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## FINANCIAL AND FAMILIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY UNDOCUMENTED FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Alexia Garcia  
*California State University - San Bernardino*

Karen Murillo  
*California State University - San Bernardino*

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FINANCIAL AND FAMILIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY UNDOCUMENTED  
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Alexia Garcia  
Karen Murillo  
May 2022

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Alexia Garcia  
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Approved by:

Dr. Herbert Shon, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Laurie Smith, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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## ABSTRACT

As a first-generation student, it is difficult to navigate a higher education with little to no support. Having an undocumented status as a first-generation student the challenges and barriers increase. This study utilized snowball sampling through qualitative virtual interviews with 10 undocumented first-generation students. The data collected from the interviews was presented using content thematic analysis. The three major themes identified were access and barriers to financial resources, meeting family and educational expectations and perseverance. The findings identified the limited financial resources for undocumented students, and the influence of the family unit on the student's educational experience. A key finding of this research was students' determination to overcome their unique obstacles. This study identified the gaps in assistance and resources available through college institutions. Researchers recognized recommendations to address the gaps, by incorporating collaborations between institutional programs and emphasizing the importance of social work professionals to continue practicing cultural competency. A suggestion for future research is to increase sample size by connecting with different institutions initially.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

Undocumented students account for 2 percent of the college population and they continue to expand as more undocumented individuals are seeking a higher education (National Immigration Law Center, 2020). Nationally, undocumented students account for 450,000 individuals in a higher education setting (National Immigration Law Center, 2020). First-generation student's experience in higher education could be quite different from students who are non-first generation, including 2nd and 3rd generations and so forth. Non-first-generation students have the support and passed down knowledge from families and friends who already pursued higher education. Whereas first-generation students have little knowledge about the college system, process, less resources, and support where they cannot find within their family system.

The student's documentation status puts them in a difficult situation and places them at a disadvantage. Students who are undocumented could apply for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA protects undocumented immigrants from deportation and allows individuals to receive a work permit. Among those undocumented individuals, there is a sizeable number of students who do not qualify for DACA and are not able to seek protection under DACA. Students who are undocumented and do not meet the qualifications for DACA continue to have no social security number (SSN).

When pursuing higher education, it is important to have an SSN, as it makes it challenging for them to access financial resources and services. First-generation students tend to come from low-income families and require more financial support if considering a higher education (Simmons et al., 2018). Without SSN undocumented students are unable to apply for financial assistance from a college or university. Being from a low-income family, they are unable to financially support them, which forces students to find employment to pay for their education and end up having to work long hours. The students' financial condition places a burden and challenge to pursue higher education.

A barrier first-generation students experience is being unaware of how to select a college, how to complete the application process and how to connect with campus resources. As students of undocumented status begin to assimilate within the college culture, they may experience the fear of prejudice or judgment based on their status. Students may find it difficult to seek support from administrators and mental health specialists, which can result in isolating habits and poor coping mechanisms.

As a first-generation student from low-income families, they hold a greater responsibility in their familial unit. The additional responsibility the students hold could include financial support, sibling care, or supporting their parents in other aspects. Having to juggle their household duties with their desire to pursue higher education is a challenge for students. The family obligations can either encourage or prevent educational progress because they feel the duty to provide

financially for their family while also succeeding in their academics (Kim & Diaz, 2013). The responsibilities the student has can be a motivator for them to seek a higher education. Low-income families are interdependent and require ongoing support to have a successful educational journey.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the barriers that undocumented first-generation students face while obtaining a higher education. The population consisted of both undocumented first-generation students who qualify for DACA and those who do not qualify for DACA. The study also identifies the resiliency students show when they overcome those barriers. A barrier that an undocumented individuals may experience when deciding to pursue a higher education is being a first-generation college student. As a first-generation student there is little to no guidance or mentoring through the process of obtaining a higher education. Groce and Johnson (2021) identified a program in the state of Arizona which prepares school staff and institutions in assisting undocumented students in college readiness. This study clarifies the support and resources that first-generation students need. An additional barrier that undocumented students experience is the lack of support. An important influence in a student's educational journey is their family's support. That support can look quite different based on the students' needs. The knowledge provided by this study, assists social work professionals and college institutions in identifying the

resources needed for students who are undocumented in ensuring there is a support system to succeed in their education.

The last barrier identified in this study will be the financial burdens undocumented students face. In addition to the concern of job stability there is a concern for the cost of education. An additional stressor for undocumented students is the financial support they may provide to their family. The services that are already in place at most universities are federal or state grants, loans, scholarships, and work study programs. The purpose of the study is to identify the need for additional services for undocumented students who do not meet the qualifications for the existing services.

The research method used in this study is a qualitative design. A qualitative design allows for an interview assessment to understand undocumented first-generation students financial and familial experiences. The interview is semi-structured with open-ended questions. The qualitative design uses a small, but effective number of participants to allow researchers to gain a better understanding and knowledge of participants' experiences. Participants' responses from the interview will be transcribed for data analysis.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Undocumented first-generation students are one of the most vulnerable groups on campus because of lack of support and knowledge about the higher education system. These students deserve to be recognized and applauded for the resiliency shown in overcoming the challenges and barriers. The knowledge

generated from this study can be utilized for social work advocacy work to make policy changes, collaborate with community resources, and potentially initiate development of new supportive services. This study will assist social work practice on assessing undocumented first-generation students who are pursuing a higher education. It is important to gain all the demographic information such as legal status, generation status, financial security, and familial background to determine the impact it has had on their educational journey.

California State University, San Bernardino has existing groups and resources available to undocumented students such as the Undocumented Student Success Center and Counseling and Psychological Services. The Undocumented Student Success Center provides a safe space for students to collaborate with one another to identify services and provide support. The Counseling and Psychological Services center provides emotional and mental health support. The findings of this study will help the universities/colleges in continuing to implement improved systems and/or services for their incoming students who are first generation and of documented or undocumented status.

With the appropriate and supportive resources or services, the students who are pursuing a higher education will be able to succeed. This study contributes to current research in the financial and familial experiences of first-generation students and how their documentation status contributes to their educational journey. As well as exploring the resiliency of the students overcoming those barriers. Our research question focused on how

documentation status affected the financial and familial experiences of first-generation college students. How does documentation status affect the financial and familial experiences of first-generation students who are pursuing a higher education?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This section focuses on the existing literature of undocumented students. The subsections discuss the relationship between financial and familial influences of undocumented students and their education. As well as the resilience outcomes of the students. The subsections examine the difference or similarities between first generation students and non-first-generation students. The final subsection utilizes Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to discuss the relevant findings of this study for the targeted population.

