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*Although many undocumented high school students are demonstrated student leaders with records of outstanding academic achievement, their higher education prospects in the United States are limited due to their legal status. Many of these students enter higher education with academic and emotional challenges that need to be understood and addressed by student affairs professionals.*

## “Cursed and Blessed”: Examining the Socioemotional and Academic Experiences of Undocumented Latina and Latino College Students

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This chapter’s title, “Cursed and Blessed,” encapsulates the sentiments of many undocumented college students in the United States. One particular student, referred to as Guillermo, poignantly expressed how he felt living in the shadows of American society:

Being an undocumented student in the United States is like being “cursed and blessed” at the same time. Cursed, in that you are marginalized by society, and you have to live in fear almost every day. Blessed, in the fact that you use that experience, and you become a much better person because of everything that you have struggled with. You work ten times as hard as, maybe, somebody who takes it for granted because they were born in this country, or somebody who is a legal resident and doesn’t know exactly what that means and what power they have.

Guillermo, who was identified as gifted throughout his primary and secondary school years, had no choice but to turn down his offer of admission to the University of California, Berkeley because he did not qualify for federal and institutional financial aid. He tried vigorously to raise money by way of scholarships and private sponsors to pay for his tuition and housing expenses, but he was unable to collect enough for his first year. This major

setback forced Guillermo to recant his opportunity to attend the university, and he coped by suppressing his feelings of despair. He made the best of what was available to him at his local community college because he knew that it was relatively affordable and it was a stepping-stone to a four-year university.

Approximately sixty-five thousand immigrant students who have been in the United States more than five years graduate from American high schools each year, but they face limited prospects due to their undocumented status (Passel, Capps, and Fix, 2004). Among these are high-achieving student leaders with outstanding records of academic achievement. Although these students constantly worry about their legal status, they nevertheless fully dedicate themselves to their academic endeavors and civic engagement.

Undocumented students initially received legal access to public education as a result of the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Plyer v. Doe*. The Court ruled that undocumented children must be provided access to a free public education because citizens and potential citizens cannot achieve any meaningful degree of individual equality without it. The Court held that undocumented children in the United States should not forfeit their education because of their parents' decision to immigrate illegally. Furthermore, the Court indicated that denying education to children who cannot affect their parents' conduct or their own status would impose a lifetime hardship on them for their disabling status. The Court further stated that educating children, regardless of their immigration status, is essential for creating individuals who can function in society and contribute to the development of the United States.

Currently, however, court-mandated equal access to education ends when undocumented students graduate from high school. Upon graduating and after extensive public educational investment, thousands of college-eligible undocumented students are unable to pursue higher education due to their legal status, federal law, and limited financial resources. These students face significant hurdles in their educational trajectories because they do not qualify for financial aid and are unable to secure employment (Olivas, 1988). They are forced to put their dreams on hold because of the difficulty of procuring the necessary funding and support to continue their education at the postsecondary level. In many cases, undocumented students who have no choice but to forfeit their chance to attend highly selective four-year institutions battle with feelings of anguish and disappointment, just as Guillermo did. Hence, they likely will enter their local community colleges with emotional setbacks that student affairs professionals may need to address. Student affairs professionals need to familiarize themselves with the struggles of this population, especially because the number of undocumented students attending community colleges and state universities is increasing due to legislation allowing undocumented students to pay state tuition fees if they have met specified criteria (for example, California's Assembly Bill 540, which passed in 2001).

More specifically, student affairs professionals may notice that these students constantly battle feelings of shame, trepidation, anger, despair, marginalization, and uncertainty (Cortes, 2008; Dozier, 1993). These socially driven emotions often are derived from experiences of discrimination, anti-immigrant sentiment, fear of deportation, and systemic barriers such as ineligibility for college financial assistance and federally sponsored support programs. Those who persist to college in lieu of stopping out after high school are more likely to experience higher levels of socioemotional distress and various challenges because of the harsh reality that a postsecondary education will come at a significant cost; furthermore, completing a degree will not necessarily guarantee them an entry-level position in their field (Perez, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes, 2006).

