who are uninformed about college options for undocumented students. Additionally, colleges and universities publish little information to guide undocumented students through the application and financial aid processes. Yet some undocumented students have managed to gain admission to colleges and universities. The purpose of this thesis is to discover how undocumented students are gaining access to higher education opportunities despite these obstacles and to offer policy recommendations to improve their access to institutions of higher learning. All undocumented students who were interviewed will
remain anonymous; the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Some higher education administrators who were interviewed for the purpose of this thesis also asked to remain anonymous.

**WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS?**

Before assessing undocumented immigration, one must first define the term immigrant. An immigrant can be defined as “a person who enters the United States with the intention of remaining here permanently” (Erisman and Looney 2007, 9). An undocumented immigrant differs to the extent that he or she does not enter the country legally and could intend to stay or leave the United States ultimately (Erisman and Looney 2007, 9). The majority of undocumented students interviewed for this thesis indicated that their parents intended to stay in the U.S. permanently to try to make a better life for themselves and their children. However, some of their parents were nonetheless deported to their home countries due to their lack of documentation.

An estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States (Hanson 2009, 3) or about “4% of the nation’s population and 5.4% of its workforce” (Passel and Cohn 2009, i). Some undocumented immigrants come under temporary visas and never leave, and many illegally cross the border from Mexico into the United States (Hanson 2009, 3). A “1992 study by the U.S. Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service showed that 0.7% of the undocumented non-citizens living in the US had used an illegal passport, visa, or Border Crossing Card to enter the country” (Morrel-Samuels 2002, 287).

Undocumented immigrants live across the United States with the largest numbers being found in California (24%), Texas (14%), Florida (9%), New York (7%), Arizona
(5%), Illinois (4%), New Jersey (4%), and North Carolina (3%) (Flores 2010, 242).

Although California is still home to the greatest number of undocumented immigrants (2.7 million), growth of the undocumented share of its population has slowed from 42% in 1990 to 22% in 2008 (Passel and Cohn 2009, i-ii).

Undocumented immigrants are most likely to reside in metropolitan areas. “Approximately 94% of unauthorized immigrants live in metropolitan areas, compared with about 80% of the U.S.-born population” (Passel and Cohn 2009, i-ii). This may be because cities tend to offer more jobs which require low-skills levels.

Ethnically, the majority of the undocumented population (about 80%) is Latino and the largest subgroup of undocumented Latinos are the Mexicans (Flores 2010, 43). Asians comprise about 11% of the undocumented population and Africans, Canadians, Europeans, and all others comprise about another 9-10% of the undocumented population (Passel and Cohn 2009, i; Flores 2010, 243).

Educational attainment is less likely for undocumented immigrants. About 27% of undocumented immigrants complete high school and go no further (Passel and Cohn 2009, 11). More staggering is the fact that only about 25% of undocumented immigrants have attended or graduated from college compared to 54% of legal immigrants and 61% of citizens born in the U.S. (Passel and Cohn 2009, 11).

Without the benefits of additional education that would lead to better employment, undocumented immigrants tend to hold jobs that require low-skills levels (Passel and Cohn 2009, 16).

In 2008, [undocumented immigrants] represented 25 percent of farm workers, 19 percent of building and maintenance staff, 17 percent of construction labor, 12
percent of employees in food preparation and serving, 10 percent of production labor, and 5 percent of the total civilian labor force. (Hanson 2009, 5)

Jobs that require very little skill tend to pay poorly, and correspondingly, undocumented immigrants tend to earn very low incomes (Passel and Cohn 2009, 16). “In 2007, the median annual household income of unauthorized immigrants was $36,000, compared with $50,000 for people born in the United States” (Passel and Cohn 2009, 16). Many undocumented immigrants in the U.S. live below the poverty line. Poverty rates for undocumented immigrants are 21% compared to 10% for U.S. born citizens (Passel and Cohn 2009, 17). Even more staggering is the fact that one in three children of undocumented immigrants live below the poverty line (Passel and Cohn 2009, 17).

Not only do undocumented immigrants face financial challenges, but they also face persecution and nativist sentiment within the United States. “Hostile media images of undocumented immigrants, scapegoating of immigrants by politicians, and anti-immigrant rhetoric by nativist groups have led to persistent negative public opinion about undocumented immigrants” (W. Perez 2009, xx).

DO UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY?

The widespread belief is that the undocumented cost more in government services than they contribute to the economy…The research demonstrates the exact opposite, that the undocumented actually contribute more to public coffers in taxes than they cost in social services. Their labor brings down the costs of goods and services for all and makes firms and sometimes entire industries more competitive. (Perez 2009, xxi)

Some undocumented workers are contributing to Social Security even though they will never receive Social Security payments. “The U.S. Social Security Trust Fund reported a surplus of more than $49 billion in 2000 from payroll collections from persons with invalid Social Security identification numbers” (Perez 2009, xxi). Additionally,
undocumented workers contribute to the U.S. economy through their consumer goods purchases, home purchases, and usage of services. This “...provides federal, state, and local governments with additional revenue through sales, income, business, and property taxes. In other words, spending by undocumented immigrants has an economic “multiplier effect”” (Perez 2009, xxii). One might try to argue that undocumented workers place a drain on public services. This was found not to be the case:

In California, the state with the largest undocumented population, the research indicates that undocumented residents not only use fewer health services than do citizens and documented residents, they also tend to be younger and healthier than the average Californian. When they do use health services, undocumented immigrants are less reliant on public funds (such as Medicare and Medicaid) to pay for their care and instead primarily pay out-of-pocket costs for health care. (Perez 2009, xxiii)

**WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED CHILDREN?**

By definition, undocumented children are those children who were brought into the U.S. illegally by undocumented parents.

Born abroad and brought by their parents at an early age to live in the United States, undocumented children are among those youth referred to in academic literature as the “1.5 generation,” because they fit somewhere between the first and second generations. They are not first-generation immigrants because they did not choose to migrate, but neither do they belong to the second generation because they were born and spent part of their childhood outside of the United States. In a sense, they straddle two worlds. Their origins include the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa. Although they may have some association with their countries of birth, their primary identification is informed by their experiences growing up in the United States. With every year lived in the United States, the distance grows between them and the native countries of their parents, as they speak more English and less of their parents’ language. In fact, members of the 1.5 generation are often called upon to assist their parents in the acculturation and adaptation process. Ironically, each year also brings them closer to the legal restrictions experienced by their parents. As they reach adolescence and early adulthood, the day-to-day lives of these students become severely restricted and their futures uncertain. They cannot legally work, vote or drive in most states. Moreover, at any time, these young men and women can be, and sometimes are, deported to countries they barely know. (Gonzales 2009, 7)
Of all undocumented immigrants, one-sixth are under the age of eighteen (Flores 2010, 242). “The latest census data show that 10.5 million students in the United States are children of noncitizens, and one-fourth of these students are foreign-born” (López and López 2010, 4). “According to Pew Hispanic Center data, 7 percent of Latino children are undocumented immigrants” (P. A. Perez 2010, 21). However, a large percentage, 73%, of children of undocumented parents “were born in this country and are U.S. citizens” (Passel and Cohn 2009, i).

Pew data shows that approximately 6.8% of students from kindergarten to twelfth grade, “have at least one parent who was undocumented in 2008” (Passel and Cohn 2009, ii-iii). In five states, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and Texas, the percentage of students with at least one undocumented parent reaches as high as 10% (Passel and Cohn 2009, 9). Many states, however, that are home to fewer immigrants have “less than one-in-fifty students [who]…live with parents who are unauthorized immigrants” (Passel and Cohn 2009, 9). Not all of these students are undocumented, however, because children born in the U.S. qualify as U.S. citizens (Passel and Cohn 2009, ii-iii).

Undocumented children “…have almost no legal rights, they can be deported at any time, they are not eligible for most government services, they cannot legally work, and, most frustrating of all, they are not eligible for financial aid to attend college” (Perez 2009, xvii).

Undocumented children historically have had challenges completing higher levels of education. Only 51% complete high school (Flores 2010, 242). Of the remaining approximately 65,000 high school graduates, only 48% attended at least some college (Flores 2010, 242). Children who arrive in the U.S. before age 14 are more likely to
attend college than their peers who arrived at older ages (61% vs. 42%) (Passel and Cohn 2009, 12).

Many undocumented students face two major hurdles to overcome – coming from a minority background and a low income family. Students from low-income backgrounds are much less likely to attend college. “Only 54 percent of high school graduates from the lowest income quartile enroll in college, compared to 82 percent of those with incomes above $88,675 (the top quartile) (Bowen et al. 2005, 74). Bowen and colleagues found that “…poor families have great difficulty investing sufficient resources to develop in their children, in the time before high school graduation, the abilities and outlooks necessary to enable their children to attend college and to graduate” (2005, 77). Additionally, students from low-income families typically attend under-funded public schools that provide insufficient academic preparation opportunities for all students to go to college (Bowen et al. 2005, 74).

“In addition to the socioeconomic gap in college enrollment, there is a clear race gap: students from certain minority groups (African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) are much less likely to enroll in college than their non-minority peers” (Bowen et al. 2005, 75).

Low levels of higher education attainment by undocumented children should not be seen however as a lack of desire for educational attainment by them or their parents.

In many instances, these students have lived in America longer than in their home countries. These students have adopted American mannerisms, identities and aspirations… many of these students have internalized the US values and expectations that equate academic success to economic rewards and stability. (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 42)
Chavez had similar findings:

The undocumented settlers that I met had a clear set of values, hopes, and desires for their children’s future that form part of the immigrant dream and also influence incorporation and return migration. Undocumented immigrants hope their children will be better educated and find better, less menial jobs than they. For some, the life they must endure as “illegal aliens” is part of the sacrifice they are willing to make for the next generation. (Chavez 1998, 182)

Despite the challenges they face, undocumented students and their parents do appear to aspire to higher education opportunities.

LEGAL PRECEDENTS IN REGARD TO UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT EDUCATION

Over thirty-five years of legal history exists in regard to educating undocumented students. In 1975, Texas amended TEC 21.031 to restrict undocumented students from attending public school on the basis that undocumented students were a financial burden on the school system (Valencia 2008, 226). By 1977, the Texas school system decided to allow undocumented children to attend public schools, if their parents paid $1,000 per student per year (Valencia 2008, 227). This fee was too steep for parents of undocumented students to pay and thus their children were expelled from the school system (Valencia 2008, 227). “On September 6, 1977, four sets of undocumented parents…filed Doe v. Plyer in federal district court” (Valencia 2008, 228). The case was taken all the way up to the Supreme Court. “In a 5-4 decision, [the Supreme Court] affirmed the Fifth Circuit’s ruling: the new Texas law violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment” (Valencia 2008, 242) and thus undocumented students would be allowed to attend public schools. Justice Brennan wrote in his opinion:

Section 21.031 imposes a lifetime hardship on a discrete class of children not accountable for their disabling status…By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic
institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation. (Valencia 2008, 243)

The *Plyer v. Doe* Supreme Court decision “protects the educational rights of approximately 1.8 million children under 18 years of age, about one-sixth of the total undocumented population” (W. Perez 2009, xxv). It is not without limits, however, because it only applies to undocumented children up to age eighteen (W. Perez 2009, xxv).

Very little federal legislation applies to undocumented students after age 18. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996, “prohibits states from providing undocumented immigrants with in-state tuition at public colleges or universities unless the same benefit is provided to all American citizens” (Erisman and Looney 2007, 20). Although this law is framed in terms of what states *cannot* do, it does provide a manner in which states *can* choose to provide funding to undocumented students if they so desire. (State laws to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students will be addressed extensively in Chapter 2).

Additionally, members of Congress have been supporting the Dream Act in its various forms since 2001 (W. Perez 2009, xxvii). DREAM stands for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors. In 2001, the Act was not voted upon, but it was later reintroduced in 2006 and then again in 2009 (W. Perez 2009, xxvii). The Dream Act was re-introduced in fall 2010, but unfortunately, the bill has not been passed to date. If ever passed, the bill would “extend a six-year conditional legal status to undocumented youth who meet several criteria including entry into the United States before age 16; continuous presence in the United States for five years prior to the bill’s enactment;
receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent; and demonstrated good moral character” (W. Perez 2009, xxviii). Furthermore, “if during the six year period they graduate from a two-year college, complete at least two years of a four-year degree, or serve at least two years in the U.S. military, the beneficiary would be able to adjust from conditional to permanent legal resident status” (W. Perez 2009, xxviii). Passage of this act would provide undocumented students with the guarantee of being able to finish their degrees in the U.S. but would not alleviate the financial hardship that many of these students face when trying to pay for their degrees.

**SHOULD UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION?**

Should undocumented students have access to higher education? Simply put, yes. Undocumented students further the goals of higher education excellence as outlined by William Bowen and many others.

In William Bowen’s book, *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education*, he defines the purpose of higher education as the preparation of “…talented young people to assume productive roles in their societies—to foster the creation of “human capital” (2005, 2). Bowen asserts:

As part of their quest for excellence, colleges and universities want to attract the most promising students, and there has never been reason to believe that all outstanding candidates will be able to pay whatever fees are charged without help. At many colleges and universities, the best students have often been the recipients of need-based financial aid. (Bowen et al. 2005, 3)

Can undocumented students fall into that category of “most promising students”? Yes, they can:

My research on college-eligible undocumented students indicates that they exhibit academic achievement, leadership participation and civic engagement patterns that

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are often above that of their U.S.-citizen counterparts. More than 90 percent report volunteering and 95 percent participated in extracurricular activities. In those activities, 78 percent held a leadership position such as club president. Undocumented students also exhibited various aspects of psychological resilience, perseverance and optimism. For example, while students had responsibilities at home such as taking care of younger siblings, worked various jobs an average of 13 hours per week during high school, 30 hours per week during college, and participated in extracurricular and volunteer activities at very high levels, they still earned high grades in their academically demanding courses. However, despite high levels of achievement, community service, leadership experience, and a deep sense of commitment to American society, they remain without legal status, are not consider American and thus are not eligible for any type of assistance to attend college even though more than 90 percent of the students surveyed aspire to obtain a master’s degree or higher. If these qualifications do not warrant access to higher education and legal status, what more can they do? (W. Perez 2010, 33)

According to Bowen’s beliefs, these “most promising” undocumented students should be funded appropriately through need-based aid to help support our society as a whole. Bowen further asserts:

Moreover, the society at large can build the educational scale that it requires only if its institutions of higher education tap every pool of talent. America has achieved one of the highest levels of educational attainment of any country, but it runs the risk of losing its preeminent position unless it can help much larger numbers of students from poor families and from minority populations to participate and succeed…. (Bowen et. al 2005, 3)

Many undocumented students, as noted earlier, are from low-income and/or minority backgrounds. Bowen believes that these students must be aided in their college aspirations less the U.S. loses its preeminent position in the education community.

Undocumented students also bring increased diversity to campus. Their life experience is unique and can and should be shared with their peers. Bowen agrees:

There are widely understood educational benefits associated with enrolling a student body that is both highly talented and diverse. The quality (“excellence”) of the campus learning environment…is improved for everyone when students from a wide variety of backgrounds are present. (Bowen et al. 2005, 4)
Douglass also echoes the importance of cultural diversity on American campuses:

Advocates of affirmative action have argued for the concept that undergraduates should be exposed to different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in the course of their academic and social experience at a university—that there is added value in cultural diversity among the student body, particularly in a globalizing world. (Douglass 2007, 67)

Undocumented students will help advance the goals of bringing the most promising and diverse students to American campuses. However, does it make sense economically to enroll undocumented students in higher education institutions? Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein argue that it should not matter because higher education access does not play by the rules of free market economies:

Were these institutions an integral part of the market economy, they would sell their educational services to those families with young people who are willing to pay the most for them...However, historically, American universities and colleges have sought to avoid this market-oriented niche....Moreover, higher education leaders view their institutions as more than the producers of services to be purchased by the highest bidder. Indeed, historically these leaders have seen the role of colleges and universities to identify the highest potential and most able of the nation’s youth, and to advance their knowledge and training. (Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein 2007, 17-18)

Under this logic, as long as undocumented students have the “highest potential” and are “most able of the nation’s youth,” they should be allowed to enroll in colleges and universities despite not being able to contribute much financially to the institutions. This is already the common practice for very smart but very needy U.S. citizens or residents attending U.S. institutions of higher education.