#### First-Generation Students

The college population is made up of both first-generation students and non-first-generation students. First-generation students lack knowledge and preparedness about college due to their documentation status (Simmons et al., 2018). First-generation students are unable to receive assistance with college applications, tips, or recommendations, and have no role models to help with the process. The student may require the support of the university and faculty/staff to guide them and provide the necessary information. The DREAMzone program was developed in the state of Arizona, counselors were trained about the difficulties undocumented students encounter in pursuing college admissions in the hopes to increase college access (Groce & Johnson, 2021). The program was developed to inform and educate allies and personnel that work closely with

undocumented students in how to provide adequate support on their educational journey. Non-first-generation students tend to have prior knowledge or guidance on the process of obtaining a higher education from past generations. Simmons et al. (2018) acknowledged that there is not enough research on first-generation social work students and that there is a need for administrators to work with first-generation students and offer resources as needed.

The challenges undocumented first-generation students experience when entering the higher education environment is social exclusion, lack of support, and low self-efficacy. Undocumented students tend to experience social exclusion once they are admitted into the college and begin attending campus (Williams, 2016). Due to limited support in achieving a higher education students tend to experience a lack of confidence, resulting in a lower self-efficacy (Simmons et al., 2018). First-generation students are interdependent and connect with individuals, especially for support. With that said, it is important for them to look for support on campus and connect with student services.

Compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation students experience more hardships (Simmons et al., 2018). These hardships may consist of financial hardships, family interdependence and mental health issues. Simmons et al. (2018) states that first-generation students are found to experience more stress especially students who identify as Asian or Latino/a than non-first-generation students. First-generation students have first-hand knowledge of their parents' educational and life experiences which results in

themselves placing a higher emphasis and increased motivation on succeeding (Moon & Casares, 2019). For non-first-generation students the pressure to succeed comes directly from the parents. The pressure to succeed can positively or negatively impact first-generation students by increasing the chances of depressive symptoms compared to non-first-generation students (Moon & Casares, 2019). Being in an academic setting the pressure to succeed is prominent for all students. A major limitation of Moon and Casares (2019) study, was that the participants were all recruited from an institution that is known for their strong emphasis on academic excellence, which could lead to the students being from privileged backgrounds and exposed to higher levels of expectations than the general population.

### Financial Insecurities

College education is a costly expense for all students, but more specifically students who are undocumented experience the most difficulty in financing their education. According to Williams (2016) there is evidence that undocumented students struggle with paying for their higher education with little to no opportunity for financial assistance. Since undocumented students do not have the opportunity to apply for government assistance, a resource that may be available to them is the Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Undocumented students who seek out the DACA program may receive benefits of a work permit and a social security number to work better jobs and apply for financial assistance. Williams (2016) states how important it is for undocumented

students to qualify for DACA to receive benefits but one of the limitations is the cost of the application process.

Williams (2016) identified that undocumented students had a challenging time with the college application process due to being first generation and a lack of guidance on the general information for their application process and costs. According to Roth (2017), undocumented students were found to utilize support outside their family to receive guidance on choosing a college, application process, tips, and strategies on obtaining funding to financially support their education. Additionally, undocumented students who do not qualify for DACA, have no social security number which prevents them from being eligible and applying for university assistance. Undocumented students have limited access to financial resources and may have no option but to work a full-time lower end job to pay for their education (Williams, 2016). Students who are undocumented come from a minority population and tend to come from low-income families. Berzin (2010), stated that families who come from low SES experience higher financial pressure due to parental income and parental employment stability. As a result, it is difficult for first-generation students to seek out additional financial support from their family.

University institutions are not naturally set up to support minorities or lower SES to succeed in higher education. This may appear as limited financial resources that are offered to minorities or lower SES students. Enriquez et al. (2019) identified that there is a strong relationship between financial stress and

institutional resources. Financial stress can affect the student's well-being and academic performance. Academic and financial stress have been associated with symptoms of depression, such as somatic symptoms and lack of positive affect (Arbona et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to consider the negative effect that institutional resources and financial insecurities have on undocumented students.

### Familial Support and Influence

A major component in a student's educational journey is having a support system. This may look different based on the student, but the support of family for an undocumented individual is important. Tseng (2004) stated that the youth who placed greater attitudinal and behavioral emphasis on family interdependence were youth from undocumented families than documented families. One of the challenges of an undocumented students is having family members who have little to no educational background. As a result, the support and social connections to school educators and counselors has been found to be important for undocumented students (Roth, 2017). Moon and Casares (2019) identified that one of the struggles the Asian undocumented youth observed about their parents' migration journey were financial difficulties. Another component that influences the student's educational journey is that after migration, parents experience a downfall of their social mobility and their prior education, which leads to them placing their dreams on their own children (Moon & Casares, 2019).

The assimilation of undocumented families to a new country can place stress and difficult choices on potential students. A crucial decision that the student must make is the career and academic choices they wish to pursue, which can add a level of distress on the student (Moon & Casares, 2019). Alongside student distress, there is also a level of stress placed on the family as a unit. Lane & Miranda (2017) believed that undocumented compared to documented individuals, the level of familial acculturative stress would be higher, and it would be more strongly associated with Mental Health concerns. It can affect the relationship between Suicidal Ideation and hopelessness, all while trying to adjust to an unfamiliar environment and maintain their ethnic identity/culture. Arbona et. al. (2017) identified four sources of college stress that relate to depressive symptoms such as academic, personal/social, financial and discrimination stress. Without addressing or assisting the student and family with their stress, it could jeopardize their opportunity for obtaining a successful educational journey.

Undocumented students who are pursuing a higher education may have more than one responsibility within their family unit. Their focus and time may be split between educational responsibilities and family household responsibilities. For example, the care of family members, financial obligations, and additional needs of the family. Tseng (2004) examined the ethnic and generational differences in the attitudinal and behavioral components of family obligation and demands effects on academic achievement and motivation. The family demands

and responsibilities may have a negative impact on the students' academic performance or drive to continue their education.

There is also the possibility of the familial responsibilities having a positive influence on the student. Tseng (2004) claims that undocumented students have a greater academic motivation compared to documented students, which could influence their academic achievement. The motivational factor may be based on the family's current challenges, financial status, and expectations for a better future. Enriques et al. (2018), states that undocumented students stress about their future, such as obtaining a degree to have an opportunity of a better job. Although undocumented students may succeed in obtaining a degree, there is still the concern and challenges of their documentation status.