In addition, there are various other issues to consider when serving undocumented students. For example, will there be adequate resources and staff training in place to facilitate their matriculation? Will other college personnel be sensitive to and adept at working with this population? Will college infrastructures be inclusive of this population? Before student affairs professionals can begin to address these concerns, it is essential for them to understand the common problems and challenges of undocumented immigrant college students in order to develop efficient strategies to enhance their college experiences.

This chapter examines the socioemotional experiences and characteristics of undocumented Latina and Latino college students. We look at how these students' socioemotional experiences compare to those of their undocumented peers in relation to their academic and mental health outcomes. In addition, we highlight how undocumented students differ in the ways they cope with their socioemotional and academic challenges as a result of their legal status. Finally, we discuss how the college administration, faculty, and support staff can assist undocumented Latina and Latino college students who are pursuing higher education.

## **Socioemotional Development Framework**

Scholars have used the socioemotional development framework to explain the impact of an individual's immediate environment on her or his emotional and mental state (Becker and Luther, 2002; Santrock, 1997). According to Santrock, the socioemotional process "involves changes in the individual's relationships with other people, changes in emotions, and changes in personality" (p. 19). Based on Erik Erikson's (1982) socioemotional paradigm, the socioemotional aspect of an individual focuses on how interactions with others (including family, teachers, peers, and neighbors) and communities trigger anger, anxiety, aggression, assertiveness, depression, fear, joy, optimism, and other emotions (Bandura, 2001; Erikson, 1982; Santrock, 1997).

In this context, the socioemotional development of an undocumented Latina and Latino immigrant college student not only is affected by typical environmental factors such as poverty, violence, lack of resources, and discrimination that affect a large percentage of low-income minority children (Kozol, 1991, 1995, 2005), but these individuals also are scorned by extra layers of systemic barriers that prevent them from enjoying all of the social and financial benefits that society has in place for legalized individuals and American citizens.

Often many undocumented students deal with issues that American-born or legalized residents never have to face. Esperanza, for example, describes her anxiety about the discovery of her status, which prevents her from applying for scholarships and internships:

I get scared of applying for scholarships. I still haven't done my internship in broadcasting because I'm scared that whenever I get to go to a radio station, they might ask me for a social security card, and that I won't be able to get a job if I get to get my degree. That's my biggest thing. I do get *depressed* and I get *disappointed* that, you know, I am doing all this work, and for me to graduate and not be able to work in the field that I want.

Irene describes her feelings of rejection and emerging hopelessness:

We're not criminals, or we're not trying to steal anything from anybody. It's just that we want to continue the dream that our parents started when they brought us here for a better future. So it's . . . really hard when some people don't know about it and they say, . . . "Oh, you must be weird, you must be an alien. You don't belong in this world." So it's hard because it's like you find people that will put you down, and you're like, "Okay, should I continue? Is this going to get harder, or this is going to get better?"

A frequent experience for high-achieving students is the likely disappointment of losing a scholarship after it has been awarded due to their legal status, as was the case for Dulce: "I was offered the Presidential Scholarship at a state university in southern California, but when they learned of my status, they said I couldn't get it. . . . I could have gone to school for free, and that would have been the difference."

Esperanza, Irene, and Dulce express the same concerns, experiences, and emotions as their other undocumented peers. The dehumanizing episodes these students experience and the overwhelming exposure to rejection often contribute to a great sense of insecurity. Due to these experiences, these students are likely to develop high levels of fear and anxiety, as their narratives show. Many have fears of the unknown or anxieties over whom to trust or not to trust. These uncomfortable feelings likely will cause them to be particularly cautious around authority figures such as

student affairs professionals and faculty members, making it difficult for higher education professionals to help them.

**Sense of Shame.** Along with fear and uncertainty, some develop feelings of shame for having to live in the shadows of society. Jacinto, a second-year community college student, had this to say:

It shouldn't be, but it's more like I'm ashamed. I'm not like everyone else. I'm not here like everyone else. I don't have an ID, and I don't have a driver's license. If someone asked for an ID, I have to take out a passport. And especially now with all the immigration debates, I really don't want to speak out . . . and basically, my mom brought me over here when I was little and I don't regret it. This is my home now. I grew up saying the Pledge of Allegiance. I grew up with the American flag.