However, many researchers also argue that there are economic benefits for providing undocumented students with access to higher education.

The Rand Corporation found that the average thirty-year-old Mexican immigrant woman who has graduated from college will pay $5,300 more in taxes and cost
$3,900 less in criminal justice and welfare expenses than if she had dropped out of high school. (López and López 2010, 62)

Dr. William Perez also espouses the economic argument:

…denying legal status to undocumented students creates a subclass of citizens who otherwise are fully capable of becoming successful individuals (i.e. skilled professionals) and, thus significant taxpayers. Without legalization, undocumented students are permanently locked into the lowest socioeconomic class, perpetuating poverty among immigrant communities…at a bare minimum, the economic and social realities of the 21st century demand college completion. A high school diploma simply does not grant access to jobs that generate the type of income correlated with individual achievement and success. (W. Perez 2009, xxxii)

Erisman and Looney add:

More education [for undocumented students] can lead to higher incomes, which in turn, lead to additional tax revenues, greater productivity, and increased consumption, all of which add to the nation’s economy. Studies have shown that better educated people…are more likely to vote and volunteer in their communities…Educated immigrants, in particular, have much to offer American society, including the ability to speak several languages and an understanding of more than one culture—skills that are increasingly valuable as the United States becomes more economically connected to the global community. (Erisman and Looney 2007, 17)

Other reasons that undocumented students should have access to higher education include lower high-school dropout rates.

In 2000, only 59.8 percent of noncitizens in the United States had completed high school. Immigration status and barriers to higher education contribute towards a higher dropout rate. Having a clear opportunity for higher education following graduation would provide an incentive to finish high school. (López and López 2010, 62)

All of these researchers seem to agree that the best and the brightest students, regardless of citizenship, should be afforded access to U.S. higher education institutions. Additionally, they argue that economic benefits like greater tax revenue and less drain on
public resources will exist if undocumented students are allowed to pursue higher education opportunities.

**HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

There are an estimated 3.4 million undocumented 18-29 year olds (W. Perez 2009, xxv). However, “only 10% of undocumented males and 16% of undocumented females ages 18-25 are enrolled in college” (W. Perez 2009, xxv). “In California, approximately 25,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year, yet fewer than 7,000 enroll in community colleges, with much lower enrollment figures for the University of California and the California State University systems” (W. Perez 2009, xxv). Why are more undocumented students not attending college?

*Can Undocumented Students Be Admitted to Colleges and Universities?*

Undocumented students are permitted to be admitted to institutions of higher learning. In general, colleges and universities use their own discretion or state law directives when deciding how to handle undocumented students in the admissions process. The College Board’s website states:

There is no federal or state law that prohibits the admission of undocumented immigrants to U.S. colleges and universities, public or private, nor does federal or state law require students to prove citizenship in order to enter U.S. institutions of higher education. However, institutional policies on admitting undocumented students vary. (*Advising Undocumented Students*)

Although some universities like the state colleges in Virginia may follow policies that recommend denying admission to those who cannot prove citizenship or residency, more often state and private institutions accept undocumented students as international students, thus rendering them “ineligible for state aid and for the lower tuition charged to
state residents” (Advising Undocumented Students). In general, college administrators are not engaged in the activity of checking student’s immigrant status “except students who come to the United States on a student visa” (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 40-41).

**Which post-secondary institutions do undocumented students usually attend?**

In general, undocumented students are more likely to enroll in a community college than a four-year state or private college or university (P. A. Perez 2010, 22). Undocumented students may ultimately aspire to transfer from their two-year community colleges to four-year institutions to obtain a bachelor’s degree (P. A. Perez 2010, 23). However, “scholars have consistently asserted that community colleges “cool out” the aspirations of Latino and other students of color which makes transfer to a four-year college much less likely” (P. A. Perez 2010, 22).

The reasons that undocumented students typically choose community colleges for higher learning include “cost, the need for remediation and the absence of affirmative action programs which previously encouraged otherwise qualified students to apply to four-year universities” (P. A. Perez 2010, 22). Oseguera and colleagues agree that cost is a predominant reason why undocumented students primarily choose community colleges for higher education and they further add that community colleges are “predominantly open access institutions, offer a route for initiating college-level studies for first-generation students, and allow for scheduling flexibility for student that are working full time” (2010, 38). In addition to having scheduling flexibility for work, undocumented students also choose community colleges that are close to home and work because they
“can’t get a driver’s license and need to take public transportation which costs additional money” (P. A. Perez 2010, 23).

In California, where the majority of undocumented immigrants live, “non-resident aliens accounted for two percent of the community college population” (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 39). In North Carolina, non-resident aliens are 1% of the community college population (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 39). Despite the staggering number of undocumented immigrants in these states, these figures indicate that very few are enrolling in the local community colleges overall.

**SUMMARY**

An estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants live among us in the United States. Many are low-income families from minority backgrounds. Their undocumented children attend public school alongside U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Many undocumented students have lived in the U.S. since they were small children. They are fluent in English and embrace U.S. culture and traditions. These undocumented students are often encouraged by their parents to do well in school so that they can make better lives for themselves. They take advanced and honors courses throughout high school. They lead clubs and organizations at schools. Often, they accomplish all these things while working on the side or taking care of siblings at home. Were these students U.S. citizens or permanent residents, most higher education institutions in the U.S. would be competing to enroll them. However, they are undocumented and the same rules do not apply to them.

Many question whether undocumented students should be able to go to college in the United States at all. Bowen and many of his colleagues assert that the undocumented
student should be able to attend college in the U.S. because U.S. colleges are looking to enroll the best and the brightest regardless of need. Others assert that the undocumented student should be able to go to college because of the future economic benefit to society; he will have increased purchasing power, pay more in taxes, and not drain public resources.

However, currently only 10-15% of undocumented students are enrolled in college. Why is this the case? The following chapters will explore three possible reasons why undocumented students face such an uphill battle trying to gain access to higher education in the United States: rising tuition and limited funding for undocumented students to finance higher education, inadequate college search support for undocumented students, and the fact that the college admissions and financial aid processes are unfriendly and lack transparency for undocumented students. The final chapter will offer policy recommendations for how to improve this process for undocumented students seeking access to higher education.
CHAPTER 2

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS CHALLENGE #1: RISING TUITION AND LIMITED FUNDING FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS TO FINANCE HIGHER EDUCATION

Recent research studies have shown that the number one challenge that undocumented students face when trying to earn a college degree is being denied access to federal and/or state funding. Federal law prohibits undocumented students from receiving federal grants, loans, and work-study dollars. Almost four out of five states do not offer in-state tuition to undocumented students and only a few states provide state financial aid. The proposal and implementation of new state laws in regard to undocumented students and in-state tuition and/or the ability to receive state financial aid is constantly evolving. Most recently, Maryland passed a law providing in-state tuition to undocumented students and California built upon their existing in-state tuition law by allowing undocumented students to receive state financial aid. Even with these progressive state measures, not all undocumented students receive sufficient tuition breaks or state financial aid dollars to fund their college degrees.

Not including the small percentage of undocumented students that do receive sufficient funding from private institutions or private scholarships to complete their degrees in four years, most undocumented students have to work a significant number of hours while in school, sometimes doubling the number of years need for degree completion. To see the great benefits that sufficient funding for higher education would provide for undocumented students, compare Victor G.’s story, the norm to Elena H.’s story, the exception.
Victor E. was born in India. He has no memories of his birthplace, however, because his mom brought him to the U.S. at the age of one and a half to live with his great uncle in a suburb of Montgomery County, MD. His dad had already come over to the U.S. previously.

Victor attended the local public high school and did well earning a 3.8 unweighted GPA. He earned thirty college credits by taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams. However, Victor was almost deported before he ever had a chance to fulfill his college dreams. Both of Victor’s parents came to the U.S. on work visas and had a pending immigration case for green cards. His parents’ petition for green cards was not granted and they were deported in 2009. In the summer of 2010, Victor was to be deported as well, but “counselors, teachers, and students all signed petitions for [him] to stay” (E. 2011). He also wrote letters to President Obama, the First Lady, and his local Congresswoman. Additionally, Victor gained publicity for his story through a local news station. He received a reprieve to stay in the U.S.

Knowing he would be able to stay, Victor applied to six schools, a combination of universities, colleges, and community colleges on the advice of his college/career counselor. His top choice was the flagship state university. The flagship state university and four other institutions accepted him. However, Victor would be considered an international student according to Maryland law in 2010. The flagship state university would have cost him $24,000 a year, which was not a financial possibility for him and his family. As a result, he chose to attend the Honors Program of a local community college.
which did offer discounted rates to undocumented students living within the county (even though no law was in place “allowing” them to do this). This smart young man will be doing research during the summer of 2012 and plans to become a doctor someday. Victor hopes that the recently passed Maryland Dream Act will allow him to transfer to his first-choice institution someday. It is obvious that the lack of funding available to Victor, as an undocumented student, greatly impacted his college aspirations.

**UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT STORY: ELENA H. – A SUCCESS STORY DUE TO INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING**

Elena H. was born in the city of Torreon in Mexico. She only has vague memories of her birthplace because her mom brought her to the United States at the age of four. (Her father and mother separated when Elena was one.) Elena’s grandmother encouraged her daughter to move to the United States to make a better life for herself and Elena. The family settled in California.

Times were very hard and Elena and her mother resided in rented bedrooms of others’ houses because they could not afford their own apartment. Elena’s mom is a self-employed housekeeper. Her step-father is in construction. Both have had challenges finding work due to the economy. The family supports six children including Elena. Throughout her childhood, starting around the age of seven or eight, Elena has assisted her mom in cleaning houses during her school vacations and caring for her step-siblings after school. At an early age, Elena decided in regard to cleaning houses, “I’m not doing this for a living” (H. 2011). Elena viewed education as her way out.

Elena attended her local, public high school in California where less than 50% of the students were college-bound. Despite her school environment, Elena excelled. She
took eight Advanced Placement (AP) courses and earned a 4.7 GPA which ranked her first in her class of 550. Outside of the classroom, Elena held leadership roles in five different clubs. Elena had learned that she was undocumented in the freshman year of her high school when a teacher pulled her aside after a writing assignment and asked her about her birthplace and how she intended to fund college. From that point forward, Elena received assistance from her guidance counselors, teachers, admissions officers, and even a fellow undocumented student from her school who had previously been admitted to Harvard.

However, the biggest concern for Elena was how she would pay for college. Despite being the valedictorian of her high-school class, Elena felt the need to apply to 25 different colleges and universities with the hope that one might fund her completely. She chose these particular schools because she knew that they had fully funded undocumented students in the past or offered scholarships geared toward undocumented students.

Although admitted to two strong schools in the University of California system, where Elena would have paid in-state tuition as an undocumented student, she still would have needed to win additional scholarships to be able to attend. These scholarships were not plentiful in number either. Fortunately for Elena, a private institution on the East Coast admitted her and agreed to fund her entirely. This allowed Elena to attend college despite the challenge of funding. According to Elena, she “…did not have a number one choice [school]. It was more about funding” (H. 2011). Elena’s success story is the exception, rather than the norm. Private institutions, such as the one that Elena chose to attend, typically only fund a few undocumented students each year due to the exorbitant cost (upwards of $50,000 a year).
THE BASIC PREMISE OF COLLEGE COSTS

The cost that a student incurs to attend a college or university is the tuition amount less the financial aid and scholarships received. The cost of higher education for an undocumented student is higher than a U.S. citizen or permanent resident not only because he is expected to pay a higher out-of-state tuition rate, but also because he is largely ineligible for financial aid (despite high need in many cases).

RISING COST OF COLLEGE TUITION

Average tuition prices at public four-year colleges and universities increased 732 percent between 1976 and 2004, while they increased 634 percent at community colleges and 693 percent at private four-year institutions...In contrast to the rise in tuition prices, the Consumer Price Index increased just 230 percent...and median family income...increased only 252 percent. The growth in tuition prices has far outpaced the growth in prices for other goods and services, and the ability of students and families to pay for college. (Orfield, Marín, and Horn 2005, 83)

For most families with college-bound students, the alarming increase in college tuition prices are offset by the ever-larger financial aid packages that colleges and universities are awarding. As Orfield, Marin, and Horn point out, “student financial aid—in the form of grants, loans, tax credits, and work study assistance—provides resources to help reduce the cost of attending college or postpone paying for it” (2005, 84). However, undocumented students do not qualify for any federal financial aid and rarely qualify for state financial aid. They cannot participate in federal work-study jobs or qualify for federal loans.

As seen in Chapter 1, undocumented students largely come from minority and low-income backgrounds. Orfield, Marin, and Horn acknowledge that students from minority and low-income backgrounds tend to be more concerned by high-tuition prices at colleges and universities, making them less likely to enroll (2005, 86). Compound this
with the fact that undocumented families tend to have little college savings for their students, and that $50,000 a year price tag (and growing) looks even more out of reach.

**COLLEGE TUITION RATES**

In general, there are three types of tuition rates—those set by private institutions, those set by state institutions, and those set by community colleges. Private colleges and universities do not receive state funding and thus are able to set their own tuition rates each year. These tuition rates do not typically depend on where a student resides. On the other hand, public institutions receive funding from the state. As a result, they offer different tuition rates to students who live in-state versus out-of-state. This is due to the fact that families of students that live in state are already paying taxes to help support that school. Often, community colleges offer three tuition rates to students—out-of-state, in-state, and in-county. In-county tuition is the cheapest of the three rates.

Many times, parents and counselors will encourage students to consider public colleges and universities within their home state due to the lower costs. However, most states do not offer this same opportunity to undocumented students. Most schools consider undocumented students to be international students regardless of the state or county in which they are domiciled. Considered as international students, “undocumented students face the hardship of state institutions charging them out-of-state tuition fees even though they have been a (illegal) resident of the state for many years” (*Advising Undocumented Students*). These rates are “usually three times or more compared to resident students” (López and López 2010, 63).

Cost is the number one reason why undocumented students tend not to go to college or to choose the local community college to begin their studies. Undocumented
students may be concerned with the wages they will forego while in college that could be used to help the family send money home in the form of remittances (Erisman and Looney 2007, 21). Or “some immigrant parents, not recognizing the long-term economic benefits of a college education, may be more inclined to encourage their children to work to help meet their family’s immediate economic needs” (Erisman and Looney 2007, 21).

For younger undocumented students, their parents may have few resources to help pay for college due to their low incomes (Erisman and Looney 2007, 21). Additionally, immigrant parents seem to be less willing to take on debt to pay for their children’s college education, perhaps due to “lack of security in terms of financial capital” (Erisman and Looney 2007, 21).

**FINANCIAL AID**

“Financial aid is an umbrella term that refers to any financial assistance given to students for any type of postsecondary education…” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 253). There are different types of financial aid. The U.S. federal government provides aid to U.S. citizens or permanent residents who are college-bound in the form of grants, loans, and work-study dollars. Most federal government aid comes in the form of loans (Orfield, Marín, and Horn 2005, 88).