A limitation in the existing literature was the inability to generalize the findings to all undocumented students. Our study builds onto the current research and available information on undocumented students. In her study, Tseng (2004) identified the limitation of identifying small interactions or ethnic variations in the relationship of academic adjustment and family interdependence. Our study focuses on providing more context in how families are interdependent in the home and its effects on undocumented student's educational journey.

### Resiliency

A student's higher education journey is influenced by internal and external factors. The factors consist of personal family influence, motivation, psychosocial

well-being, resources, and support. Students' academic resilience is affected by the number of resources that are present, a substantial number of resources results in a positive academic performance (Perez, 2009). For undocumented students to access these potential resources, they must reveal their status to teachers and counselors (Roth, 2017). These undocumented students must attempt to build trust with teachers and counselors to seek benefits of support and positive messaging about their ability in pursuing a higher education. As an undocumented first-generation student, the obstacles they face are financial and familial barriers. Thereby, students must develop motivational patterns to accomplish their overall goals. The students with positive motivational patterns result in being more resilient than those without (Rouse, 2001). As an undocumented first-generation student, they face higher levels of adversity growing up such as low SES and no parental education. This places the students at a higher risk of not being successful (Perez, 2009).

Research has proven the importance of social ties to mentors and peers in high school leads undocumented students to a higher probability of accessing a higher education (Roth, 2017). Implementing programs and groups in K-12 settings, have proven to prepare students in preparing for a higher education. For example, students who receive counseling in a small group setting, are provided college and career readiness to prepare them to reach their goals (Groce & Johnson, 2021). In addition, school personnel that implement activities such as focusing on attitudes, long-short term goals, problem solving, and decision

making are proven to be successful in programs. Groce and Johnson, (2021) also discuss the GEAR UP program that utilizes counseling, mentoring, and college visits/information has demonstrated college enrollment success. Students with a positive school environment and a positive home life environment will facilitate resiliency (Rouse, 2001). The influential factors in a student's life strengthens their resiliency to accomplish their overall goals.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theory chosen for this study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory states that an individual will have relationships with the different environments or systems around them. He believed that the environment had different settings or levels and he categorized them as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem is defined as the individual and its immediate relationship with their environment such as their home, school, work, or extracurricular activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The mesosystem is defined as the relationship between the person and that setting at a certain time in their life such as family members, friends at school, and coworkers at place of employment. The exosystem is defined as the extension of the mesosystem in which the individual may or may not be in contact with a setting, but it affects the setting in which that individual participates in (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For example, health facilities, extended families, a workplace, and neighborhoods. A macrosystem is defined as a

system in which the fundamental rules, policies, and regulations begin and therefore the remaining systems are created (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

This theory is important when analyzing a problem and determining how the systems and/or environment that an individual is in can affect that individual. It is also important to understand that each system not only interacts with one another but that they are also dependent on the next system, and it is important to look at the relationship between them. For example, an undocumented first-generation student who is attending a university is dependent on the support of family members and academic advisors. As undocumented first-generation students, the microsystems that shape their college experience are the school setting, home, and place of employment. The mesosystem that the students will affect their college experience are their family obligations/support, their employment responsibilities, and the support from the universities administrators/faculty that they receive. The exosystems that influence their college experience are the mental health services, health care systems, federal student aid and government programs (DACA). The macrosystems that may limit the college experience of first-generation students are laws and policies that affect undocumented individuals, university policies and regulations that affect the services and assistance available to undocumented students.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory helps understand how first-generation students who are documented or undocumented will have a different interaction with each system. These challenges or barriers will impact their

academic journey. In this study, there is a focus on first generation college students and their interaction with the systems around them when they pursue higher education. The systems noted are not individual systems that affect the experience of a first-generation student, they are interdependent of each other and influence each other's role in the students' lives (Paat, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps understand how first-generation students who identify as undocumented lack the support from each system and the relationship between the systems are complex compared to documented students.

### Summary

This study explores the financial and familial experiences of first-generation students' and their higher educational journey. It also explores how the documentation status of first-generation students affects their access to services for both financial and social support. Based on the literature, there were a variety of barriers and hardships identified that undocumented first-generation students encounter. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory brings understanding for the need of additional supportive services tailored for undocumented first-generation students. This study improves our social work profession and adds to the limited current research on undocumented first-generation students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study explored the barriers undocumented first-generation students faced when obtaining a higher education and their resiliency in completing their education. This study used a qualitative design and utilized snowball sampling to recruit participants by advertising the study through flyers, email, and social media. Interviews were conducted following an interview guide and the interview was video audio recorded after obtaining participants' consent.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to provide information and awareness of the barriers undocumented first-generation students went through in higher education. This was an exploratory study using qualitative study design that investigated the influence documentation status and first-generation status had on students' educational experience. The qualitative design provided an in-depth understanding of the barriers undocumented first-generation students faced by utilizing a narrative style approach. This design allowed for open-ended questions to further explore and gain more knowledge about the barriers. Researchers used one-on-one interviews to collect data from the subjects.

The one-on-one interview limited the possibilities for participants to be influenced by other participants' responses. Utilizing open ended questions in the

interviews, allowed the participants to share their own individual experiences without restrictions. The interview questions consisted of the topics related to students' upbringing, motivation to obtain higher education, family background, social/familial support, financial stability, mental health, and resiliency.