Jacinto, who has no legal status in the United States, proudly conveys his pride at being raised under the American flag. Nevertheless, he expresses a sense of humiliation and helplessness because he lacks the proper legal documentation and has no way to remedy his situation. As a result, Jacinto and many other undocumented students like him closely guard their legal status from institutional agents and may avoid them altogether. Therefore, student affairs professionals have to work diligently to reach out to these students.

**Sense of Discrimination.** At a very young age, undocumented immigrant children learn about discrimination, fear, and hatred (Chavez, 1994). The nativistic attitudes of American society and the negative portrayal of undocumented residents in the media distort their opportunities for a healthy identity development. For example, Chavez (2007) has argued that undocumented immigrants are being misrepresented as “immoral criminals” and “social threats” to the United States rather than as contributing members of society. Consequently, these labels particularly affect Latina and Latino immigrants because they are grossly overrepresented by media as “illegal aliens” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Furthermore, undocumented Latina and Latino college students presumably have to deal with having a “triple minority status”: ethnic origin, lack of documentation, and economic disadvantages. These factors may pose great socioemotional distress because of the strong social stigma behind each label. Irene describes her interaction with a counselor that illustrates such experiences of discrimination:

There was one time when I told a counselor that I was a California AB 540 student. [AB 540 is a California law that permits undocumented students who meet certain criteria to qualify for in-state tuition rates.] Then he goes, “Oh, what's that?” I was like, “Oh, that's . . .,” and I started to explain. Then

he goes, “Oh, does that exist?” “Like, yeah.” And he’s like, “Oh, but no, you . . . since you’re . . . you’re an immigrant, that’s what it is, right?” And I was like, “Yeah, that is what it mainly is, but mainly, it’s a law that was passed and it allows us to . . .” And he goes, “Oh, well, still you can’t make it in life, so why do you bother?” So I was like, “Whoa!”

As this exchange exhibits, the exposure to discrimination and hostility manifests itself in different forms. Exposure to microaggressive behaviors and stereotypes often conveys to participants that they are perceived as social outcasts or inferior.

Inevitably many of these students learn of institutional discrimination by way of federal and state laws and policies designed to disallow undocumented students from participating in or enjoying particular academic programs and benefits, as in Dulce’s scholarship experience. In addition, many school agents, such as Irene’s former high school counselor, do not hold back their ignorance and biases relating to undocumented students. Clearly these attitudes can be distressing to students who are exposed to such verbal abuse or bias.

Exclusion in academia also is a harsh reality for undocumented students. Federally and state-funded college student services programs, for example, are likely to require students to be U.S. citizens or legal residents, another reminder to undocumented students that they do not matter or belong in this society. This especially affects low-income minority students who need the extra support services that are designed to meet their needs.

## **Coping Mechanisms of Immigrant Latina and Latino College Students**

Michael Rutter (1988), a child psychiatrist, defined the coping process as what an individual does to deter or alleviate a stressful or threatening situation. Rutter explained, “Coping must have the dual function of problem-solving and regulation of emotional distress” (p. 27). As undocumented students undergo extreme hardships, many rely on the emotional and financial support of their families and external social support networks to buffer stressors related to their status, ethnic origin, and economic struggles (Finch, Kolodny, and Vega, 2000; Finch and Vega, 2003). Many of the students who were interviewed often sought emotional and academic support from their parents, instructors, counselors, and peers.

**Parents.** Typically, undocumented students attribute their strong will to achieve their educational dreams to the sacrifices their parents have made to bring them to the United States (Cortes, 2008). Many of the students interviewed here alluded to the love, guidance, and support their parents have provided for them. Diego, for example, said:

My mother always told me that school was the only way for me to succeed. . . . She always reminds me that I have more opportunities than her because she couldn't attend elementary school, and that we could help her or help others in the future, once we succeed.

And Monica had this to say about her parents:

My parents always push me to go to school. They always encouraged us because they didn't have much education—formal education. So they knew that they had very hard and tough lives because of that. They couldn't get the jobs that they were very much capable of doing because of that, so they always encouraged us to go to school.