In the last decade, borrowing has become an increasingly popular way to finance educational expenses, and average borrowing levels have increased for students at all income levels and types of institutions. Loans reduce the current expense of education costs and therefore postpone the burden of paying for college, but do not directly reduce the cost of attendance as grants do. (Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein 2007, 108)
Unlike their U.S. born peers, “undocumented students cannot legally receive any federally funded student financial aid, including loans, grants, scholarships, and work-study programs” (Advising Undocumented Students).

Another type of financial aid available to students is state need-based aid. In most states, undocumented students are ineligible for state financial aid as well (Advising Undocumented Students). Some states, however, have agreed to offer undocumented students in-state tuition. (This topic will be discussed at length later in the chapter.)

A student might also receive need-based or merit-based grants directly from a college or university. Colleges and universities, both public and private, are able to award grants to students either on the basis of “need” or on “merit”. Merit grants are given to students with high GPAs or test scores that the college or universities think will help them improve in the rankings (Orfield, Marín, and Horn 2005, 92). Undocumented students generally would not qualify for need-based or merit awards from public institutions unless the state happens to offer state financial aid to undocumented students. However, undocumented students could qualify for need-based or merit awards from private institutions that have license to award their funds as they see fit (Advising Undocumented Students).

Even applying for institutional scholarships from private schools, undocumented students face an additional conundrum. Most schools require that students fill out the federal form, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) if they are requesting any form of aid. The FAFSA requires a Social Security number, a number that undocumented students are unable to provide. Also, after submission of a FAFSA by a student, “a number of database matches are conducted with other government agencies
such as the Selective Services System, the Social Security Administration, and Immigration Services” (Matthay 1995, 65). Undocumented students have no desire to alert Immigration Services of their status or their parents’ status. However, not filling out a FAFSA may preclude an undocumented student from being considered for institutional aid.

Undocumented students may also be able to receive some funding from private scholarships or foundations. Possible outside sources of funding include private scholarships. “The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the University of Southern California Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, and the National Council of La Raza have compiled extensive lists of scholarships for which undocumented students are eligible” (W. Perez 2010, 34).

In *We Are Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream*, Dr. Perez profiles Daniella, a young woman who was able to attend community college by receiving a total of $10,000 worth of small scholarships that she won for her extensive community service. Daniella’s parents were not supportive of her college dreams because they had no funds to help her pay for college. By combining outside scholarships with working 16 hours a weekend and on breaks during high school, Daniella was able to pay for college (Perez 2009, 34-35).

Another higher education success story for an undocumented student is New York Times reporter Jose Antonio Vargas. In June 2011, he disclosed his undocumented status to the world in a poignant newspaper magazine article in which he detailed that he was
able to go to college through the help of private scholarships (as he could not apply for
state and federal financial aid):

Eventually [my mentors] connected me to a new scholarship fund for high-
potential students who were usually the first in their families to attend college.
Most important, the fund was not concerned with immigration status. I was among
the first recipients, with the scholarship covering tuition, lodging, books and other
expenses for my studies at San Francisco State University. (Vargas 2011)

Daniella and Jose’s experiences with outside scholarships are extremely positive.
However, not all undocumented students are able to receive sufficient outside funding to
make their higher education dreams a reality. A “full scholarship” like the one that Jose
Vargas received, in particular, can be extremely rare and very competitive. Additionally,
many scholarship programs “require applicants to be U.S. citizens or legal residents”
(Advising Undocumented Students). The scholarships open to undocumented students
tend to be limited in number.

In her research, Perez-Huber found that “not having access to state or federal
financial aid programs was the most problematic barrier [undocumented students]
identified in attaining their college degree” (2009, 714). Additionally, if the
undocumented students were not provided with any scholarship, either from the
institution or an outside source, “they had to attend school part-time, work more hours
(detracting from academics), and/or prolong their time-to-degree (P. A. Perez 2010, 22).

PAYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The amount that a family is asked to pay after the financial aid award is deducted
from the total tuition cost is called the expected family contribution (EFC). Often,
families are unable to pay this amount solely by using discretionary income and/or
college savings accounts.
There are a number of ways to meet this expectation. The first is savings, the second is current income, and the third is borrowing. Students and parents typically use a combination of these resources. Parent borrowing is becoming a primary vehicle for education financing, as many families have neither the opportunity nor the motivation to save for the students’ college expenses. (Matthay 1995, 71)

The EFC can present a challenging dilemma for parents of undocumented students because they do not qualify for PLUS (Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students) loans. PLUS loans are “federal loans available to parents of dependent undergraduate students to help finance the child’s education. Parents may borrow up to the full cost of their children's education, less the amount of any other financial aid received” (Financial Aid Glossary). Without being able to borrow money, undocumented students or their parents are forced to come up with this money out of discretionary income or savings.

In 2002, the Federal Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance conducted an analysis on the impact of unmet need on college participation. “Need” is the difference between cost of attendance and the expected family contribution (Financial Aid Glossary). For most students, “need” is covered by a financial aid award. However, undocumented students do not typically receive financial aid awards sufficient for meeting need. Often, they receive no financial aid at all. The Federal Advisory Committee found:

…among students with low unmet need—those who, with their own and family resources and financial aid, were able to meet the cost of college, except for an average of about $400—96 percent enrolled in some form of postsecondary education within two years of graduating high school...In contrast only 78 percent of students with high unmet need (averaging $3,800) attended college within the same time frame....Eighty-three percent of students with low unmet need attended a four-year college, while just over half of students with high unmet need were able to enroll in a four-year institution. (Orfield, Marín, and Horn 2005, 94)
These results have profound implications for undocumented students who often fall in that 50% of students with high unmet need who were unable to enroll in a four-year institution within two years of graduating high school. The best-case scenario is that these undocumented students enroll in a local community college instead, like Estrella did.

Estrella, an undocumented seventeen-year old, while completing her senior year of high school, commented on the challenges she was facing trying to attend college as an undocumented student:

I’m focusing on going to college next, and majoring in biotech research. I’ve never really wanted to go to a four-year university right after high school, because it would be complete chaos. I don’t have the money. It’s not possible. I might qualify for grants, but still, it just wouldn’t work. My plan is to go to a community college and then transfer to UC Davis, because UC Davis has a great biotechnology program. And hopefully I can get an internship at a biotech company to help pay for my education. (Orner and Andes 2008, 329)

The unfortunate reality is that some talented undocumented students choose not to attend college at all due to the challenges they are facing financially. Lack of funding is a true detriment to higher education enrollment for undocumented students.

**TUITION AND FINANCIAL AID POLICIES FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS BY STATE**

“Federal law does not expressly prohibit the admission of undocumented immigrants to U.S. colleges and universities ...no federal statutes require disclosure and proof of immigration status and citizenship in order for students to enter higher education …” (Roy Biswas 2005, 2). Technically two federal laws prohibit the states from providing in-state tuition to undocumented students. “In 1996, Congress passed ‘The Illegal Immigrant Responsibility and Immigration Reform Act’ (IIRIR) which restricted
the ability of states to extend in-state tuition benefits to [undocumented immigrants] on the basis of residency” (Thangasamy 2010, 60). “The law also requires states to furnish information on the immigration status of students who apply for federal financial aid” (Roy Biswas 2005, 2). The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 denies state and local benefits such as postsecondary education payments or assistance to “…any alien who is not a qualified alien, a nonimmigrant under the Immigration and Naturalization Act, or an alien paroled into the United States” (López and López 2010, 65).

Despite the federal laws, some states have implemented their own laws that allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition or even to receive state financial aid funds (Advising Undocumented Students). “These state laws attempt to circumvent the federal law by simply not asking students whether they are in the US legally…They also circumvent the law by basing eligibility for in-state tuition on attendance at or graduation from an in-state high school and not on state residence” (Financial Aid and Scholarships for Undocumented Students). Every day, states attempt to pass new laws either in favor or against undocumented students receiving admission, in-state-tuition, or state financial aid. These policies are constantly evolving.

As of September 2011, the following states offered in-state tuition to some students: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin (Patchwork 2011). Even though the General Assembly of Rhode Island has not passed a law allowing undocumented students in-state tuition, in late September 2011, the state higher education board approved a measure (Niedowski 2011). Oklahoma had previously offered in-state tuition
to undocumented students, but support ended in 2008 (Mangan 2011). The laws in the states that currently offer undocumented students in-state tuition typically “require eligible students to have attended school in the state for a set number of years, to have graduated from high school or received a GED from that state, and to sign an affidavit declaring that they will apply for legal status as soon as they are eligible” (Flores 2010, 245). In-state residency requirements vary from one to three years based on the state (Flores 2010, 245). Specific requirements for the GED also vary by state (Flores 2010, 245-246). These policies are very controversial and have been contested, but currently many have been upheld for the following reason:

In-state residency is a state-determined benefit and purely state benefits can be extended or withheld to undocumented students because tuition benefits and state residency determinations are properly designated as state classifications and may incorporate, but not determine immigrant status. (Flores 2010, 245)

In fact, in June 2011, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal that California’s in-state tuition law violated federal immigration law. The Supreme Court refused to hear the case leaving all other in-state tuition laws for undocumented students firmly in place (Savage 2011).

Some of the states that have passed laws offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented students also offer state financial aid. As of September 2011, these states included New Mexico, Illinois, and Texas (Patchwork 2011). Illinois’ law, SB 2185 or the Illinois Dream Act, has a fascinating premise: undocumented students are able to “…obtain private college scholarships and enroll in state savings programs” (Illinois to Create 2011). California most recently joined the list of states offering undocumented students in-state tuition in October 2011 when the California Dream Act, or AB131, was
signed allowing undocumented students to “…apply for Cal Grants, fee waivers at community colleges, and institutional financial aid at public universities, starting in 2013” (Keller 2011).

Unfortunately, it does not appear likely that all states will implement similar laws. Some states, including Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina outright deny undocumented students’ admission to some or all public schools (Patchwork 2011). Additionally, as of September 2011, five states have laws denying in-state tuition to undocumented students including Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, and South Carolina (Patchwork 2011). In states that don’t have laws in place, the federal IRIR is controlling and it is interpreted to deny [undocumented immigrants] in-state tuition” (Thangasamy 2010, 62).

ARE IN-STATE TUITION POLICIES FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS EFFECTIVE?

The offering of in-state tuition rates to undocumented students appears effective. In her research, Flores posed the question, “Did the introduction of an in-state resident tuition law in select states impact the college participation rates of students likely to be undocumented compared to similar students living states without an in-state resident tuition law?” (2010, 249). Flores used an econometric method called differences-in-differences to test her hypothesis that in-state resident tuition laws had positively impacted the college participation rates of undocumented students (2010, 244). Flores found that “…there is a significant positive effect in the odds of college enrollment after the enactment of the tuition policies in states with the resident tuition legislation …” (2010, 257).
Additionally, according to a report produced by researchers at Roger Williams University’s Latino Policy Institute, “states that allow illegal immigrants to pay cheaper, in-state tuition have seen a 31-percent jump in that population’s college-going rate and a 14-percent decline in high school dropouts among undocumented Latino students” (Mangan 2011).

Opponents to in-state tuition policies may argue that these policies will only encourage additional undocumented students to migrate to those states. However, “reports show that those states [that offer undocumented students in-state tuition] experienced neither a large influx of noncitizen students nor added financial burdens on their educational systems. Instead the states have experienced school revenues increase by bringing in tuition from students who otherwise would not be in college” (López and López 2010, 78).

**IN-STATE TUITION CASE STUDY: CALIFORNIA**

…[an undocumented] community college student explained, "I simply chose to go to the college that was giving me the opportunity to attend." In her particular situation a community college counselor had given a workshop at her high school and explained that undocumented students could file AB 540 affidavits and pay in-state tuition. It was the only postsecondary representative that had given her this option, and thus the only school that gave her the opportunity to attend any form of higher education at all. (P. A. Perez 2010, 23)

To understand better how these in-state tuition laws function, California’s law, AB 540 will be used as a case study. California is home to the largest number of undocumented immigrants in the country. Almost a third of the population in California is undocumented (Erisman and Looney 2007, 34). The immigrant population in California is diverse, about 50% Hispanic (almost half from Mexico and the remainder from Central America) and about 30% Asian/Pacific Islander (Erisman and Looney 2007, 34).
Interestingly, Asians tend to be overrepresented in the number of undocumented students in higher education, especially in California. “In the 2005-06 academic year, Asian American students represented 55 to 60 percent of students paying in-state tuition under AB 540 and 40 to 44 percent of all undocumented students paying in-state tuition” (Gonzales 2009, 10).

To serve its large undocumented population, California passed Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) which “provides the opportunity for undocumented and documented students alike to pay in-state tuition prices” if they meet certain criteria (P. A. Perez 2010, 22). The four criteria are that the undocumented students must “graduate from a California high school or the equivalent, attend a California high school for at least three years, have enrolled in or are currently attending an accredited postsecondary institution, and….the student must also ensure that they will file for legalization as soon as they are eligible” (P. A. Perez 2010, 22).

Under AB 540, most undocumented students in California enroll in the community college system, “the largest higher education system in the US, enrolling 2.6 million students annually” (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 39). “If a student has lived in California for over a year and intends to remain in the state, he or she is eligible for in-state tuition at public colleges and universities. Undocumented residents are also eligible for in-state tuition if they attended high school in the state for at least three years and meet college admission standards” (Erisman and Looney 2007, 34).

Sadly, there is no information recorded consistently across the state to track the efficacy of in-state tuition for undocumented students under AB 540. “Since 2001, some institutions have tracked students qualifying for in-state tuition under the legislation (as
“AB 540 kids”) but without reporting these numbers to the state” (Roy Biswas 2005, 7). Although data specific to California does not exist, general studies about in-state tuition policies have shown increases in college-going rates amongst undocumented students.

Unfortunately California’s in-state tuition law does not apply to all undocumented immigrants in the state because of the requirement of graduating from a high school in the state. “Undocumented immigrants who enter the country as adults or who do not complete high school in the United States are not eligible under these provisions” (Erisman and Looney 2007, 20).

The newest development in California was the 2011 passage of AB 131, the California Dream Act. Not only will undocumented students in California be charged in-state tuition but in 2013, they will also be able to apply for “…Cal Grants, fee waivers at community colleges, and institutional financial aid at public universities…” (Keller 2011). Perhaps the new California Dream Act will allow future undocumented students to avoid the experience of Lorena, having to work constantly while pursuing her higher education in California.

**UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT STORY: LORENA**

Lorena came to California from Puebla, Mexico at the age of six. Lorena attended college at Fresno State starting in 2002.

Of her experience she says:

I was still working at the meat market when I started college at Fresno State, in 2002, as a biology/premed major. I was lucky that I started college before Governor Gray Davis got booted out. He was the one who signed the law allowing undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition. So, actually, it’s doable to go to school if you work. Otherwise it would have been extremely difficult. But if I wasn’t undocumented, I would be getting financial aid. I probably wouldn’t have had the need to work so much, and I would have finished school by now. I had to
sign an affidavit stating that I graduated from a California high school, that I’d been here a certain number of years, and that I would get legal residency as soon as I was able to. (Orner and Andes 2008, 190)

Lorena was only able to work at the meat market and the real estate agency making a decent wage because she was using her cousin Sabrina’s name and Social Security number (Orner and Andes 2008, 189). For most undocumented immigrants in college, this would not be a possibility.

Also, working so much severely impacted the amount of time Lorena spent in college and her academic success.