A significant limitation of the study design was the subjectivity of the participants that were recruited. A limitation of utilizing open-ended questions during interviews was that participants provided information that may not be applicable to the study. The format of the interviews did not limit the responses participants provided. A second limitation of the interview style was that participants may not be anonymous as they may have been face-to-face with the researchers/interviewers. If participants were not anonymous, there was a possibility of them withholding information, feeling coerced, or fear of speaking out. Participants may have a preconceived bias towards the interview topics based on their personal beliefs. When using a qualitative design there is no manner in determining causality between the variables

### Sampling

This study utilized snowball sampling of students from public universities in California. The sample consisted of undergraduate and graduate students and snowball sampling led researchers to other students in higher education. Researchers also solicited respondents via contact with their own families, relatives, friends and their families and friends too. Researchers requested approval from the Director of the Dreamers Resource Center to publicize

recruitment flyers through their center. We requested assistance from the Director of the Social Work program to access social work students. Researchers emailed Social Work faculty members from a public university of California to obtain permission to send out the recruitment email to their students directly. Researchers will recruit participants from additional sources via social media platforms. Researchers will post the flyer and the statement provided in the social media script attachment referenced in Appendix K. Researchers will contact other universities or colleges to request support in sharing our recruitment flyer with their first-generation students among whom may include undocumented students to recruit participants. The study consisted of 10 students who identified as undocumented first-generation students completing a higher education. There was the possibility that students would refuse to participate. To obtain a sufficient sample, we promoted the study through email, flyers, and social media while respecting their wishes, protecting their privacy, and confidentiality.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Qualitative data was collected through a live video-audio recording. Data was collected from the recording of the interview between participants and researchers through the zoom platform. Interviews conducted via zoom offered convenience and flexibility. Each participant was interviewed individually by one researcher and a supplementary researcher for follow up questions. This limited the possibility of influencing the participants' responses. The purpose of the study was explained in the beginning of the interview to the participants.

Demographics of the participants were collected in the beginning of the interview by the researchers. The demographics collected were age, gender identification, ethnicity identification, education level, income status, documentation status, and generation status. An interview guide was designed specifically for this study which can be referenced in Appendix D. The interview guide identified six specific domains related to three areas: finance, family, and resiliency. The finance domain covered financial stability, financial resources, and financial support. The family domain covered family interdependence and family influence. The resilience domain covered personal hardships, resources, motivational patterns, school, and home environment. Each domain consisted of a specific number of questions. The questions were clear and concise. The data gathered from the interviews increased the knowledge of financial and familial experiences of undocumented first-generation students pursuing higher education.

### Procedures

This study was advertised by three methods, a flyer, email invitation and social media posts. The flyer provided details of the study, the need for participants, and researchers email address which can be referenced in Appendix E and Appendix F. The flyer was placed throughout the Dreamers Resource Center office and their online platform. The email invitation was sent out by Dr. McCallister, the director of the social work program, on behalf of the researchers and by Social Work faculty. The email detailed an introduction of the

researchers and their contact information. It also included the purpose of the study and the need for participants who were first-generation and undocumented. Once participants contacted the researchers, they were offered a list of dates and time slots that best fit their schedule to complete the interview. After participants confirmed, they were provided the informed consent form to complete prior to the interview which can be referenced in Appendix C, their zoom link and were also instructed to use a pseudonym when they logged onto the interview.

Interviews were conducted via the zoom meeting platform, in the comfort of the participant's home. Researchers asked the participants to locate a private space or the use of headphones for confidentiality. Participants were given the option to keep their cameras for the duration of the interview. Researchers also located a private and confidential space. Interview slots were offered in the morning, afternoon, and evening times that provided flexibility to the participants to complete the interview. The duration of the interview ranged between 30 minutes to an hour following the interview guide.

At the commencement of the interview, researchers introduced themselves and reminded participants to locate a private space for the duration of the interview. Researchers discussed confidentiality with each participant and provided the purpose of the study. Participants received their informed consent documents prior to the interview and were reviewed with researchers. Once documents were reviewed, researchers collected the participants' demographics,

and conducted the interview following the interview guide questions. All interviews followed the interview guide, and each participant was asked the same questions in the same order to increase reliability. Once interviews were completed participants were thanked for their participation and a debrief session was completed. Researchers provided referrals to Mental Health resources/services for participants as needed.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The participants' information was kept confidential from everyone but researchers in the study. Participants were encouraged to turn their camera off in the beginning of the zoom meeting to remain anonymous. They were assigned a pseudonym prior to the interview in their appointment confirmation email. Participants were able to use that pseudonym on their screen name through the zoom platform to maintain confidentiality. Researchers encouraged participants to use headphones and locate a private space throughout the meeting to protect confidentiality. Anonymity was limited due to the nature of the online platform and participants' willingness to follow instructions. Before commencement of video-audio recordings, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form agreeing to be recorded. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw their participation and end the interview at any time. After the interview was completed, a debriefing session was completed with each participant to ensure their well-being. Mental Health resources were provided through their campus Health Center, to each participant after completion of the interview.

To ensure participants anonymity and safety, documents and information collected from the participants were saved to the researcher's computer and saved on researchers shared Google Drive. Video-audio recordings and all data collected were also stored on Google Drive. The pseudonyms provided by researchers for each participant were assigned a number for transcription purposes of the data collection to protect their identity. After three years of the studies completion date, all data and material gathered will be deleted from Google Drive. When the data on Google Drive is not being utilized, the shared drive will be hidden under the “hidden shared drive” feature. To ensure that data cannot be accessed by entities besides researchers, the data can only be accessed through the password protected University Google Drive account. In addition, researchers' computer devices were password protected.

### Data Analysis

Researchers used the zoom platform to interview participants. Researchers utilized the transcription feature provided on the zoom platform. Both researchers revised and reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. Researchers manually transcribed in written form the statements that were not correctly identified by the zoom feature. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Participants were assigned a unique ID to differentiate each participant from the other.

The participants' responses were categorized into their respective domain's financial stability, financial resources, financial support, family

influence, family interdependence, and academic resilience. In each domain, the statements were categorized as a barrier, a challenge, resiliency, and as the participants need. Researchers reread and reviewed transcriptions to identify themes that related to each category. Each statement was assigned a color code to distinguish the recurrent themes. Researchers calculated the frequency of statements that fell under each category. Any coding discrepancies were discussed and agreed upon by both researchers after discussion.

### Summary

The study explored the influences of financial and familial experiences on undocumented first-generation students' higher education journey. The interviews provided the knowledge and first-hand experiences to increase the understanding and support for undocumented first-generation students. A qualitative method allowed researchers to gain valuable information pertaining to undocumented first-generation students. The data collected identified the gap in research and the need for resources for this population.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

In this chapter we will present the data that was collected using content thematic analysis. This study was conducted to explore the experiences and barriers of undocumented first-generation students. This study was conducted during the months of December 2021 through March 2022. The demographics, interview questions, responses, themes, and sub-themes will be presented.

#### Demographics

There was a total of 10 participants recruited for this study. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-25 years old, with an average age of 22.4 years old. Seventy percent of the participants identified as female, and thirty percent identified as male. The ethnicity of all 10 participants were Hispanic/Latino(a). Of the participants 10% have been at a university/college for one year, 10% for five years, 20% for six years, 30% for three years and 30% for four years. Participants household income ranged from \$11,000-\$46,000 and \$51,000-\$120,000. Of the 10 participants, 60% identified as DACA recipients and 40% identified as undocumented status. All participants identified as first-generation students.