Undocumented students often attribute their motivation to the sacrifices and struggles that their parents have made to provide them with the extra opportunities that they would never have received in their native homelands. However, not every undocumented student shares the same sentiments toward his or her parents. For example, Daniela felt a sense of betrayal and frustration because her parents made the decision to come to the United States illegally:

As far as with my parents, I was going through problems with them just because I would blame them a lot for my situation, for being an undocumented student . . . like I tried to apply for certain things and I was rejected. So those things kind of didn't help, and I know it was not the right thing, but I blamed my parents for bringing me here, and I wasn't very happy.

The constant exposure to rejection clearly frustrated Daniela, to the point that she displaced the blame onto her parents. Although this is uncommon for most undocumented students, this form of coping can lead to emotional distance between undocumented children and their parents.

**Institutional Agents.** Both faculty and student affairs professionals can have a tremendous impact on undocumented Latina and Latino students. Often the motivation and sense of hope that undocumented students develop are attributed to these caring school professionals. For example, Guillermo shared with us how a college counselor helped him maintain his optimism:

I sought the advice of my college counselor, and she knew my situation. She was one of the few people at the school who knew exactly what my situation was as an undocumented student, and she knew my potential also. She was one of the ones that motivated me to really do well in school. And when I thought about not continuing my education, my college counselor seemed to disagree. She said, “There's no way you are going to stop going to school. This is what we need to do, and it's not a matter of whether you want to—it's that you're going to.”

As exemplified in this example, academic counseling professionals can play a significant role in the lives of undocumented students. Student affairs professionals can serve as advocates and as moral support for these students.

College instructors also are key contributors to fostering a sense of care and belonging among undocumented students. Instructors serve as validating agents who can make a significant difference in the lives of those historically marginalized (Rendón, 1994). Jacinto expresses his appreciation for an English professor who had made a difference in his life:

She coached me a lot in my writing capabilities. She expressed to me that I have a talent for writing. She told me to try my best to go to a university because she thinks that I will really excel. Having people at the professional level that believe in you really pushes you.

**Peer Influence and Support.** Seeking peer support is another common form of coping for undocumented Latina and Latino college students. It is not unusual for this student population to seek guidance and support from their Latina and Latino peers and others who share the same identity or interests (Cortes, 2008). As we have noted throughout this chapter, undocumented students undergo tremendous emotional challenges that are difficult to endure by themselves. College students naturally seek acceptance and support from peer groups who are empathetic to their academic and socioemotional needs (Venegas and Tierney, 2006). One such peer group is AB 540 students. AB 540 is a California law passed in 2001 authorizing in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities for undocumented students who meet certain criteria; these criteria include attendance at a California high school for three or more years, a diploma from a California high school or its equivalent, enrollment at an accredited institution of higher education in California, and the filing of an affidavit confirming intention to apply for legal residency as soon as possible (Oliverrez, Chavez, Soriano, and Tierney, 2006). The law created a new group of undocumented students who could now afford college, and these students relied on each other for support. Irene's experience is an example:

I actually know a lot of UCLA students that are AB 540, and I was amazed because I knew that there's . . . it's possible to go to college and earn a degree and everything, but I had never met somebody who was an AB 540 and had a bachelor's and master's and all that. I was really amazed because first of all, there's the struggle. Okay, how do you pay for that school, because it's not like twenty dollars a unit, it's more than that, and also the books, and also knowing that they were first generation. I was really amazed. I was like, "Well, you know, how did you do it?" And they're like, "Well, mainly by getting united with all the AB 540 students, helping each other and sharing books and strategies on how to do this."

Peer groups clearly play a significant role in the decisions that many of these students make relating to college persistence. Associating with academically successful peers who themselves are or were undocumented can serve as motivating factors for those who are feeling alienated and frustrated. Furthermore, establishing close relationships for the purpose of addressing an economic or social goal not only fosters community solidarity but also instills a common identity (Venegas and Tierney, 2006).

**Campus Support Programs.** Another highly preferred coping mechanism was heavy involvement in campus support programs that did not require reporting immigration status. Many participants found these programs to be instrumental in fostering their sense of mattering and empowerment (Schlossberg, 1989). For example, various undocumented students gave special recognition to programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), Puente, SHPE (Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers), MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement), and others. The following is Irene’s perspective:

I remember that it’s like self-motivation here now. It’s not more of the teacher, the counselor, and the parents. It’s like your motivation, you have to make it here. . . . Even though some people are different races and all that, there are some programs that will help you. It is self-motivation, but also there are people who are willing to help you if you’re willing to go on. So I think that’s really very good about this [community college] campus.