I’m hoping and praying to be done with school next year, 2008. That would be my seventh year. It’s just getting more and more difficult to keep going through this. I still love being in the classroom. I still love learning about biology. But I’m only taking one class right now. First, because that’s all I could afford at the time when tuition was due. Second, with my job, there’s no way I could take more than one class. That’s an ongoing struggle, between work and school. I have to work a lot of hours so I can pay for school. But working so many hours takes tons of time away from schoolwork. I used to be a straight-A student. But now, the time I have allotted after working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, is very minimal. No matter how much I want to read that chapter or how much I want to do extra research for that paper, my body just won’t let me. Last quarter, I did horribly. My job was so demanding and so was school, that I got really sick. I started developing ulcer symptoms. I became anemic. I was having anxiety attacks. I started thinking that I need to choose, either work or school, but my fiancé insisted that I can’t quit school. And I know I can’t. I have to do it for myself. Because I know I can. (Orner and Andes 2008, 201)

California is one of the most progressive states in terms of offering undocumented students both in-state tuition and now state financial aid. Only two other states offer both in-state tuition and state financial aid to undocumented students. By 2013, Lorena’s experience will likely cease in California, but across the country her story will be reproduced in the states not offering state financial aid or in-state tuition rates to undocumented students.
CONCLUSION

College tuitions are on the rise. Most undocumented students are considered as international students, despite residing in the U.S. for most of their lives, and are therefore asked to pay the most expensive out-of-state tuition rates. Currently, in only 12 of 50 states, undocumented students qualify for in-state tuition rates due to the passage of state laws.

For U.S. citizens and permanent residents, the higher tuition costs are offset by larger financial aid packages. However, undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid grants, loans, or work-study jobs that comprise the majority of financial aid packages. Additionally, only three of 50 states provide undocumented students with state financial aid.

So how do undocumented students fund their education? Those who are able to enroll in school at all largely enroll in community colleges which offer significantly cheaper tuition rates than four-year colleges or universities. Undocumented students work tremendous numbers of hours to pay for their tuition. Well-paying or any job at all can be hard to obtain without a Social Security number. Often this work done by undocumented students is at the expense of timely degree completion.

The most fortunate undocumented students receive scholarships from private colleges or universities or private scholarship programs that will consider applications from non-citizens. These opportunities for private funding are very limited however.

The most progressive states, such as California, have created greater opportunities for undocumented students to go to college. California currently offers in-state tuition rates to undocumented students and starting in 2013 will provide state financial aid as
well. The research shows that the states offering in-state tuition for undocumented students have seen college-going rates increase, drop-out rates decrease, and no significant influx of undocumented students to the state. Furthermore, states offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented students are experiencing increased revenues from students who probably would not have attended college if the policies weren’t in place.

Most undocumented students still face great financial challenges when trying to complete a college education. The trend of states passing laws providing in-state tuition and state financial aid for undocumented students provides hope for a brighter educational future for these students.
CHAPTER 3

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS CHALLENGE #2: INADEQUATE COLLEGE SEARCH SUPPORT FOR UNDOCUMENTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Studies have shown that successful applicants to college receive encouragement from parents and peers to pursue higher education, and enjoy logistical support from high school teachers and guidance counselors in searching for the right college and navigating the complex admissions process. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper detail the influence of parents, peers, teachers, and guidance counselors on potential college applicants in their “Model of College Choice.” The three stages of this model of college choice include predisposition, search, and choice. Student’s predisposition to go to college is influenced by their parents and peers. Student’s search process is mainly influenced by high school teachers, guidance counselor, and peers. Finally, students’ college choice is most heavily influenced by high school teachers and guidance counselors. For undocumented students, absence of such support system becomes a serious obstacle on their paths to college. While some undocumented students do receive adequate support, they are the exception rather than the norm. Most undocumented students’ stories about their college search process sound like Matthew’s.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT STORY: MATTHEW J. – A STORY OF INADEQUATE COLLEGE SEARCH SUPPORT

Matthew J. came to the U.S. from Panama at the age of thirteen on a tourist visa. Although he remembers his life in Panama clearly, he indicated that “the most significant parts of my life [have been] spent in the U.S.” (J. 2011). Matthew attended the local public high school in a suburb of Montgomery County, MD. He took Advanced Placement (AP) and dual-enrollment classes with the local community college. He earned
a 3.8 unweighted GPA. He also emerged as a strong leader in his extracurricular activities in high school including serving as senior class vice president and winning multiple awards for service to his community.

Matthew had strong support from his mother in regard to pursuing his education. There is no doubt that this encouragement helped him to succeed in high school. However, Matthew received no college-related guidance from his high school teachers and weak counseling from his high school guidance counselor. According to Matthew, he received no help from his teachers because he “…was so involved, people expected him to have it all together” (J. 2011). Additionally, his guidance counselor, at one point, advised him to lie on his college applications and say that he was a U.S. citizen. Fortunately, despite the lack of quality support from his school teachers and guidance counselor, Matthew was able to enroll in the honors program at the local community college. It was not the first choice school for this aspiring politician, but nonetheless a better outcome than many undocumented students with inadequate support experience: not pursuing higher education at all.

**HOW STUDENTS DECIDE TO GO TO COLLEGE**

As noted above, in *Going to college: how social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make*, Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper introduce their “Model of College Choice.” The three stages of this model of college choice include predisposition, search, and choice. These phases of college choice can be applied to the experience of the undocumented student when potentially choosing a community college, college, or university (or not to pursue higher education at all). “Predisposition refers to the plans students develop for education or work after they graduate from high school”
Factors that influence this stage include “students’ family background, academic performance, peers, and other high school experiences” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 9). In fact, “the foundation for the self-esteem required to aspire to higher education is laid [as early as] elementary school” (Matthay 1995, 7).

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper also note that timing is important, as students’ plans for higher education tend to be formed between eighth and tenth grade (1999, 22). And yet students are not receiving much if any guidance from counselors at this early stage of high school. In general, parents start encouraging their students to think about college at this age. Parents of undocumented students may encourage their sons or daughters to pursue college, but they often lack the resources to guide their children through the process itself.

The researchers have found that “more than 80 percent of the ninth-grade students…reported that the most important reason for going to college was to be able to get a good job” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 23). This also has important implications for undocumented students who are likely unable to secure any work at all after graduating college. What is their incentive to go to college? Others must help them see the potential benefits.

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper note that counselors, teachers, family, and friends influence the predisposition stage. Parents are the most influential (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 23).

The single most important predictor of postsecondary educational plans is the amount of encouragement and support parents give their children. Parental encouragement was defined by frequency of discussions between parents and
students about the parents’ expectations, hopes, and dreams for their children. (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 24)

Deborah Santiago, co-founder and vice president for policy and research at Excelencia in Education and daughter of Latino immigrants, is a strong example of Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper’s findings on parental encouragement. Santiago attributes the fact that she is a college graduate to her family.

My siblings and I knew our parents expected us to go to college. While they themselves had not gone, they made their expectations clear and set standards high. But they didn’t know how to navigate the higher-education system. It was my job to figure out how to actually get to college. (Santiago 2011)

A second example of Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper’s finding about parental encouragement can be found in Dr. Perez’s book, *We are Americans: undocumented students pursuing the American dream*. Dr. Perez interviewed Angelica, an undocumented student in her second-year of college. Angelica said about her parents, “It was always a given that I was going to go to the university; they just didn’t explain how I was going to pay for it, how I was going to get in, or anything else. They would say, “When you grow up, you’re going to go to the university”; that was it” (Perez 2009, 59).

Angelica’s story reaffirms the influence of parental encouragement on college attendance. In fact, Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper found that “nearly 64% of the students receiving strong encouragement attended a four-year institution; and almost 75% receiving strong encouragement attended some form of postsecondary education” (1999, 102).

However, Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper have found that there is a difference between parental encouragement and parental support. Parental support “includes parents saving for postsecondary education, taking students on visits to college campuses, or
attending a financial aid workshop with their child” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 24). Parents of undocumented students are more likely to be able to provide parental encouragement than parental support because of lower incomes and a lack of knowledge of the college admissions and financial aid processes.

Potential good news for undocumented students is that “in the early stages of the college decision-making process, parental encouragement and support, along with good grades, are more important than family income” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 26). This only takes an undocumented student so far, however, because ultimately he will need to fund his college dreams. “Students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to go straight to work after high school and were much less likely to attend a four year school than their richer peers” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 105).

Another factor in the predisposition stage is whether a child’s parents have attended college.

As parental education level increases, children are more likely to plan to go to college….analysis of interview data demonstrates that parents who have gone to college are familiar with the experience and are better equipped to explain to their children how the college system is structured, how it works, and how the student can prepare for it. (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 26)

Only half of the students whose parents had a high school degree attended college compared to 75% whose parents had a college degree (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 105). Unfortunately, for undocumented students, many of their parents have not completed college nor have they completed college in another country, which means they are less able to help their students through the U.S. college application process.

Other family members also influence the predisposition stage. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper found that siblings already in college or peers planning to go to college
Students’ college-going aspirations (1999, 25). P.A. Perez found a similar result in her research:

Participants remarked that they had older siblings who attended the schools they were currently attending and this was significant in their selection. Older siblings served as mentors who were able to guide their younger siblings through the college choice process. In each case older siblings were also undocumented and could refer their younger counterparts to pre established contacts who were former or current advisors, professors and mentors who could assist them. These contacts were unquestionably helpful and supportive to the younger siblings in their own college going endeavors. (P.A. Perez 2010, 24).

Undocumented students who do not have siblings or peers to “lead the way” are less likely to pursue higher education opportunities.

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper define the search stage as “students’ discovering and evaluating possible colleges in which to enroll” (1999, 9). Parents can be a strong influence on this process. However, at this stage in the process, students “…began to look beyond the family—to peers, high school teachers and counselors, work experience, college visits, and reading – for guidance” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 51).

By sophomore year of high school, students “…who reported talking to family members, peers, teachers, and counselors about their high school plans were likely to be engaged in active and interactive search” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 60). During junior year, students become more interested in particular colleges and they “consult more with teachers and counselors, suggesting that, as students moved closer to high school graduation, school personnel played a more important role in helping students identify the colleges they should consider” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 61). This is not surprising because typically by junior year, students and parents want to know more about
It is important for undocumented students to have advocates at this point in their search process. Although they may have encouragement from their parents, they will also need more specific guidance from their counselors, teachers, and peers about where to apply, how to apply, and how to fund their education.

In her research, P.A. Perez, concurs with Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper about the influence of peers on an undocumented student’s college search process:

Specifically, students followed older friends who were already attending a particular college or decided to go along with a friend to their respective postsecondary institution. In one case a student did not decide to pursue higher education until his friend informed him he was going to attend. As a result, he decided he would also pursue higher education at the same institution. (P. A. Perez 2010, 24)

The impact that students can have on each other in regard to the college search process is clearly profound. This example from P.A. Perez’s research clearly demonstrates the positive impact of “peer pressure” from one undocumented student to another.

Teachers can also strongly influence students’ college search processes. Daniella, an undocumented student who was introduced in Chapter 2, was also greatly influenced to pursue her college education by a teacher.

She fondly remembers a middle school teacher who made her feel important and encouraged her to forge ahead despite other teachers who treated her with disdain...He was not only a role model, he also set high expectations to motivate her. She recalls, “He always told me, ‘You know, I’m going to be there for your high school graduation, and then when you go to college, I’m going to be there,’ and I guess that’s something that I needed. (Perez 2009, 36-37)

Daniella’s teacher gave her that encouragement and support necessary to see herself as a college-bound student.
In her research, Janet K. Lopez also notes the importance of undocumented students having supportive teachers to help them with the admissions and the financial aid processes.

While Mexican immigrant parents did the best to provide a supportive environment for their children, the teachers had the capital to provide access to knowledge regarding the expectations of honors coursework and the college application process. Throughout their junior and senior years I observed as the teacher allies helped their students write college essays, helped them fill out college and financial aid applications, and even took students on visits to college campuses. (Lopez 2010, 67)

Not only were these teachers encouraging their students to go to college, but they were also helping the students with their actual college and financial aid applications. They were filling the role that parents or guidance counselors would traditionally play, but often don’t in the case of undocumented students.

Guidance counselors can also strongly influence students’ college search processes. In his research, Dr. Perez interviewed undocumented student, Eduardo, a college freshman, who noted the important influence his guidance counselor had on his achieving his dreams. Dr. Perez noted that Eduardo’s counselor, “…nominated him for awards and was key in his decision to apply to a summer enrichment program” (2009, 73-74) at a local university. (Guidance counselors will be further addressed later in the chapter.)

According to Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, “in the choice stage, students choose a school from among those they have considered” (1999, 9). This stage occurs during senior year of high school. By senior year, students are relying more heavily on peers, teachers, and counselors than parents for information about choosing a college (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 86).
This is a particularly precarious time for undocumented students for the following reason:

Although most parents...indicated in the ninth-grade year that they expected their student to attend college, by the twelfth grade some parents had changed their minds, especially parents with low incomes, low educational level, and whose student had a low grade point average. (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 84)

Parents of undocumented students may balk when they realize that they cannot cover the college costs or the potential of lost wages from their child not working after graduation.

**HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR STORY: JANE SMITH – A STORY OF LIMITED RESOURCES**

Jane Smith, Higher Education Coordinator, at a large, public high school in Santa Ana, California, discussed the challenges that she faces when working with undocumented students. Seven counselors at her school serve almost two thousand students. That is a student: teacher ratio of 286:1. Ms. Smith works very hard and often stays late but still says that she “can’t always …reach every student the way we like” (Smith 2011). Ms. Smith works with about 100-200 undocumented students each year. Although few undocumented students disclose their status to Ms. Smith, she can usually tell by looking at the birthplace on their transcripts. If she believes a student is undocumented, she speaks in generalities so as not to “call out” the undocumented student on his or her status. Some undocumented students tell her that they wish she had started advising them as a freshman. Ms. Smith is worried that undocumented students will become depressed, however, when they learn how limited their options truly are.

Since support for undocumented students is such a politically-charged issue, Ms. Smith does not feel comfortable hosting a meeting for the parents of undocumented students. Nor does she feel comfortable posting information on the school website for
undocumented students. To get around these challenges, Ms. Smith will “throw in information for undocumented students” during regularly-scheduled college presentations for parents.

Ms. Smith works with many undocumented students applying to two-year and four-year colleges each year. She has noticed over the years that some schools accept her undocumented students but then do not give them enough financial aid to attend. Ms. Smith encourages students to apply for outside scholarships. If they do not apply for these monies, they ultimately go to community college because they do not have other options financially. However, according to Mrs. Smith, many of these private scholarships do not inform students that they have been selected until after the May 1st reply date to colleges.

Ms. Smith does her very best, but she feels limited to help the many undocumented students in her school to succeed. She is not alone in that feeling; schools across the country have too few guidance counselors and the counselors they do have are often not trained sufficiently to aid students, let-alone undocumented students, with the college search process.

**CHALLENGES FOR HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELORS SERVING UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

Within schools, no profession is more important to improving college enrollments than counselors. Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students’ aspirations, achievements, and financial aid knowledge…However…counselors are structurally constrained from doing the job they know and do best, which is providing information to help nurture and sustain aspirations…motivation to achieve, and advice on how to investigate and choose a college. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 2)
The policy goals of “improving academic preparation for college and ensuring affordability, especially for low-income students and students of color” are almost universally recognized in the education community (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 3). So why are undocumented students (and many others) receiving inadequate college counseling?

The first reason that undocumented students are receiving inadequate college counseling is because college counseling needs to start in middle school instead of high school.