## Presentation of the Findings

The data collected will be presented following the interview guide. This section will consist of direct quotes and responses from the interviews to clarify the themes and sub-themes that were identified in the study.

### How Does Your Schooling, Bills, and Other Living Expenses Get Covered/Paid?

This question was utilized to identify the sources students used to pay for their financial obligations. Participants identified six different sources of financial assistance to cover their expenses, both formal and informal. The formal sources of support include the California DREAM Act Grant, Title IV-E, Scholarships, Loans, and the California College Promise Grant (BOG waiver). The informal sources of support include parental support and employment.

Tay stated “When I first started it was my parents paying for me, so what DACA wasn’t able to cover I had to pay the difference still in the beginning. Like my first year it was like \$300 around there, to pay for every quarter or every time we had to do the financial aid tuition stuff. And then after I want to say my second or third year I started paying, because I started working more and getting more hours. So, I started seeing the difference on my end.” May stated “Well I mean for schooling, thankfully I didn’t have to pay out of pocket so far. It might change because I mean financial aid does lower the amount you receive year by year. So, I just get enough literally, just to pay off school from financial aid bills. I do work, I used to work two jobs. Currently I only have one because I did decide just

to focus on school and just finish up.” Participants sources varied on a case-by-case basis.

Of the participants who reported they work, they explained how their financial assistance was affected. Jan stated “No, just because even though I’m doing the part-time program it is still very like demanding because I do have to do internship, and the internships are not paid. So that means that the internship is 16 hours a week. So, it’s hard to go to school, do the internship and work full-time. So, I had to reduce my hours at work. So now I’m only working 32 hours instead of 40. So that means my paychecks come out shorter and I am paying the loan that I took out my first year. Plus, other bills I have to pay.” Hay states “Yea, definitely. I mean the whole reason behind working was so I wouldn’t have to struggle so much buying life textbooks and stuff, and there’s just some other like basic expenses.”

The University Offers Resources Such as FAFSA, Loans, Scholarships, and Work Study. Are You Receiving Any Financial Assistance From School?

From the resources offered through the university, one participant accepted a loan through the DREAM act. Jan stated, “So I did have to take out a loan my first year, and that loan was \$12,000 to pay for my first year”. Additional assistance that was mentioned were scholarships and grants through the university. Hay stated, “I did receive one, I received like a grant from my department at the time.” Avi stated, “This year I received the ASI scholarship.”

### If Yes, How Would You Describe Your Experience Getting That Assistance?

The participants who did receive that assistance through the financial aid office described their experiences. Hay stated, "I think it was through my department actually, so I think I struggled finding a scholarship that I could apply for considering most required US citizenship or something similar." Avi said, "I had some issues financially, you know you don't have a social, you need an ITIN, or you need to be a permanent resident...in order to qualify as a California resident and not pay out of state on the scholarships." One participant explained that their lack of motivation hindered them from seeking scholarships. "Tay stated, I did apply to some scholarships, but I was never really good at like making the essays and stuff. I know I could have done better and gotten like to get help, but I never really tried for scholarships, but I knew that there was."

In attempting to connect with the financial assistances, the participants described how comfortable or supported they felt in getting information. Jon stated "No, no definitely not, just because I felt like in one way I would always be judged. Like asking for help because I knew there was people that just had it and I'm like okay well they're probably going to think like oh she needs help." Pat shared she felt comfortable "because it was on zoom, so no one really saw my face. Like I wouldn't have to meet in person with someone, so it isn't that hard or wasn't uncomfortable. But if it had been in person, I don't think I would have went to the information workshop." Sea stated "it just depends on like where you were exactly getting help financially. Like in the USSC, I'm comfortable just because

I'm friends with a lot of them and they know me." Hay said, "At first no. I think it's kind of hard to disclose you know, that you're undocumented or that you're of a different status."

The participants who did not access the financial assistance through the financial aid office, sought out resources through different methods. Tay stated "I always felt like we never had those type of resources. Like I always just felt like okay, those aren't for me, those are for like other people." Avi shared, "The experience I would say was a little difficult...as an undocumented individual I was very skeptical about being able to pay for college tuition...so yes it was a struggle for me. Specially because I didn't have orientation from anybody. I was the one doing the research online and filing the paperwork myself.

A center on campus at a public university of California, that was utilized for guidance and financial assistance by seven participants was the Undocumented Student Success Center (USSC). Lyn stated, "During my undergrad...the undocumented resource center were able to help a little bit. Yea, they were helpful in finding like scholarships and stuff, but as far as like something through school, it wasn't." Pat shared her experience was "helpful, I didn't know about the grant that was available, but it was available through the Dream Act application." Sea said, "For the most part it has been easy. I mean mainly because of the people who work at the USSC are very knowledgeable, on top of thing and helpful...if you need help filling out essays for scholarships, they can help." One

participant stated he was unaware of the USSC, “until like my senior year...it would have made it a lot easier.”

#### Who Can You Count On To Help You Financially If Needed?

All participants shared they could count on family members, but one participant could also rely on friends. Tay stated “My three closest friends, helped me a lot. In school sometimes, I was a little behind on my credit card bill and they would help me.” Those participants who shared they could count on family described how comfortable they felt. Jon shared “I would definitely say my siblings, I feel like more than anything I’m more comfortable going towards like my brother or my sister to help financially. Rather than to put that, I would say like that burden on my parents again.” May stated, “It is definitely a little bit uncomfortable because I mean I’ve been working since I was 10 years old. Like I used to sell chocolate bars just so I can go to camp, or just to buy anything that I wanted to have, or just to save money like my parents.” Tay stated, “I never felt uncomfortable having to ask them. Like maybe just in the moment but like it never felt wrong because I knew that they’d have my back.”

#### Does Your Family Have Any Influence On Your Education?

Participants described both positive and negative family influence on their education. Lyn stated, “Yea, for sure like my parents always stressed the importance of you know, going to college, going to a four-year university. You know doing everything that they literally couldn’t do, and they always stress the importance for just higher education in general.” May said “They definitely do, I

would say good and bad in a way. Good because you know I see some examples of how they've made it so far without an education. They always tell me like I have this because I've worked up for it. But if I had an education here, I'd have more, or I would help out my family more." Jon shared that "Well I think just knowing that I'm a first-gen, makes me want to like push myself...but I mean my parents will ask me every now and then, but I wouldn't say I get that push from my family because I don't."