Irene realizes that her willingness to seek help from various programs had a positive effect on her sense of empowerment. Hence, the accessibility and effectiveness of student services programs is a sign of reassurance and validation for these students (Rendón, 1994). Linda offers an additional example:

After my first year, I met my English instructor, who introduced me to the Puente Program . . . which is designed to help minority students who want to go to a four-year college, want to transfer, and we also had the Puente Club. I was the senate rep for the club. We did a lot of fundraisers, we visited universities, UC Santa Barbara and Berkeley. . . . They took us to different schools just to see the difference. We went to private universities. I even got myself a scholarship, \$1,000 scholarship, which paid my tuition.

And Valerie offers a similar perspective:

Right now I am part of the MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement) program, and I’m also involved in SHPE. SHPE stands for the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers. They take students on trips. Next weekend, I am going to a conference in Long Beach—that’s where you

network and meet other people that can actually give you jobs. Because that's what it all comes down to: I need a job. MESA also gives lots of opportunities, like touring universities and things like that. They also give you information on scholarships and how to apply.

As expected, many undocumented Latina and Latino college students received help from special academic support programs such as Puente, SHPE, and MESA; clubs such as MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán); and community-based organizations such as CHIRLA (Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles) that fostered cultural empowerment, intellectual development, and advocacy and provided extra financial resources as well. Students who became involved developed social support network systems and learned more about available resources by participating in such programs.

**Civic Engagement.** Many undocumented college students are highly engaged civically. For undocumented students, civic engagement is an attractive alternative to the frustrating impediments due to their legal marginality. Through civic engagement undocumented students feel that they are contributing members of society. Community service, believe Rutter and Newman (1989), is one of the few things individuals can do to feel good about themselves. Among the most prevalent civic engagement activities among the college students we interviewed were providing social services, tutoring, working for a cause, and political activism.

*Providing Social Services.* Janet, a college student, dedicated twelve hours a week during high school volunteering at a rehabilitation center for people with brain trauma and other injuries. She took the bus to get to the center since she could not drive due to her undocumented status. Similarly, Liz, a college senior, dedicated many hours volunteering for the local chapter of the United Farm Workers and for a drug and alcohol prevention program for children in her neighborhood. One of the most impressive examples of social service participation was Karen. Through her church, she spent countless hours providing various types of services for her community:

I've been to shelters, feeding the homeless. We go to the shelter to donate clothing and general accessories. We have also gone to the pregnancy center where we host a dinner for wealthy people who donate their money to fund a program for women who are suffering through pregnancy. They're young or they're in a bad relationship and so that program helps them. Also, if there's a family in need in our community, we help to gather whatever is needed, either money or clothing, and we give it to them. Then we also have the Christmas and Thanksgiving baskets which go to people who are in need.

These and other students have demonstrated a high level of civic engagement in light of other demands on their time. Most of the students

were on the college track in high school, taking time-intensive and academically rigorous courses. In addition, they were involved in various extracurricular activities and had after-school jobs. High school students worked an average of twenty hours per week, while college students worked an average of thirty hours per week. Despite these high demands on their time, many continued to participate in civic engagement activities.

The social service narratives begin to provide insights into the motivations for civic engagement among undocumented students. Many were driven to volunteer in part by their desire to belong in American society. Lucila is a typical example of a student who wanted to be seen and treated as a regular American. She began volunteering during middle school at a convalescent home where her mother worked. After high school, she began to volunteer for the Red Cross. Shortly after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Lucila took a semester off from school to help with the relief efforts in Louisiana:

I was sitting one day with my mom, and we were watching everything that was happening during the disaster, and I remember my mom saying, “You know, somebody needs to go help them,” and I was like, “You know what? I’m going to go down and see if I can answer phones or something and help locally.” When I got there, they asked me, “Do you want to work here, or do you want to be deployed to the area to help?” And I said, “Well, if I can help, anywhere you guys want to put me.” They called me a couple of days later and told me, “Call this number. Your plane leaves this day,” and I celebrated my eighteenth birthday out there.