Repeated studies have found that improving counseling would have a significant impact on college access for low-income, rural, and urban students as well as students of color. Specifically, if counselors begin actively supporting middle school students and their families in preparing for college, as opposed to simply disseminating information, this will increase students’ chances of enrolling in a four-year college. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 4)

The second reason that undocumented students are receiving inadequate college counseling is there are not enough counselors in the schools. According to *Fundamentals of college admission counseling: a textbook for graduate students and practicing counselors*, “multiple recent research studies and policy reports call for increasing the numbers of counselors available and the amount of time they devote to college advising tasks as one of the top three reforms needed to improve college access” (2008, 5).

However, student-counselor ratios are ridiculously high leading to counselors having to do “large-group guidance, at least minimally, in order to reach all students” (N.A.F.C.A 2008, 7).

…the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends an ideal student-to-counselor ratio of 100:1. In public schools across America student-to-counselor ratios are outrageously high. According to the *Condition of Education 2004* the ratio is 284:1, although in large schools and schools with more than 20 percent minority students the ratios are greater than 300:1. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 8)
Some of the worst student-to-counselor ratios are found in states with high percentages of undocumented students like California and Arizona. California is “the notorious leader in highest student-to-counselor ratios at 994:1, followed by Minnesota at 800:1, and Arizona with 736:1” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 8).

The situation is even worse in urban and rural schools which often educate low income students and students of color. In these schools, “counselors are even fewer and often unavailable to the college advising job” (N.A.F.C.A 2008, 7).

Not only are the student-counselor ratios too high, but also the few counselors in the schools spend little of their time on college counseling itself. These counselors are responsible for “…personal needs counseling, academic or other testing, occupational counseling and job placement, teaching…” and often administrative duties which could easily be done by someone other than a trained counselor (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011, 22). With so much to do, little time is left over to advise students on the college admissions process.

The third reason that undocumented students are receiving inadequate college counseling is that counselors need more time for college advising. Counselors wear many hats within the school. They serve as psychologists counseling students on emotional problems. They perform a variety or administrative tasks such as scheduling classes, etc. Finally, they are responsible for college advising (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 7).

According to the NCES HSGC study (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), only 43 percent of all public high schools reported that more than 20 percent of their counselors’ time is spent on college advising, which mean that 57 percent of schools’ counselors spend between 0-19 percent of their time on college advising. Using NCES’ ratio of 315 students per counselor in public high schools, and the Moles estimate of hours the average school counselor spends on college
Thirty-eight minutes is insufficient to advise traditional students on the college process. It is woefully inadequate to advise an undocumented student who may have little to no knowledge about the admissions or financial aid processes, especially as they pertain to an undocumented student.

The fourth reason that undocumented students are receiving inadequate college counseling is that counselors are not receiving opportunities for sufficient professional development on the college admissions and financial aid processes. According to the 2011 National Survey of School Counselors, “more than one in three of all counselors…and 43 percent of counselors in lower-income schools do not think they have the support and resources to be successful at promoting [college and career readiness]” (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011, 5). This is further compounded by the fact that the public school system does not provide adequate funding to counselors for professional development.

Counselors have major professional development needs related to securing accurate, up-to-date college admission and financial aid information…Hawkins (2003) found that nine out of ten counselors received time off for professional development. However, only 42 percent of all counselors received full financial support (registration fees, travel expenses, etc.), and only 21 percent of public school counselors received full financial support…. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 6-7)

Without funding to undergo professional development on the college process, high school guidance counselors are unable to relay accurate information about college costs and the financial aid process to students and their parents. In the case of undocumented students, who need even more assistance than the average college-bound student, the average high school guidance counselor will have little knowledge to guide them through the college
process. Poor guidance counseling may even discourage the undocumented student from applying to college at all. Or the counselor may inform the undocumented student that his only option is the local community college because he is not aware of scholarships offered at private four year institutions or scholarships offered by community-based organizations.

The fifth reason that undocumented students are receiving inadequate college counseling is that they largely attend schools with large low-income or minority populations. These schools historically receive fewer counseling resources.

Nearly 20 years ago, NACAC documented that the great disparities in college counseling resources and activities were a direct result of the social class of the communities in which these high schools were located. Specifically, school counselors in upper-income neighborhoods were more plentiful and spent more time on college counseling. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 9)

Additionally, the same study found that first-generation college-bound students, African American, and Latino students (groups which undocumented students are likely to be part of) are more likely to be influenced by their counselors in regard to their college plans than their Caucasian peers (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 10). This would be good for undocumented students except for the fact that often their counselors are short in numbers and do not have quality information regarding the college admissions and financial aid processes to relay.

Furthermore, the study found that counselors in schools with large low-income or minority populations rarely work with the parents of college-bound students (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 10). It has already been shown that parents have tremendous influence on their students’ college-going aspirations. Additionally, these parents of undocumented students
need even more information about the college admissions and financial aid processes than most parents. Currently, they receive less information!

The final reason that undocumented students are receiving inadequate college counseling is that their high school counselors are unequipped to advise them about community colleges (where most undocumented students begin their higher education). According to Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein, high school guidance counselors are often unable to describe what it will take for a community college student to transfer to a four-year college:

High school counseling for prospective community college students is particularly weak and students receive vague signals about the college’s academic demands. According to James Rosenbaum (2001), the level of high school achievement needed to succeed in the community college is not communicated to high school students. Students are told what it takes to enroll into a community college, but not what it takes to complete it. Because their performance in high school does not affect their enrolling in a community college, students are led to believe that what they do or do not achieve in high school does not matter. They are not told that it will affect how long it will take them to finish transfer requirements, thus decreasing their chances of ever completing college. (Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein 2007, 56)

Most undocumented students do not receive adequate guidance from their parents, peers, teachers, and guidance counselors in regard to the college application and financial aid processes. However, a rare few undocumented students do receive such guidance. Carlos’s story demonstrates the positive influence that parents, peers, teachers, and counselors had on his college search process.

**STUDENT STORY: CARLOS B. – A SUPPORT SUCCESS STORY!**

Carlos B. was brought over to the U.S. from Sinaloa, Mexico at the age of two. At the time, his mother was pregnant. Carlos is the only one of three siblings who is undocumented. For years, Carlos and his family would rent one room of someone else’s
house until the house would become too crowded and they would move on. To make ends meet, Carlos would help his father with construction work and handyman work. He would paint houses or fences. He received no pay for his work. He said, “it was hard to go to school all week and work on weekends” (B. 2011). Despite this challenge, Carlos was actually very successful in school. He applied and was accepted to a public charter middle/high school for first generation low-income students. This high school was associated with a local college campus in California where Carlos resided. This school allowed Carlos to begin Advanced Placement (AP) classes in 9th grade. (Most students do not begin taking AP classes until 10th grade, at the earliest). Had Carlos not attended the charter school, he would have gone to the local high school which offered no AP classes and had very low expectations for students. Carlos shared, “lots of friends I had became gangsters, dropped out, [or] bad things happened to them; I would have become one too” (B. 2011). Conversely, Carlos participated in research and a variety of summer programs specifically geared for students at his charter school. He finished high school with a 4.0 GPA.

When it became time to start applying for college, Carlos had many positive role models from his school. Beginning in sixth grade, every student at the school was assigned an advisory teacher who helped them research colleges, helped with essays, etc. In addition, Carlos disclosed his undocumented status to a math teacher and two history teachers. He opened up to them because he had a close relationship with them and because he knew that one of the teachers had worked with an undocumented student before. They assisted him in his college search process.
Furthermore, Carlos had multiple counselors to assist him. The school had a
counselor for the general population and Carlos also had a counselor for his class of 20
students. Different counselors worked with grades 9-10 and with grades 11-12. Carlos
received individualized attention from his guidance counselor to assist with the college
search process.

Carlos’ parents would encourage him to go to college, but they could not really
help with the college admissions process. In fact, Carlos’ mom had always wanted him to
go to college, but had secretly thought it was too difficult.

Carlos also spoke with undocumented students who had graduated before him to
learn about their experiences with the college admissions process.

Ultimately, with strong support system backing him, Carlos was accepted to his
first choice college on the East Coast. He was also fully funded by this private school
which allowed him to attend. When I asked Carlos what he would recommend to assist
undocumented students in the college admissions process in the future, two of his strong
suggestions were that undocumented students have “…someone who is undocumented in
college as a resource” and that they have a counselor or teacher who they trust to help
them out (B. 2011).

CONCLUSION

Carlos’ story demonstrates that with proper support and encouragement from
parents, peers, teachers, and guidance counselors, undocumented students can gain access
to higher education. On the other hand, Matthew’s story demonstrates what most
undocumented students encounter, a lack of support from teachers and uneducated
guidance counselors who actually act as a detriment instead of a resource in the college search.

These two young men’s stories illustrate the arguments of Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper’s “Model of College Choice” about the importance of knowledgeable guidance counselors who have time to work with their students. Throughout the three stages: predisposition, search, and choice, Matthew received little to no assistance other than parental encouragement. His guidance counselor provided him with inaccurate and unhelpful advice about the college process. Despite strong grades and great leadership potential, Matthew settled on enrolling at the local community college.

On the other hand, throughout the three stages of the “Model of College Choice”, Carlos received support and encouragement from parents, peers, teachers, and guidance counselors. His counselor, who worked with only twenty students, was able to provide him with helpful individual counseling in regard to the admissions and financial aid processes. Carlos was ultimately admitted and funded by his first choice, private institution. Chapter 5 will suggest ways that Matthew, and other undocumented students like him, could receive better support and encouragement from parents, peers, teachers, and guidance counselors.
CHAPTER 4

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS CHALLENGE #3: NAVIGATING A COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AID PROCESS THAT IS UNFRIENDLY TO UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Little research has been done to date looking at undocumented students’ experience with the admissions process itself. Long before an undocumented student ever tries to fill out an application, he has to navigate a college search process very different than that of the average high school senior. He must try to figure out different institutions’ policies on admitting and funding undocumented students with little help from traditional resources like university websites, prospectuses, and information shared on campus during information sessions and campus tours. Either the undocumented student does many extra hours of college research or he runs the risk of applying blindly to institutions that will not admit him or fund his college aspirations.

After the undocumented student develops his list of colleges to apply to, he must face the challenge of filling out the application itself. Immediately, the application asks him to declare his citizenship. Does he fill in the U.S., his country of origin, or does he leave the question completely blank and hope for the best? The application doesn’t ask him if he is undocumented and would he want to disclose his status even if the application did ask?

Next, the undocumented student wants to apply for desperately needed financial aid. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the main form that colleges and universities use to assess financial need, is designed for U.S. citizens and permanent residents and asks for a Social Security number. What does the undocumented student do? Does he try to fill out the FAFSA anyway? Does he call the financial aid office and
disclose his undocumented status? Or does he give up and not pursue aid at all? At every turn, the undocumented student faces challenges that other college applicants do not.

This chapter will explore the challenges unique to undocumented students in the college admissions process and the manner in which some undocumented students have overcome these challenges. Take for example, Roberto G. who through herculean effort was able to overcome the challenges that undocumented students face in the admissions process to enroll in a highly selective university.

**UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT STORY: ROBERTO G. – A STORY OF TRIUMPH DESPITE THE UNFRIENDLY ADMISSIONS PROCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

Roberto G. was born in Michoacan, Mexico. His parents moved to the U.S. when Roberto was three years old and eventually settled in New York. Roberto did not know he was undocumented until he was a sophomore in high school and did not have the Social Security number necessary to apply for a desired internship. Neither of Roberto’s parents went to college. They encouraged him to do well in school, but they could not help him with the actual college application process. Roberto had excelled in his high school, ranking second out of 300 students in his class. He had taken many Advanced Placement courses. Roberto chaired many clubs and won a variety of small scholarships. Once Roberto realized that he was undocumented as a sophomore, he began his college search. He sought out as many individuals as possible to help including “teachers, [his] school counselor, [his] college advisor, his Principal, admissions officers, parents, [and] friends” (G. 2011).

Much to Roberto’s dismay, none of the colleges or universities that he researched had a stated policy for undocumented students. He learned their policies through direct
contact. Roberto called many schools with his college advisor to ask about their policies for undocumented students. How did Roberto choose which schools to call? He did a lot of research online and found a list of top 20 undocumented student friendly schools. According to Roberto, sometimes admissions officers he called were unaware of policies for undocumented students. Some universities told him directly that they wouldn’t accept undocumented students. Other schools encouraged Roberto to apply despite having no “encouraging” information for undocumented students on their website. Ultimately, Roberto was admitted and funded by his first-choice, private, highly-selective university in the Mid-Atlantic. Roberto, however, had had to act as his own advocate in the college admissions process with little help from the universities themselves. Roberto’s story is a perfect example of the need for transparency for undocumented students in the college admissions process.

**POLICIES ON ADMISSION FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

One of the very first challenges that undocumented students will face in the college admissions process is whether the college or university will accept undocumented students.

The first difficulty for teachers who wanted to help these [undocumented] students involved figuring out which colleges would even consider accepting undocumented students. One teacher described her difficulty when contacting universities regarding a strong undocumented Latino male: “So I just started calling up a list of about 10 colleges, and one after another they just kept telling me there is nothing they could do because he is out of state. They told me he was going to have to fill out the international student application.” (Lopez 2010, 73)

Some states appear to have laws or policies that restrict admissions to undocumented students, but note the fact that a large community college system in the state of Virginia is blatantly rejecting this “recommendation”.

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In 2003, the state attorney general recommended that Virginia’s public higher education institutions refuse admission to students without documentation, report students whose legal status is suspect to federal authorities, and charge undocumented students out-of-state tuition. Most institutions have been following the attorney general’s recommendation and are not enrolling undocumented students. However, Northern Virginia Community College and a few other schools have questioned the memo. They have accepted the recommendation with regard to tuition, but not regarding reporting students who legal status is suspect and charging out-of-state tuition...Students are accepted on the basis of having a high school diploma or a GED. Residency for three to four years in Virginia is preferred but not necessary. The college does not pursue information on the status of students if they do not volunteer it. Since undocumented students are required to pay out-of-state tuition and are not eligible for state or federal aid, the college has taken another step to make higher education more accessible for this population. It has recently instituted scholarships funded with private dollars, designated specifically for students without proper documentation, to help bridge the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition. (Roy Biswas 2005, 5)

An undocumented student or his counselor may read or hear that the state of Virginia does not allow undocumented students to enroll in its institutions, without ever being aware that Northern Virginia Community College not only enrolls undocumented students but also partially funds them. Furthermore, Northern Virginia Community College is not the only community college that provides opportunities for undocumented students to enroll.

Many community colleges have used the absence of definitive federal or state legislation as an opportunity to take an independent stance on the admission of undocumented students. The lack of reporting requirements from either the state or federal government has also allowed institutions to act on their own accord. (Roy Biswas 2005, 8)

Without extra research, an undocumented student may never learn about institutions that “bend the rules” to admit undocumented students.
LACK OF PUBLISHED RESOURCES ON THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Most students starting a college search will consult a college or universities’ website and perhaps add themselves to the mailing list of the institution. The colleges and universities typically proceed to mail a prospectus to the student with more detailed information about their programs, philosophy, etc. Generally, the printed materials are followed by a series of e-mails instructing the student of important application deadlines, opportunities to apply for financial aid, or open houses being offered by the school. Schools offer detailed information about how international students can apply, how visiting students can apply, and even how transfer students can apply. However, rarely do any of these virtual or print materials address how to seek admission or funding as an undocumented student. This is a major roadblock that undocumented students face in the college admissions process.