Participants explained how they felt pressure to support their family and how their family affected their motivation to succeed in school. Jan said "Oh yes, I feel like I'm supposed to be contributing more and like helping them since they are immigrants as well. I feel like I'm supposed to like, help them get a house or pay more bills. Its stressful because I can't since I'm still like doing school, internship and working." Tay said, "There was a moment when I did try to come to them about how school is very stressful and it leads to a lot of anxiety...my dad wasn't very supportive, my mom didn't really understand. They're very traditional." When describing motivation to succeed, Pat stated, "Yes..., because it's like oh I don't want to disappoint them, so it's like I had to keep going."

#### How Would You Describe Your Relationship With Your Family?

The relationships between participants and their family members were described as both negative and positive. Lyn stated, "It's great now, but you know growing up it was not...we know what struggles we had to all face you know." Hay shared, "Pretty close, tight knit. If somebody needs something, I

mean we just turn to each other for help. They're kind of my support system." Relationships were affected by student's educational responsibilities. Jon reported "I'm the first one to actually be in college. They won't really understand when I say like oh, I'm stressed out or like there's time, oh I'm so burned out...they'll just look at me like it's just school like you're not working a lot more hours than us." Jan shared her family said "we don't even tell you anymore because you're always busy...my mom telling like my uncles and aunts that she never sees me. So that makes me feel like guilty."

#### Can You Describe Your Responsibilities Within Your Family?

Participants described responsibilities they held within their family. A main priority of the participants was to complete their education. Hay reported, "So since I was in college, my responsibility was just to go to school and you know get my good grades, and just make sure I graduate on time." Lit stated "School is enough, like as long as I'm at school you know, I'm good." Tay said, "My mom didn't set much responsibility on me besides the fact to go to school, finish my school, that was like my work."

Aside from their educational responsibilities, participants were responsible for childcare, finances, and maintaining the home. Avi shared her responsibilities were, "my education, helping out in my house, as the older sister I would have to spend many hours babysitting my sisters. Taking them to school, picking them up...helping with dinner, chores, laundry." Lyn said, "I did everything...helping them do taxes, paying the bills...getting registered for school, getting my little

sister registered for school.” May shared he lost his father and stated, “We both make the financial decisions...when it’s my turn to take care of my sister, she kind of does her own thing. Withing my sister, we try to teach her like some responsibilities.” Tay shared “I had to apply for In Home Supportive Services so that we could get paid basically for taking care of our grandparents because my grandma became sick. My mom had to stop her full-time job.”

Did You Set Career or Educational Goals Before Starting School and Where Are You Now With Your Goals?

The participants described goals they set for themselves when they began their education journey and their progress in meeting them. Jan stated, “Yes, I want to be a therapist or clinician...I ‘m doing the master’s program, I do want to be licensed after program and currently I’m working in the mental health field.” Sea described his goals being affected by his documentation status and stated, “I set in mind that I wanted to get an internship...I didn’t realize just how limited the internships for undocumented people are...I have a lot of recruiters that reach out to me, but it’s mainly the undocumented status that keeps me from being able to have all those internship opportunities. Jon said, “I planned to only be in a Community College for two years...I look at it, I’m in my third year soon to be in my fourth...I feel like I got burnt out from pulling so many hours at work, that I kind of put school to the side.”

To accomplish the goals the participants set for themselves, they described who or what helped them accomplish them. Tay reported “Yes, I had

the help, but it's really me. Like I put in the work, I did it." Pat shared "I would say just myself... So, I have a mentor and I actually have a meeting with her. She kind of helps me, or like give me tips or time management and stuff like that." Avi said, mainly my sister and my mom, I would say. Other than that, professors or faculty, my advisor, and friends." May reported, "The person that I always saw that I looked up to, to accomplish my goals was, you know, my dad...he always said like I became better than my dad and you're gonna be better than me."

### Can You Describe Any Difficulties You May Have Experienced Throughout Your Education?

Participants described the personal difficulties they have and are experiencing throughout their education. Avi said, "I couldn't be in two places at one and I sometimes felt like that was a struggle or challenge for me...my parents are working, and they couldn't be here at our house with my sisters...I also had to be at school, but at the same time my help was needed here with them." Jon described his difficulty as "I would definitely say I feel confused at one point as to where I was going. I did feel frustrated just because I felt like nobody really understood how tiring school was and how mentally like draining it was." Pat stated "at the beginning I think it was hard because I had to figure out everything myself...it was king of hard to because like the counselors didn't really help, until I got into a program that helped me more. But it was hard to manage getting like classes."

To overcome those difficulties, participants shared who or what helped them with their specific challenges. Avi said, "I would say, I just kept on looking forwards just persevering and having my sight placed in the future." Jon explained, "I'm taking a break because I'm tired or you know mental health comes first...so I think it was a lot of like self-reflection on my own path." May said, "So I started doing everything on my own and you know I seek out for help within family...CAPS has definitely helped me." Sea stated, "I would say I haven't gotten through them just because I'm still in school, and the barriers are still very much there...Until I eventually fix my status or there's reform passed by the government."

### Summary

This chapter provided personal narratives of each participant based on their educational journey. The findings demonstrated how documentation status, financial stability, financial resources, financial support, family influence, family interdependence, and academic resilience played a role in their education. From the responses given, the following themes surfaced access and barriers to financial resources, meeting family and educational expectations and perseverance.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss our findings significance, limitations, and recommendations. Researchers gained valuable information from the participants unique challenges and obstacles as being an undocumented first-generation student. Although our study consisted of a limited sample, the findings showed a significance in participants similar personal narratives.

#### Discussion

The three major themes in this study support the current but limited research on undocumented first-generation students. Previous research stated that undocumented students are limited in what financial resources they can access and are left to work, a low paying full-time job to cover their education expenses (Williams, 2016). Based on our findings, the theme of access and barriers to financial resources emerged. Undocumented first-generation students enter their higher education institution with a limited understanding and awareness of available financial resources. This includes the students understanding of what they may be eligible for such as the grants through the Dream Act and scholarship opportunities.