Case Study: Information for Undocumented Students on Institutions of Higher Education Websites in California and the D.C. Metropolitan Area

Ten websites of higher education institutions in California and the D.C. metropolitan area were reviewed for admissions and financial aid information for undocumented students. The California websites included three community colleges (Cerritos College, Santa Ana College, and Orange Coast College), two state university systems (California State University and University of California), and five private higher education institutions (Stanford University, University of Southern California, University of San Diego, Pomona College, and Claremont McKenna College). The D.C. metropolitan area websites included four community colleges (Montgomery College, Northern Virginia Community College, Frederick Community College, and Anne
Arundel Community College), three state universities (University of Maryland, College Park, University of Virginia, and George Mason University), and three private higher education institutions (Johns Hopkins University, Georgetown University, and Marymount University).

The first part of the hypothesis for this research was that institutions of higher education in California would offer detailed information on their websites for undocumented students because of Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) which “provides the opportunity for undocumented and documented students alike to pay in-state tuition prices” if they meet certain criteria (P. A. Perez 2010, 22). The second part of this hypothesis was that institutions of higher education in the DC metro area would offer little to no information for undocumented students due to the absence of laws offering in-state tuition to undocumented students. (Maryland’s in-state tuition law for undocumented students will go to referendum on the November 2012 ballot and thus is not currently in effect.) The results of this research contradicted this hypothesis showing that few schools other than community colleges in California, DC, Maryland, or Virginia offered any information for undocumented students on their websites.

A few community colleges offer significant information for undocumented students on their websites. One of these schools is Cerritos College, a community college in Norwalk, CA. Typing ‘undocumented’ into the search engine leads to a Financial Aid page that details that in-state tuition is available for undocumented students under AB 540. This page also provides undocumented students with links to potential funding including Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), a scholarship organization that offers students awards regardless of citizenship, and Latino
College Dollars (Frequently Asked Questions). The Admissions webpage included the “Resident Requirements for Admission” which detailed that “to be considered a California resident for purposes of admission to Cerritos College, a student is required to have resided in the state of California for at least one year and one day prior to the start of the semester for which the student is registering” (Admissions). Thus, an undocumented student would qualify as a resident.

Santa Ana College, a community college in Orange County, CA also provides easily-accessible information for undocumented students. Typing ‘undocumented’ in the search engine brings up a website which details who can apply for financial aid. The website explicitly states that “undocumented students or students on foreign visas are not eligible for federal or state Financial Aid programs” (Financial Aid Basics). Right off the main Admissions page for Santa Ana College, there is a link to the California Nonresident Tuition Exemption Request. Under AB 540, undocumented students have to fill out a special form to apply for in-state tuition. This form includes information about where the undocumented student attended high school, whether he or she is a non-immigrant alien, etc. (California Non-Resident Tuition Exemption).

It is also easy to access the California Non-Resident Tuition Exemption form on the Orange Coast College website, a community college in Costa Mesa, CA (California Non-Resident Tuition Exemption). Orange Coast College’s main admissions page addresses what undocumented students need to qualify for admission including “high school graduation, or Certificate of Proficiency or a G.E.D. from the State of California, or attainment of 18 years of age and who, in the judgment of college officials, is capable of profiting from instruction at our college, or enrollment in the 11th or 12th grade and
recommendation for advanced academic or vocational college level study” (Admission Requirements). Additionally, Orange Coast College has a link off of the main admissions page including the California Non-Resident Tuition Exemption and detailed information for undocumented students (AB 540 Non-Resident Tuition Waiver). On the other hand, it is very hard to locate information for undocumented students on Orange Coast College’s financial aid website. The website implies that all students have to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The financial aid website does not say that undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid (Steps in Applying). However, the fine print of the California Non-Resident Tuition Exemption form does indicate that undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid.

Over on the East Coast, Anne Arundel Community College, a community college with multiple campuses throughout the county, provides a very helpful webpage for undocumented students. Putting ‘undocumented’ in the search engine yields the following catalogue description for undocumented students:

Students with undocumented citizenship status must meet the following enrollment criteria:

• must have graduated from a high school (public or private) or must have earned the equivalent General Educational Development Diploma (GED) in the United States.

• if wishing to participate in high school concurrent enrollment programs must be attending a high school (public or private) in the United States.

• must submit a statement with the Community College affirming that he or she has filed an application to establish appropriate immigration status or will file an application as soon as they are eligible to do so.

• must submit an Enrollment Request Form including a signed statement affirming that the student has met all of the requirements outlined above. Information obtained in this process is strictly confidential and will not be disclosed unless
required by law. Students with undocumented citizenship status are subject to the out-of-state tuition rates and are not eligible for federal or state financial aid. (AACC Catalogue)

An undocumented student in Anne Arundel County need only access this one page to know what requirements he must meet to apply to Anne Arundel Community College and to know that he is not eligible for in-state tuition or any financial aid. This transparency is uncommon, however!

Northern Virginia Community College, a two-year community college with multiple campuses in Northern Virginia, also has a helpful website for undocumented students. Putting ‘undocumented’ in their search engine yields this result:

It is the policy of Northern Virginia Community College to admit to the College those applicants who are immigrants residing in Virginia who have graduated from a Virginia high school with a high school diploma or equivalent, even if they are not able to document their legal presence. Those who are undocumented will pay tuition at the out-of-state rate. (NOVA 2011-2012 Course Catalogue)

By contrast, a search for ‘undocumented’ on Montgomery College’s website, a community college in Montgomery County, MD with multiple campuses, yielded only board reports and news articles. Nor does Montgomery College website directly discuss whether they consider undocumented students to be considered in-county residents for tuition purposes (Residency Policy). However, a thorough reading of the appendix of the course catalogue details that tuition rates are determined upon domicile. Thus one could infer that undocumented students from Montgomery County, MD who could prove domicile in the county would receive in-county tuition. As of the 2011-2012 school year, this was the case for undocumented students domiciled in Montgomery County, MD per Registrar, Catherine Mund.
Frederick Community College, a community college in Frederick, MD, also fails to help undocumented students navigate their admissions and financial aid processes through the website. Typing ‘undocumented’ in their search engine yields no results. The community college only offers a chart to help international students determine if they qualify for in-state or out-of-state tuition (Tuition and Residency Chart).

Five of the seven community college websites reviewed offered helpful admissions and financial aid information for potential undocumented applicants. By contrast, only two of the five state institutions offered helpful admissions and financial aid information for potential undocumented applicants on their websites. Not coincidentally, both state institutions serve AB 540 students in California.

Typing ‘undocumented’ in California State University’s, a large state university with 23 campuses across California, search engine yielded policy articles only. The “Residency Classification” link off of Admissions Requirements page offers a very technical explanation of how individual campuses determines residency for tuition purposes:

Each campus' Admissions Office is responsible for determining the residency status of all new and returning students based on the Application for Admission, Residency Questionnaire, Reclassification Request Form, and, as necessary, other evidence furnished by the student. A student who fails to submit adequate information to establish eligibility for resident classification will be classified as a nonresident. (Determination of Residency)

Additionally, California State University’s “Financial Aid FAQs” do not directly address undocumented students (Frequently Asked Questions - About Financial Aid).

Unfortunately, the University of California’s website, a state university with ten campuses throughout California, is no more helpful that California State University’s
website. A search for ‘undocumented’ on the website yields policy articles and news articles. It is not helpful to an undocumented student hoping to locate information. The main freshman admissions page does not appear to address undocumented students at all; it mainly addresses course requirements and rank requirements for admission if you are a California resident (Freshman Admission Requirements). Hidden in the financial aid website is a link on the side to a document entitled “Student Information: California Residence for Purpose of Tuition and Fees.” This document is supposed to clarify for students (including undocumented students) whether they qualify for in-state tuition. However, excerpts of this document, as follow, would only confuse an undocumented student further:

After you have been admitted to the University of California, a Residence Deputy or similarly designated person in the Office of the Registrar will determine whether you are a resident for purposes of tuition and fees; that is, whether your tuition and fees will be charged at the California-resident rate or the nonresident rate. This determination is independent of, and can differ from, similar determinations made by the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid…Determining your residence for purposes of tuition and fees is based on information you provide to the campus Residence Deputy in your Statement of Legal Residence…In addition, the campus may request further evidence of residence, at which time you may decide to provide additional documents or information. You must provide convincing evidence of California residence for purposes of tuition and fees…There are four requirements you must fulfill in order to qualify for the benefit of a resident classification at the University of California…1. Physical Presence, 2. Intent to Remain in California, 3. Financial Independence (if under 24 and parent(s) are not California residents), 4. Immigration Status: citizen, permanent resident or qualifying nonimmigrant. (Student Information)

Hidden on the webpage that University of California has designed to assist high school counselors with the admissions and financial aid processes is a helpful document for AB 540 students. This webpage offers good information about which undocumented students qualify for in-state tuition, how the undocumented student qualifies, and contacts
at each of the University of California’s campuses that work with undocumented students (AB 540 Nonresident). Unfortunately, this puts the burden on the counselor to find the information and to relay it to the undocumented student. Undocumented students would not likely think to review the website designed for counselors.

Other state university websites like University of Maryland, College Park, University of Virginia, and George Mason University (VA) do not address undocumented students directly. Each of these schools considers undocumented students to be international students although they do not state this explicitly on their website. Each of these schools provides admissions and financial aid information for international students on their websites. All of these schools admit international students. Each has a different policy in regard to funding international students. University of Maryland, College Park provides no federal, state, or institutional aid for international students. However, international students may be eligible for outside scholarships (Financial Aid for International Students). In similar fashion, University of Virginia, a highly-selective public, state university in Charlottesville, VA offers admission to international students, including potentially undocumented students, but does not offer any need-based aid. International students are potentially considered for merit scholarships (Frequently Asked Questions - International Students). George Mason University, a public, state university in Fairfax, VA includes a webpage detailing additional financial resources for international students since they also are unable to provide federal or state financial aid to international students (Financial Aid for International Students).

None of the eight private institutions of higher education’s websites researched address undocumented students directly. All provide admissions and financial aid
information for international students only. The private institutions researched in California include Stanford University (www.stanford.edu), University of Southern California (www.usc.edu), University of San Diego (www.sandiego.edu), Pomona College (www.pomona.edu), and Claremont McKenna College (http://cmc.edu). The private institutions researched in the D.C. metro area include Georgetown University (http://admissions.georgetown.edu) in Washington, DC, Johns Hopkins University (www.jhu.edu) in Baltimore, MD, and Marymount University (www.marymount.edu) in Arlington, VA.

In summary, only seven of the twenty institutions of higher education researched offered any information for undocumented students. Five of the seven institutions are community colleges and two are state universities. Of these seven institutions, five are located in California which has a law in place, AB 540, offering in-state tuition to undocumented students. No private institutions in either California or the D.C. metro area addressed undocumented students directly. Ironically, private institutions of higher education often have the ability to offer significant scholarships to undocumented students if they wish to do so. Clearly, the lack of transparency on university’s websites for undocumented students is a challenge that undocumented students must face when trying to gain access to higher education.

NEED FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS TO HAVE PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICERS

After finding insufficient information on college and university websites about the admissions and financial aid processes, the next logical step for the undocumented student is to call or visit the Admissions Office. Perhaps he will meet an admissions officer at his
school or at a program in a nearby city. He will need time to pull the admissions officer aside for a private conversation to discuss his undocumented status. Having made himself vulnerable by disclosing his undocumented status, the student hopes to hear words of wisdom from the admissions officer about how to successfully apply and receive funding at the college or university. According to Ms. Jane Smith, the Santa Ana Higher Education Coordinator who spoke of challenges counseling undocumented students and their families in Chapter 2, many college admissions officers who come to visit her school are uninformed about the application process for undocumented students (Smith 2011). Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga indicate that it may not be the admissions officers’ fault:

The primary theme that emerges from studies conducted about the experiences of undocumented students in community college is a general sense that “front-line personnel” such as admission and financial aid counselors, and records officers are not trained to handle the unique issues undocumented students bring with them to the community college setting, but more importantly to understand the policy directives of their state or local institution. As previously mentioned, the perception of insufficient training can be attributed to state and institutional policies that are often in flux. Even in states like California and Texas where there is a long history of immigrant migration and state legislation providing in-state tuition for undocumented students, there is confusion about the application of specific directives of the state policy. (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 41)

However, not all college admissions officers and officials are uniformed. Undocumented students facing this roadblock should persist and call the school to ask for another contact or seek help from other undocumented students who have already successfully navigated the college admissions process. P.A. Perez echoes this advice:

…students needed to seek out information in order to create opportunities for themselves. Although undocumented students may be hesitant due to their "situation", as was commonly used to denote their legal status, participants repeatedly recommended that it was critical that their fellow undocumented students take the initiative and find contacts, information and resources to assist themselves in achieving their goals. It was imperative that they not remain
"invisible" because the resources were not likely to come to them. (P.A. Perez 2010, 23)

Janet Lopez details Fidel’s experience in Undocumented Students and the Policies of Wasted Potential. Fidel’s story proves the importance of undocumented students finding contacts to assist them in navigating the college admissions process.

As the year went on Fidel began to negotiate the college application process by utilizing various tactics. Throughout the process he only approached and told trusted teachers and confidants about his undocumented status. He then systematically made choices about the college application process: He applied for fee waivers for all of the colleges he applied to, and he narrowed his decision to one “dream” college and others that would be the cheapest schools for out-of-state students…Fidel strategically approached teacher allies for help with the essay writing, college information, and advice on scholarships and financial aid…Fidel made other contacts with a liaison at the Latino Outreach program, and a senior professor at a university, who encouraged him to work hard so that a university might be able to produce scholarship dollars for him. (Lopez 2010, 121)

Ultimately Fidel gained access to a four-year college with a full scholarship.

“YOU COME TO US”: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

How do community colleges, colleges, and universities assist undocumented students? Often the answer is very quietly and behind closed doors. Marie Staley, Assistant Director of Admissions at Frederick Community College in Maryland noted that none of Frederick Community College’s materials address undocumented students directly. Undocumented students are considered international students by the school and the school materials “give tuition rates for international students based on visa types – permanent resident, green card, refugee and asylee” (Staley 2011). Ms. Staley indicated that most undocumented students “walk-in” to her office to try to address their situation in person and find out what opportunities are available to them at the community college.
Catherine Mund, Registrar at Montgomery College in Maryland, noted that most undocumented students do not disclose their status on their applications. Montgomery College usually deduces their status from an empty citizenship or visa status box on the application. Montgomery College offers in-county tuition to all students who have attended Montgomery County high schools for the last three years and graduated from a Montgomery County high school. According to Mund, “this just happens to include undocumented students” (2011). Montgomery College had not publicized this policy in any written materials or on their website as of April 2011. Instead, Montgomery College chose to spread the word informally through “working closely with the college counselors in each of the high schools” (Mund 2011).

Thomas McGinn, Director of Admissions and Enrollment Development at Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) in Maryland has also seen many undocumented students apply for admission. AACC currently considers undocumented students as international students. AACC has one of the few websites that address undocumented students directly. The AACC catalogue and forms in the admissions office also address undocumented students directly (McGinn 2011). Undocumented students are required to submit a written statement that they have filed an application to establish appropriate immigration status or will file an application as they as they are eligible to do so. McGinn indicated that this provision is not designed to keep undocumented students out of the community college currently, but rather a “matter of good faith” (2011). AACC also does outreach at neighboring high schools to spread the word about its opportunities for undocumented students, especially at a local high school which has a large English as a Second Language (ESL) program.
Sarah U. serves as Dean of Admissions at a large state university in the Southwest. She has worked for the school for eighteen years, sixteen of those years in admissions. On average, her admissions office would see about 50 undocumented students apply for admission a year. Recent changes in immigration law in the state have diminished the number of undocumented applicants to around five per year. Despite the large number of undocumented students in the state, the school does not offer any printed materials for undocumented students. Sarah explained that “we just talk to [undocumented] students as we come across them; we try not to bring too much attention to it” (U. 2012).

According to Sarah, undocumented students usually learn about their options at the university through high school guidance counselors who are “…very in tune to what is available [for undocumented students seeking higher education]” or through admissions recruiters and student recruiters in the schools (U. 2012). Sarah also highlighted the private conversations that undocumented students will have with admissions officers, noting that “…so many [undocumented students]…don’t come to programs or to [their high school] counselor because they are afraid of getting in trouble [for being undocumented]” (U. 2012).

John C. has twenty years of admissions experience at highly-selective, private universities. He currently works for a highly-selective university in the Mid-Atlantic region. John estimates that he has seen about 75 undocumented students apply for admission during his career. He has worked directly with many of these students. Undocumented students at this institution are considered as international students. Some will be funded by the university through institution dollars. However, this is not advertised in any of the university’s print or web materials. According to John, the reason
that no policy is stated for undocumented students in any of the university’s print materials is because funding for undocumented students is available on a “case by case basis” (C. 2012). The funding is more likely to be awarded to an undocumented student who was brought to the United States unknowingly as a small child than an undocumented student who has only been in the United States for a few years. This distinction is made because the university is only able to fund about four to six students annually. If the word got out about potential funding, John believes that more undocumented students would apply, but the pool for undocumented students would become even more selective because the university would still only be able to fund a few of them (C. 2012).

The private university where John works also assumes that undocumented students and their high school counselors will know to call and ask the school, much like the parent of a home-schooled student would call to ask about the differences in the admissions process for a home-schooled applicant (C. 2012). Additionally, John mentioned that undocumented students will approach him after admissions presentations to speak about their status one on one.

These administrators at the community college, state university, and private university level experience the challenges of aiding undocumented students in every admissions cycle. Few of these schools have transparent admissions and financial aid processes for undocumented students. However, all of these administrators expressed that they assist undocumented students when they are approached directly or when the undocumented student calls or e-mails the admissions office. Clearly, assistance for undocumented students wishing to pursue higher education opportunities does exist, but it
is not well publicized at this time disadvantaging the undocumented student who doesn’t know or isn’t willing to go to these extra lengths.

**CHALLENGES FACED BY UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS WHEN FILLING OUT THE ADMISSIONS AND THE FINANCIAL AID APPLICATIONS**

Undocumented students confront challenges when filling out the admissions application and the financial aid application required by colleges and universities. Students applying to four-year public and private institutions are usually asked to pay an application fee which can be as high as $100 at some institutions. Fee waivers do exist for students who have financial hardship, but many counselors and students are unaware that they are available. For example, the University of California (UC) system will grant undocumented students fee waivers, but the Cal State system makes undocumented students fill out a separate form and will only grant some fee waiver requests (Smith 2011). As a result, some students are deterred from applying due to the fee or won’t “apply to institutions where they were not confident they would be accepted to save money on application fees” (P. A. Perez 2010, 23).

Secondly, undocumented students largely have to navigate the admissions and financial aid processes on their own. Although their parents may be supportive that they are pursuing higher education opportunities, they may not have “the tools or resources to assist them” (P. A. Perez 2010, 22). Perhaps the parents are unable to speak English or they may not be able to understand the required financial aid forms (FAFSA, CSS Profile, tax returns, farm supplements, etc) that are necessary to submit to even be considered for financial aid (P. A. Perez 2010, 22).
“Many undocumented students fear that if they apply for college, they and their family members might risk being deported as a result of the information they disclose in their applications” (López and López 2010, 63).

The FAFSA presents a major problem for undocumented students. Most undocumented students are interested in applying for institutional grants which usually requires submission of a FAFSA and sometimes a CSS Profile as well. However, a Social Security number is required for students to fill out the FAFSA, and undocumented students rarely have valid Social Security numbers. For example, Estrella, the undocumented student from Mexico living in California from Chapter 2, tried to fill out the FAFSA with a Social Security number that her mother got for her. Unfortunately, her birth date that was written down on the Social Security card was inaccurate.

As Estrella says, if they check …my date of birth that I put down on my application compared to the birth on the Social, I could end up in big trouble. Something like that happened when I filled out the FAFSA. I was waiting for my PIN number to come through email, and they sent me a letter, saying, “The information you gave us does not correlate with the information on your Social. Please check the material and reapply.” So now I don’t know what to do…If I can’t get some kind of scholarship or financial aid, my parents will have to pay for my education, and that’s a lot of money. Especially for a seven-member family. (Orner and Andes 2008, 338)

Many schools, especially private higher education institutions, encourage international students to fill out the CSS Profile or a separate financial aid application for international students. However, not all undocumented students are aware that they should fill out financial aid forms as an international student. Undocumented students fit in that gray area where financial aid is concerned at private institutions. They may not be considered for any aid because they are undocumented or the private school may decide to fund them fully like they would for a very needy U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
Once again, how is an undocumented student to know? As seen previously, the information is not readily available on college and university websites. The undocumented student, or his counselor, will need to call each school individually to assess its policies for financial aid for undocumented students adding yet another burden to the process of seeking higher education.

**CONCLUSION**

Through a series of interviews with undocumented students, community college administrators, state university administrators, and private university administrators, the undocumented students’ experience with the admissions and financial aid processes has been shown to be anything but transparent. Policies on admitting and funding undocumented students are rarely available in printed or web-based materials issued by colleges and universities. The burden of learning that information is left to the undocumented student, who often does not have any assistance from his parents and little assistance from his high school guidance counselor. Like Roberto, an undocumented student might have to call up to twenty institutions to ask about admissions and financial aid policies. Undocumented students are by no means guaranteed adequate funding to pay for the colleges and universities that are willing to accept them. Thus, they must cast a very wide net of applications with the hope that they receive admission and adequate funding. Without the use of printed resources and accurate website information, discovering these colleges is much more difficult for the undocumented student seeking higher education.
Large application fees often accompany the long online forms that undocumented students seeking admission to higher education institutions must complete. Without fee waivers, these application fees can be prohibitive for undocumented students.

Additionally, the admissions applications ask for students to declare their citizenship. The undocumented student faces the challenge of answering this question. For all intents and purposes, he is American, but technically he remains a citizen of a different country. He often feels scared answering this question honestly, especially in states with laws that are not currently friendly to immigrants.

Finally, the undocumented student is challenged by the financial aid process. He is asked to fill out the FAFSA which requires a Social Security number he doesn’t have. The colleges and universities he is applying to may consider him to be an international student but often the financial aid application for international students ask questions which are irrelevant to his situation.

Admissions officers and financial aid officers largely wish to help the undocumented student navigate this process, but they are limited to the undocumented students who approach them directly. Thus, a large percentage of undocumented students remain unassisted or under-assisted in the admissions and financial aid processes. A potentially insurmountable barrier is placed in front of the undocumented student seeking access to higher education.
CHAPTER 5
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Undocumented students face an uphill battle to earning a college degree. As noted in the foregoing chapters, they do not have access to the same tuition rates and funding as American citizens. They receive inadequate college search support from parents, teacher, and counselors. Additionally, undocumented students confront unfriendly college admissions and financial aid processes. These problems will not be solved overnight. However, short-term and long-term policy changes could greatly benefit undocumented students and improve their access to higher education.

Recommendations to improve higher education funding for undocumented students include (1) higher education institutions improving the financial aid application process for undocumented students and providing scholarship opportunities not contingent upon citizenship; (2) states passing laws providing in-state tuition and state-sponsored financial aid for undocumented students to attend the local community college; and (3) passage of the Dream Act at the federal level.

Recommendations to improve college search support for undocumented students include (4) parents of undocumented students involving themselves more in the college search process; (5) elementary, middle, and high school teachers and guidance counselors reaching out to undocumented students to talk about higher education plans; (6) states providing high school guidance counselors with an adequate budget and time for professional development activities; and (7) states mandating a student-to-counselor ratio
in public high schools that facilitates the counselor’s ability to advise students on the college search process.

Recommendations to improve college admissions and financial aid processes for undocumented students include (8) admissions offices improving the way they convey information to undocumented students and their parents; (9) admissions offices bringing undocumented students and their parents to campus for special events or formal mentorship programs; (10) and admissions and financial aid offices having personnel specifically appointed to assist undocumented students.

Should even some of these policy recommendations be implemented, the undocumented students’ likelihood of receiving a college degree in the United States could drastically be improved.

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

Higher education institutions largely regard undocumented students as international students and require them to pay the most expensive out-of-state tuition rates. For undocumented students, these costs are typically not offset by financial aid packages. Undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid and only three of 50 states currently provide undocumented students with state financial aid. The most fortunate undocumented students receive scholarships from private colleges or universities or private scholarship programs that will consider applications from non-citizens. These opportunities for private funding are very limited however. The following are policy recommendations designed to improve higher education funding for undocumented students.
Policy Recommendation #1 – In the short term, higher education institutions should improve the financial aid application process for undocumented students and provide scholarship opportunities not contingent upon citizenship.

First, college and universities need to provide financial aid information sooner to undocumented students and their parents. Additionally, since undocumented students cannot fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) due to the requirement of a Social Security number, higher education institutions should provide an alternate financial aid application form for undocumented students and detailed instructions about how to fill out the form.

Beyond improving the financial aid application process itself, private higher education institutions should provide aid to undocumented students in the form of grants. These grants will need to come from private institutional scholarships that do not require students to be a U.S. citizen to qualify.

…if private scholarships or foundation funding could be generated or channeled that did not require citizenship status, institutions would attract additional students in general and undocumented students in particular. It would behoove development officers to approach their funders and donors and inquire whether citizenship status is a necessary criterion to be eligible for the scholarships they are funding. (P. A. Perez 2010, 24)

Policy Recommendation #2 – States should consider passing laws providing in-state tuition and state-sponsored financial aid for undocumented students to attend the local community college.

States that do not currently offer in-state tuition and/or state-sponsored financial aid for undocumented students should consider passing laws to do so. These laws should be designed to help undocumented students afford tuition at the local community college. (Ideally, later undocumented students would have the opportunity to transfer to a four-
year state school and to continue receiving in-state tuition and state-sponsored financial aid to complete their Bachelor’s degrees).

Why should state laws encourage undocumented students to enter community college instead of other institutions of higher education within the state? The first reason is that community colleges are open-enrollment institutions and undocumented students will not be taking seats from American citizens or permanent residents. This will silence many of the critics of in-state tuition laws who insist that undocumented students are pushing out their American citizen counterparts from higher education institutions. If this remains a problem, states could add provisions to their laws similar to Virginia’s law that states “…in programs where demand exceeds capacity, citizens and legal residents have precedence over undocumented students” (Roy Biswas 2005, 9-10).

Second, community colleges cost less making them more accessible to undocumented students and reducing the cost of funding state-sponsored financial aid for undocumented students. Third, community colleges are uniquely able to increase the earning power of students from low-income and minority backgrounds, which is true of many undocumented students (Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein 2007, 105).

How should states design these laws to advantage undocumented students? Laws should focus on residency rather than immigration status by basing, “…eligibility for in-state tuition [for undocumented students] on attendance at an in-state high school and the awarding of a high school diploma or GED from the state” (Roy Biswas 2005, 9-10).

States must be prepared to justify the potential cost. States must be able to project the benefits to undocumented students despite the lack of federal and state data on
undocumented students which can potentially lead to “…only vague estimates of the demand for, and impact of, proposed legislation (Roy Biswas 2005, 9-10).

In the absence of data, states can arrive at the estimated impact by using some common criteria—for example, the number of students without social security numbers in high schools, minority representation in high schools, high school minority graduation rates, rate of postsecondary attendance in the state for minority groups, and GED awards in the state. (Roy Biswas 2005, 9-10)

States also need to consider if they will offer financial aid in addition to in-state tuition for undocumented students. Some in-state tuition laws that states passed have been less successful than desired due to the “…lack of access to financial aid” which can be crucial for undocumented students to be able to stay enrolled in higher education institutions (Roy Biswas 2005, 9-10). States also need to consider how they will implement the policies in such a way that undocumented students feel comfortable about disclosing their status (Roy Biswas 2005, 9-10).

Why should states offer in-state tuition and/or state-funded financial aid to undocumented students? Society benefits from states’ offering in-state tuition to undocumented students because high school dropout rates have lowered, college attendance has increased, and there has been no notable rise in undocumented students migrating to states offering in-state tuition. Stella Flores’ research confirms that “…undocumented students living in states that have in-state policies…are more likely to attend college than students who live in states without such a policy” (Lopez 2010, 28). Furthermore, states offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented students experience increased revenues from students who probably would not have attended college if the policies were not in place.
Policy Recommendation #3 – In the long term, the U.S. Congress and Senate should pass the Dream Act.

The DREAM Act is designed to allow undocumented immigrant youth who were brought to the country years ago as children to obtain legal permanent resident status if they remain in school through high school graduation and go on to college or military service. The current version of the DREAM Act would permit students to obtain legal permanent resident status if they satisfy the following conditions: (1) they entered the United States at the age of 15 or younger and are under 35 on the date of the bill’s enactment; (2) they have been continuously present in the country for at least five years prior to the bill’s enactment; (3) they have obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent; and (4) they can demonstrate good moral character. Undocumented students who satisfy these conditions would be able to apply for a six-year “conditional” legal permanent status that would allow them to work, go to college and/or join the military. If, within this six-year period, the DREAM Act beneficiaries complete at least two years toward a four-year college degree, graduate from a two-year college or serve at least two years in the U.S. armed forces, they would be able to change their conditional status to permanent and would become eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship. Estimates suggest that the DREAM Act would provide 360,000 undocumented high school graduates with a legal means to work and secure additional resources for college, and could provide incentives for another 715,000 youngsters between the ages of 5 and 17 to finish high school (to fulfill the act’s eligibility requirements) and pursue postsecondary education. (Gonzales 2009, 23)

This would be the easiest solution to the funding problem. Argument to the naysayers is that the initial outlays in additional federal loans, work study, etc. would eventually be offset by increased tax revenue since undocumented students would become tax-paying citizens.

Research indicates that when given an opportunity to regularize their status, undocumented immigrants experience substantial upward mobility. For instance, studies of undocumented immigrants who received legal status under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act have found that, over time, legalized immigrants moved on to significantly better jobs. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Labor found that the wages of immigrants legalized under IRCA had increased by roughly 15 percent five years later. Given the opportunity to receive additional education and training, and move into better paying jobs, legalized immigrants pay more in taxes and have more money to spend and invest. It is therefore likely that if currently undocumented students were granted legal status, they would not only improve their own circumstances but, in turn, make greater contributions to the U.S. economy. In fact, the economic benefits derived from obtaining legal
status would likely be even greater for the undocumented 1.5 generation because these students would combine their newfound labor mobility and freedom from immigration enforcement with significantly increased educational attainment. (Gonzales 2009, 13)

The Dream Act is a very controversial piece of legislation as is the issue of immigration to the general public in the U.S. This particular bill has been introduced four times in varying forms and has yet to pass. Until a federal law is passed to aid undocumented students’ quest for higher education opportunities, it is even more important that other policy initiatives, especially at the state and institutional level, be implemented.

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COLLEGE SEARCH SUPPORT FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper detail the influence of parents, peers, teachers, and guidance counselors on potential college applicants in their “Model of College Choice.” Their research clearly indicates that successful applicants to college receive encouragement from parents and peers to pursue higher education, and enjoy logistical support from high school teachers and guidance counselors in searching for the right college and navigating the complex admissions process. The following policy recommendations are designed to complement their theory.