Participants expressed an inadequacy of financial resources through college institutions. The students who described their experience in accessing

financial support on campus, stated that there was limited guidance and support in obtaining accurate information for undocumented students. Participants encounter a stigma associated with help seeking from financial aid offices. Jon shared “I’m an immigrant, I can’t get FAFSA. I have to go through DREAM Act and so I would feel like, oh maybe they’re going to look at me differently based off the type of help that I receive.” Therefore, participants were deterred from accessing the resources and having to achieve self-reliance. Although participants families offered support, students tended to avoid seeking that support due to the families’ financial restrictions.

The following theme of meeting family and educational expectations was shared by the participants in how family interdependence and influence affect their ability to succeed. According to Moon and Casares (2019), after migration parents place their own dreams on their children because they experienced a downfall in their own social mobility and education. A barrier for Undocumented first-generation students is parents lack of knowledge and understanding of the education system. Participants described feeling a sense of indirect pressure to contribute and help support their family. Students were given the option to complete their education or get employment. The participants developed an internal motivation to succeed and achieve what their parents were not able to do. Moon and Casares (2019) also identified how first-generation students have an increased motivation to succeed based on the knowledge of their parents educational and life experiences. Lyn stated, “They were big influences in my life

just because it was something that they've never achieved...high school graduation and getting your bachelors and stuff... first time generation, no one's ever done it before.”

An additional barrier participants identified, is maintaining a school life balance. The primary responsibility of the students was their educational obligations, along with household and family obligations. Jan said, “sometimes when I am home, I feel like I have to help out around the house or just because again like it makes me feel guilty that I don't get to help out here at home and that I'm always at school, working or doing internship.” Participants had to learn how to manage their time between their responsibilities. As a result, family relationships were affected due to the limited time in the students' schedules.

Despite the barriers, undocumented first-generation students described their perseverance in overcoming their own personal challenges. Students identified three sources of support through their educational journey including family, faculty, and self. All participants emphasized that they were the main reason for getting through their education. Through the financial barriers, participants had to be resourceful in obtaining financial assistance and learning to apply for themselves. May shared advice stating, “Just don't open the first door, look around for your options, and when you feel under pressure, just look at the person that you think is going to help you the most.” Researchers found that all participants suffered from mental health issues, and they sought out services on their own through the mental health resources on campus. Participants set

both educational and career goals throughout their education. Participants continue to achieve those goals and set new goals for themselves. Rouse (2001) stated that those who are more resilient, are the students with positive motivational patterns. A major concern that the undocumented first-generation students shared was an uncertainty of their future because of their documentation status.

### Limitations

The main limitation this study encountered was recruiting participants during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. All university courses were conducted virtually, therefore limiting activity on campuses. IRB modification was completed to increase the sample size. Due to this limitation, the sample size consisted of only 10 participants, two participants were from a different higher education institution. Although participants were from three college institutions, the findings cannot be generalized to all undocumented first-generation students. All participants ages ranged from 18-25 years old, the study is limited in generalizing the findings to individuals above the age of 25. A significant limitation of the study was the willingness and comfort level of participants disclosing their documentation status to others.

## Recommendations

### For Social Work Practice

During the interviews, researchers identified gaps in how undocumented first-generation students are being supported. As social work practitioners it is our ethical obligation to be culturally competent by beginning to acknowledge the diversity of each undocumented individual. Social workers should learn about the different resources that undocumented students have access to or qualify for, when pursuing a higher education. In addition, learning how to connect these students to the appropriate services on an individual basis. To best serve this population, it is imperative that the social work practitioners stay up to date on the current policies and their changes. As well as advocating for new policies that will support the further development of services and support for undocumented individuals.

### For Programming for Institutions of Higher Learning

Researchers recognized recommendations to address the gaps in institutions of higher learning, in how they support their undocumented first-generation students. To improve the educational experience of this population, institutions could develop a screening upon admission, to create a system where they identify undocumented first-generation students. By doing so, campus organizations such as the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the Undocumented Student Success Center (USSC) also known as the Dreamer's Center could develop a collaboration to best serve these students. With the

collaboration, the centers can reach out to these students early in their education to reduce the possibility of barriers or address barriers early on. An important aspect of this collaboration would be to designate a representative that is knowledgeable of the available financial resources that undocumented students qualify for, and to provide them with guidance. This individual would preferably be in the financial aid office. Members in the collaboration would also partner with high schools in their community to provide outreach for prospective students.

### Conclusion

This study provided firsthand experiences of undocumented first-generation students in a higher education institution. The study also magnified the barriers students encountered in financial assistance, familial support and as a result showed academic resilience. The findings from this study contribute and are consistent with the current literature on undocumented and first-generation students. A suggestion for future research is to increase sample size by connecting with different institutions initially. Students' experiences highlighted the importance of institutions providing adequate information and guidance to improve their educational experience.

APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL EMAIL



November 12, 2021

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination

Status: Determined Exempt

IRB-FY2022-87

Herbert Shon Karen Murillo, Alexia Garcia

CSBS - Social Work

California State University, San Bernardino

5500 University Parkway

San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Herbert Shon Karen Murillo, Alexia Garcia:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Financial and Familial Challenges Faced by Undocumented First-Generation Students in Higher Education" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD MODIFICATION APPROVAL EMAIL



March 7, 2022

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Protocol Change/Modification

IRB-FY2022-87

Status: Exempt

Herbert ShonKaren Murillo, Alexia Garcia  
CSBS - Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Herbert Shon Karen Murillo, Alexia Garcia:

The protocol change/modification to your application to use human subjects, titled "Financial and Familial Challenges Faced by Undocumented First-Generation Students in Higher Education" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A change in your informed consent requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Please ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study. A lapse in your approval may result in your not being able to use the data collected during the lapse in your approval.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following by submitting the appropriate form (modification, unanticipated/adverse event, renewal, study closure) through the online Cayuse IRB Submission System.

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

**INFORMED CONSENT**

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore the barriers undocumented first-generation students face in higher education. The study is being conducted by Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. Herbert Shon, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to identify barriers that undocumented first-generation students face while obtaining a higher education.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked a few questions on the financial influences, familial support, resilience and some demographics.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take 45 to 60 minutes to complete the interview.

**RISKS:** Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Herbert Shon at (909) 537- 5532.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2022.