**Policy Recommendation #4 – Parents of undocumented students should involve themselves more in the college search process.**

For undocumented students to be successful in gaining access to college, it is evident that their parents must be invested in the process. Parents must take steps to seek out information from the secondary schools and the colleges about admissions and financial aid policies for undocumented students. They must encourage their students to
take challenging classes and to plan for college as early as freshman year. “Parents should communicate high educational expectations to their children when they are young…” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 133). Parents should expose undocumented students to college admissions officers and others who promote going to college.

In a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Katherine Mangan discusses what one geographic region has done to influence college predisposition:

> So institutions like South Texas, a public community college, are pairing up with local school officials to reach out to students as early as kindergarten to get them thinking about college. They’re also enlisting the support of parents, many of whom are poor and lack even a high school diploma. (Mangan 2011)

Even if they are low-income households, parents of undocumented students should start a college savings account. “No matter how small the amount, students interpret parental savings as a tangible commitment” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 134). Elementary school is not too early for counselors to start encouraging parents to save money for their children for college (Matthay 1995, 10).

Parents of undocumented students tend to be less knowledgeable about the college search process in the United States. This makes it ever more important for educators to start informing them much earlier in the process than the parents of a typical student. Educators in Florida are finding success by starting to educate parents about the college process as early as elementary school.

A program for parents who are unfamiliar with the workings of higher education in America has been initiated at the elementary level in several school districts in Florida. Parents are taught the vocabulary and concepts of college admission as well as the vast arrays of options available, ranging from career training programs and community colleges to highly competitive colleges and universities. Such teaching takes away the mystery of higher education, sets up the expectation that
college can be a realistic possibility for children, and helps parents understand the relationship between academic preparation at the elementary school level and the number of postsecondary opportunities available. (Matthay 1995, 10)

Armed with the knowledge of the college process when students are young, parents of undocumented students can be more active during the students’ crucial high school years. Parents of undocumented students should support their children by taking them to visit colleges, attending financial aid workshops, etc. whenever possible (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 134).

**Policy Recommendation #5 – Elementary, middle, and high school teachers and guidance counselors should reach out to undocumented students to talk about their future plans, including higher education.**

For undocumented students to be successful college applicants, their teachers must also be invested in their future plans. It is recommended that teachers of undocumented students talk to students about college options. “Many middle, junior high, and senior high public schools are now adopting Teacher Advisor Programs (TAPs), long used in independent schools to provide individual attention and what might be termed surrogate parenting for students…teachers are logical human resources to improve the advising process” (Matthay 1995, 19). These programs can be used to advise students on postsecondary options. Some undocumented students may be more comfortable opening up to a teacher they know well as opposed to a counselor they barely know. Teachers should also suggest schools that undocumented students might apply to, help them with research, help with essays, etc.

Guidance counselors should start advising students about college in middle school. Counselors also need to start advising parents of undocumented students in
middle school “since parents play the decisive role in shaping the educational aspirations of their children” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 28).

Research shows that most students have some post-high school educational or job plans by the ninth grade. Students need to begin to develop college awareness aspirations in the middle school years in order to take algebra and other gatekeeping courses in middle school, which then positions students for high school course work that aligns well with college enrollment requirements…It is in this stage that students need to be informed of college entrance requirements, be enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum, be engaged in extracurricular activities, and begin to learn in broad-brush ways about financing a college education. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 5-6)

How can middle school guidance counselors specifically help undocumented students? First counselors, can “help students select courses that will prepare them for college prep courses in high school” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 142). Secondly, counselors should “let parents know that…[they are] available to meet with them to discuss their concerns about the college process” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 145). Thirdly, counselors should “create a “college-going culture” – have a college information center, a College Day, or host a college panel or reps from local schools or graduates who are currently in college” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 146). Fourth, counselors should “provide information to students and families about the cost of college and the financial aid options available to them…” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 147). Finally, middle school counselors should “keep information on financial aid and college costs basic… [to] let parents know that college can be an affordable option” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 29).

High school guidance counselors also play a very important role in encouraging undocumented students to pursue higher education. “Thus research reveals that counselors impact students’ aspirations, plans, enrollments and financial aid knowledge;
that meeting frequently with a counselor increase a student’s chance of enrolling in a four-year college…” (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 11).

Specifically, high school counselors working with undocumented tenth graders “…should focus on educational aspirations and broad typologies of postsecondary institutions” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 61). Studies have shown that tenth graders are not yet ready to delve into specifics of individual colleges and universities (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 61). Even if undocumented students are not ready to look at specific higher education institutions, guidance counselors can encourage students to enroll in college level classes while still in high school, which may help save costly tuition dollars once in college.

Counselors can also encourage undocumented students to take as many Advanced Placement (AP) tests as possible in order to save money and fulfill [General Education] requirements, simultaneously. Where available, counselors should encourage undocumented students to participate in dual enrollment programs with community colleges to earn college credit without the tuition cost. (W. Perez 2010, 34-35)

By the time, undocumented students are in eleventh grade, the high school guidance counselor plays a crucial role in helping undocumented students determine what colleges to apply to (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 61). High school guidance counselors should give their undocumented counselees “…multiple options with regard to higher education attendance” and should not focus exclusively on “…community college information merely because they cost less than four-year institutions” (P. A. Perez 2010, 24). Guidance counselors assisting juniors who are undocumented should discuss different opportunities available at two year vs. four year schools and public vs. private institutions. This information should address both admissions and financial aid
opportunities available for undocumented students specifically at these different types of schools. Junior year of high school is also a crucial time to provide additional outreach to the parents of undocumented students about the college search process.

For students from all socioeconomic levels, parents are the most influential source of information about colleges. Therefore, the [high school] counselor must mount an aggressive college information campaign for parents of high school students. Formal evening presentations should be scheduled on college selection, admission testing procedures, and financial aid. Programs can be offered that focus on the college planning needs of specific populations…. (Matthay 1995, 12)

If the parents of undocumented students are not available to assist, perhaps they still live in their home country or have been deported, it is important that guidance counselors involve third parties that can assist undocumented students in the college search process. “Under these conditions it would be best to focus on peer groups and networks that share a similar influence. In this manner students could purposefully share information and recruit their peers through informal knowledge sharing or more formal peer-mentoring programs” (P. A. Perez 2010, 24).

The fall of twelfth grade is a crucial time for all students aspiring to attend higher education institutions, undocumented students included. High school counselors working with seniors should “schedule financial aid workshops for students and parents… focusing on forms and the details of the process” (Matthay 1995, 360). It is also crucial that high school counselors advise undocumented students and their parents about possible scholarship opportunities at the state and institutional levels (Matthay 1995, 360).

High school counselors can play perhaps their most important role by advising low-and moderate-income families about financial aid options. Evidence clearly indicates that many students rule out colleges and universities that would be a good fit for them because they are not knowledgeable about federal, state and
institutional financial aid program. Moderate- and low-income families need the most information and assistance regarding financial aid and in completing applications. A strong college guidance program should include financial aid workshops, group advising, and perhaps course sessions focused upon increasing the understandings of students and parents about financial aid programs and how to complete financial aid application forms. (N.A.F.C.A. 2008, 49)

High school guidance counselors advising undocumented students should familiarize themselves with resources such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the University of Southern California Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, and the National Council of La Raza which have “…compiled extensive lists of scholarships for which undocumented students are eligible (W. Perez 2010, 34-35). In addition to providing undocumented students with these lists of scholarship opportunities, guidance counselor should also learn about private higher education institutions across the country that offer scholarships to undocumented students regardless of citizenship (W. Perez 2010, 34-35).

During senior year of high school, guidance counselors should also make themselves available to help parents of undocumented students fill out financial aid forms and scholarship forms (Matthay 1995, 13). Many parents of undocumented students are overwhelmed by this part of the process, especially if their sons or daughters are first-generation college bound or if the parents’ first language is not English.

Policy Recommendation #6 – States should provide public school high school guidance counselors with an adequate budget and time for professional development activities.

For high school guidance counselors to be able to assist special populations of students, like undocumented students, they need increased professional development opportunities. States should provide counselors with the funding necessary to go to
professional development opportunities about college access. “The No Child Left Behind Act provides districts with the flexibility and resources to apply professional development and other funds as states and districts see fit” (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011, 8).

Counselors need to educate themselves about admissions and financial aid processes specifically for undocumented students. Professional development groups like the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) and the College Board can assist high school guidance counselors’ ability to advise not only undocumented students about the college process, but all students who wish to attend higher education institutions.

“The National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC)…offers professional support to school-based and independent counselors as well as to college admission counselors” (Matthay 1995, 341). “The work of NACAC is supplemented by twenty state and regional associations, which provide additional services and many opportunities for personal involvement. These affiliated groups also sponsor workshops, meetings, conferences, publications, and other activities to assist in the professional development of all counselors” (Matthay 1995, 342).

“The College Board in New York City is a national nonprofit organization of…colleges and secondary schools. It sponsors a number of publications and programs that can help counselors keep abreast of the latest developments in the field and further sharpen their skills”(Matthay 1995, 342).

By utilizing these groups for professional development opportunities, high school guidance counselors can keep up to date with policies in regard to college admissions and financial aid.
Policy Recommendation #7 – States should mandate a student-to-counselor ratio in public high schools that facilitates counselor’s ability to advise students on the college search process.

States should mandate a student-to-counselor ratio (at the high school level at a minimum). Schools with too few counselors should hire more counselors. Ideally states would mandate “the “American School Counselor Association…recommended ratio of 250 students per counselor” or lower (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011, 8). With more counselors in the schools, more time could be dedicated to the college advising process and less to administrative tasks.

The 2011 National Survey of School Counselors shows that “…nearly all counselors (95 percent) are in favor of additional support, time, and empowerment for leadership to give students what they need for college, even outpacing 91 percent reporting support for reducing administrative tasks and 90 percent wanting smaller caseloads” (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011, 7).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AID PROCESSES FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Undocumented students experience that the admissions and financial aid processes lack transparency. Policies on admitting and funding undocumented students are rarely available in printed or web-based materials issued by colleges and universities. Undocumented students are uncertain how to fill out citizenship questions on the admissions application and what forms they need to fill out to request financial assistance. Even when undocumented students do seek assistance with these processes, many admissions and financial aid officers are unknowledgeable about the school’s policies.
The following policy suggestions are designed for admissions and financial aid offices so that they may better assist undocumented students gain access to higher education.

**Policy Recommendation #8 – Admissions offices should improve the way they convey information to undocumented students and their parents.**

Admissions offices must improve their methods for conveying information about admissions and financial aid to undocumented students and their parents. Research shows that high school sophomores are not ready to digest much information. Printed and web-based materials should be targeted largely at juniors and seniors (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 135). Admissions offices should consider posting information for undocumented juniors and seniors in high school on their website. Additionally, admissions offices should provide information to guidance counselors of undocumented students on their websites. One possibility would be that schools could work with the state to develop a policy manual similar to the *College and Financial Aid Guide for AB540 Undocumented Immigrant Students in California*”(Lopez 2010, 155). This would be a:

…comprehensive manual that would include the admission guidelines (including a definition of common terms used in the application process), the tuition prices and the federal laws regarding the issue…In addition, a listing of national scholarships available to students regardless of citizenship, as well as a listing of advocacy groups across the state and nation…could be included in this guide. Such a guide should be made available as a tool not only for high schools, but also in college admission offices statewide. Preferably, the guide would be available in both English and Spanish. (Lopez 2010, 155-156)

A comprehensive manual for undocumented students issued by the state and available in all high schools and admissions offices would greatly assist undocumented students in accessing higher education.
Policy Recommendation #9 – Admissions offices should bring undocumented students and their parents to campus for special events or formal mentorship programs.

Beyond providing printed and web-based information for undocumented students, admissions offices should create programs to bring undocumented high school juniors, seniors, and their parents to campus. During these programs, admissions and financial aid officers could sit down one on one with undocumented students and their parents and help them to fill out college applications and financial aid forms (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999, 136). Of course, the parents and students’ anonymity would be protected!

A more elaborate way for institutions of higher education to accomplish this goal would be to form mentorship programs.

Colleges and universities should consider developing mentoring/college prep programs that accept undocumented students (or they should expand their existing programs to serve undocumented students if they don’t already). These programs should make sure to get parents involved, provide relevant admissions and financial aid information to students and their families, provide Spanish-speaking mentors, set high academic expectations, be honest with undocumented students about limitations on their college options, bring undocumented students on to college campuses to provide exposure to college life, develop an individualized college plan for each undocumented student, accommodate students’ needs to support families through after-school jobs or providing of childcare, and have mentors visible in the high schools themselves. (Lopez 2010, 157-161)

Mentorship programs would build an even stronger relationship between the undocumented student and the university or college. Thus, the undocumented student could see higher education as a viable possibility while still in high school.

Policy Recommendation #10 – Admissions and Financial Aid Offices should have personnel specifically appointed to assist undocumented students.

Additionally, higher education institutions should appoint a staff person in the Admissions and the Financial Aid office to work directly with undocumented students.
Admissions offices should provide advocates for undocumented students who can guide them through the admissions process safely and confidentially. For example, these advocates can help undocumented students determine if they need to fill out the international student application and how to fill out sections that are not relevant to undocumented students (Lopez 2010, 156). Advocates in the Financial Aid office can let undocumented students know what tuition they will need to pay, what paperwork they must fill out and what scholarships they qualify for. These advocates in the admissions and financial aid offices could also reach out to other members of the college or university to educate them about undocumented students and their specific needs. This would increase the support system for undocumented students once they arrive to campus (P. A. Perez 2010, 24-25).

Informed advocates for undocumented students are particularly essential at the community college level.

It is through education and training about in-state residence admission and tuition policies that community colleges will be able to ensure that student services personnel are properly equipped to manage and handle the changing climate of undocumented student access at their institutions. As community colleges are the institutions most likely to enroll undocumented, immigrant students, their role cannot be overstated. (Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga 2010, 41)

Undocumented students would highly benefit from advocates within the higher education institutions that could confidentially explain and assist the admissions and financial aid processes that currently lack transparency.

CONCLUSIONS

Without a path to citizenship, undocumented students will face tremendous challenges in their lives. Assuming that someday, the Dream Act (or some other similar
piece of legislation) passes providing citizenship to undocumented students, it will be even more crucial that undocumented students receive access to higher education opportunities now. The degrees that they earn will allow them to be productive, tax-paying members of society once citizenship is possible.

The most crucial policy changes that must occur involve providing higher education funding for undocumented students. While it is highly unlikely that undocumented students will receive access to federal funding in the near future, states should either continue to offer or pass legislation to offer in-state tuition and state financial aid dollars to undocumented students. Higher education institutions can do their part by improving financial aid application processes and increasing scholarships available to undocumented students.

Beyond the funding problem, undocumented students need greater assistance from those who influence the college search process. Policy recommendations include increased parental, teacher, and counselor involvement in the undocumented student’s college search process and increased funding by the states to add additional counselors to the school and to provide increased professional development opportunities. Professional development opportunities should largely be dedicated to learning more about the college counseling process.

Admissions and financial aid offices must also improve the manner in which they support undocumented students. Policy recommendations include providing increased print and web-based information for undocumented students, bringing undocumented students and their parents to campus for special events or formal mentorship programs,
and the appointment of knowledgeable personnel to assist undocumented students directly in both the admissions and the financial aid offices.

While these policy recommendations cannot guarantee that an undocumented student will gain access to higher education in the United States, they should definitely improve his or her chances. As seen through the remarkable interviews with undocumented students and their supporters, this population of college-bound students has much to offer society should they be afforded the opportunity. Undocumented students’ ability to contribute to society is largely dependent on their ability to transcend the “uphill battle to a college degree.”
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