\*\*\*\*\*

I agree to have this interview be video/audio recorded:     YES     NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Appendix

### Appendix A- Interview Guide

1. Demographics Survey
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. What gender do you identify as?
  - c. What race/ethnicity do you primarily identify with?
  - d. How many years have you been at the university?
  - e. What is your household income?
  - f. What is your documentation status?
  - g. Are you a first generation student?
2. How does your schooling, bills, and other living expenses get covered/paid?
3. The university offers resources such as FAFSA, loans, scholarships and work study. Are you receiving any financial assistance from school?
4. If yes, how would you describe your experience getting that assistance?
  - a. Are there any financial aid services you would like to have known of?
5. Who can you count on to help you financially if needed?
6. Does your family have any influence on your education?
  - a. In what ways do they have an influence on your education?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your family?
8. Can you describe your responsibilities within your family?
9. Did you set career or educational goals before starting college and where are you now with your goals?
  - a. What or who helped you accomplish those goals?
10. Can you describe any difficulties you may have experienced throughout your education?
  - a. What got you through it or how did you overcome it?

Created by: Karen Murillo and Alexia Garcia

APPENDIX E  
RESEARCH FLYER

## Participants Needed

FOR SOCIAL WORK  
RESEARCH PROJECT

**GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK  
STUDENTS FROM CALIFORNIA  
STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN  
BERNARDINO ARE  
CONDUCTING A RESEARCH  
PROJECT TO EXPLORE THE  
BARRIERS UNDOCUMENTED  
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS  
FACE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.**

This study has been approved  
by the California State  
University, San Bernardino  
Institutional Review Board.  
This study is being conducted  
under the supervision of Dr.  
Herbert Shon.  
[herb.shon@csusb.edu](mailto:herb.shon@csusb.edu)

## INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING?

If you are interested in  
participating and providing  
your input on this research  
topic, please contact Alexia  
Garcia and Karen Murillo for  
more information at:

[Alexia.Garcia7596@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:Alexia.Garcia7596@coyote.csusb.edu)

### Participant Requirements

The student researchers are seeking students  
within CSUSB who are first-generation  
undocumented students.

At least 18 years of age.

Participation in this study is voluntary and  
confidentiality will be maintained.

Interviews may take from 45-60 minutes.

Flexibility of dates and times for  
participation will be offered.

Due to COVID-19, communication and  
participation will be conducted virtually  
through zoom, for your safety.

APPENDIX F  
GENERAL RESEARCH FLYER

## Participants Needed

FOR SOCIAL WORK  
RESEARCH PROJECT

**GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK  
STUDENTS FROM CALIFORNIA  
STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN  
BERNARDINO ARE  
CONDUCTING A RESEARCH  
PROJECT TO EXPLORE THE  
BARRIERS UNDOCUMENTED  
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS  
FACE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.**

This study has been approved by the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Herbert Shon. herb.shon@csusb.edu

## INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING?

If you are interested in participating and providing your input on this research topic, please contact Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo for more information at:

[Alexia.Garcia7596@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:Alexia.Garcia7596@coyote.csusb.edu)

### Participant Requirements

The student researchers are seeking students who are first-generation undocumented students.

At least 18 years of age.

Participation in this study is voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained.

Interviews may take from 45-60 minutes.

Flexibility of dates and times for participation will be offered.

Due to COVID-19, communication and participation will be conducted virtually through zoom, for your safety.

APPENDIX G  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

School of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407  
909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029  
<http://socialwork.csusb.edu>

Hello,

Our names are Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo, we are MSW graduate students working on recruiting participants for our research project. The purpose of the study is to identify the barriers that undocumented first-generation students face while obtaining a higher education.

Please see attached flyer for more information!

Thank you,

Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo

APPENDIX H  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR ADDITIONAL CAMPUSES

School of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407  
909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029  
<http://socialwork.csusb.edu>

Hello,

Our names are Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo, we are MSW graduate students at CSUSB, working on recruiting participants for our research project. The purpose of the study is to identify the barriers that undocumented first-generation students face while obtaining a higher education. We are requesting your support in recruiting participants from your campus by distributing our flyer to your first-generation student population and undocumented population. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. We appreciate your time and support.

Please see attached flyer for more information!

Thank you,

Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo

APPENDIX I  
CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION EMAIL

The following is a general template followed for each participant reached out to:

“Good Morning [Potential Interviewee First Name Only],

Our names are Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo, we are working on recruiting participants for our research project. It involves a 45-60 minute interview discussing the barriers that undocumented first-generation students face while obtaining a higher education. We were informed that you were interested in participating.

Would you like to set a day and time for us to meet? Interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom, we will be able to accommodate your schedule time if need be.

Please let me know if you have any questions!”

(Developed by Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo)

APPENDIX J

DREAMERS RESOURCE CENTER APPROVAL EMAIL

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## Study Recruitment Flyers

2 messages

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**Karen Murillo** <005059440@coyote.csusb.edu>  
To: "Dalia.Hernandez@csusb.edu" <Dalia.Hernandez@csusb.edu>  
Cc: Alexia Garcia <004627596@coyote.csusb.edu>

Wed, Nov 10, 2021 at 2:46 PM

Hello,

My name is Karen Murillo. My research partner Alexia and I are conducting a research study and looking to recruit undocumented first generation students. Upon IRB approval we would like to distribute flyers in the Dreamers Resource Center.

Our study title is "Financial and Familial Challenges Faced by Undocumented First-Generation Students in Higher Education".

Thank you,  
Karen Murillo and Alexia Garcia

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**Dalia Hernandez** <Dalia.Hernandez@csusb.edu>  
To: Karen Murillo <005059440@coyote.csusb.edu>  
Cc: Alexia Garcia <004627596@coyote.csusb.edu>

Wed, Nov 10, 2021 at 2:49 PM

Hello Karen,

Your request to disseminate your study flyers at the Undocumented Student Success Center is approved. Please get in touch with me once you have the flyers available for distribution.

Best,

Dalia

[Quoted text hidden]

APPENDIX K  
SOCIAL MEDIA SCRIPT



WE DEFINE THE *Future*

School of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407

909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029  
<http://socialwork.csusb.edu>

Hello everyone,

Our names are Alexia Garcia and Karen Murillo and we are MSW students in our advanced year at CSUSB. We are completing our research study focusing on the barriers Undocumented First-Generations students experience while obtaining a higher education. If you or someone you know meet the requirement of an undocumented first-generation student, please reach out to [alexia.garcia7596@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:alexia.garcia7596@coyote.csusb.edu). We are also seeking your assistance in sharing our flyer in hopes of continuing to recruit participants. If you have any questions please feel free to reach out to us!

Thank you!

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

All chapters were completed together by both researchers Karen Murillo and Alexia Garcia. Chapter two literature review was split evenly between both researchers. Transcriptions of the interviews were also split evenly between both researchers.