In addition to her sense of accomplishment, Lucila describes her experience as life changing because she had the opportunity to show her fellow American citizen volunteers that she was just like them and cared about the same issues they did:

There were people from all over the country who came to volunteer. I remember being very open with them when I got there and telling them, “Yeah, I am an illegal immigrant,” and everybody was kind of in shock. I remember seeing some people from like Missouri and North Dakota just looking at me like, “You’re what? You’re an immigrant?” and I said to them, “Yeah, I’m just a college student trying to get by.” And I remember these people just having a new image of what an immigrant was like, and I think that was the biggest impact that I’ve ever had because I remember showing and telling these people, “Look, we don’t come here to take your money. I’m just trying to get an education and succeed in life,” and I remember them being in shock that I was so young and out there willing to do stuff.

Lucila was pleased that “regular Americans” were beginning to see her as similar to them. Despite her dedication to the relief efforts and her

life-changing experience, Lucila's frustration nevertheless returned when she was back home because she still could not do many of the things she wanted to because she was undocumented, "It's kind of hard because it's like I'm doing all these things. I've done volunteer work, I've gone with the Red Cross, I'm willing to go out there," but her status still keeps her marginalized and limits her options.

Interviews with undocumented students revealed that they were driven to become civically engaged not just by their commitment to certain political and social ideals, but their civic engagement served as an antidote to the political and social marginalization they faced as undocumented students. Civic engagement allowed them the opportunity to affirm themselves as good people and model citizens.

*Work as a Coping Mechanism.* One of the main difficulties that undocumented students face is finding ways to pay for their college tuition and other related expenses. Because most do not qualify for federal and state financial aid, the only way to cope with this predicament is to work as many hours as possible to cover school and personal expenses. Moreover, it is not atypical for these students to take on the added responsibilities of helping their parents financially, often as a matter of the family's very survival.

In high school, undocumented Latina and Latino students worked an average of twenty hours per week, and in college it increased to nearly full-time status at an average of thirty-two hours per week (Cortes, 2008). The excessive time that these students work inevitably has an effect on their academic performance. Some, for example, find themselves so tired physically and emotionally that studying for their examinations is difficult. Carla describes her frustration about balancing school, work, and life in general:

I don't really think people [on campus] are aware of our struggle. I know they may have a rough idea about how we don't get financial aid and how we struggle for the money, but I don't really think they acknowledge the fact that we have to go and work long hours to be able to make up that money and then attend class early in the morning and to demonstrate the same expectations. Like they still want you to turn in that paper, that five-page paper that you didn't have time to write, you know, or that you stayed up all night writing or editing and stuff like that. I don't think they see that.

Social engagement on college campuses also can be affected negatively because of the limited time that some undocumented students have to participate in clubs or events. Although establishing social support networks is a positive coping method for undocumented Latina and Latino students, many of these students are denied the opportunity to establish beneficial friendships through clubs and organizations.

## Implications for College Practice

As Dozier (1995) suggested, colleges must pay close attention to the behavior, attitudes, and challenges of immigrant students, especially those who are undocumented. Although school officials may not know who is undocumented, intervention strategies may be implemented to help these motivated students seek the support they need without fear or threat.

**Training College Faculty and Staff.** Institutional agents should be trained to be sensitive to the needs of this population. On many occasions, undocumented students have been scrutinized and humiliated because they did not furnish a social security number, as illustrated by Dulce’s passport incident or Irene’s counselor who was ill informed about AB 540. Students develop great anxiety when they seek services in an admissions and records office because student affairs personnel are not trained adequately to work with this population. Offering comprehensive training workshops focusing on sensitivity and customer service may help reduce misunderstandings.

Second, student support program counselors can become advocates for and important sources of information for undocumented students (Brilliant, 2000). Counselor collaboration with instructional faculty and student support program leaders would be beneficial to provide helpful referrals to students. Motivated undocumented students need to know about honors programs, student-run organizations, and alternative sources of financial aid. This information can help reduce the level of stress and fatigue for the thousands of undocumented students.

Instructors can have a tremendous impact on many of the undocumented students. Students often value and respect effective teachers who are caring and passionate as well. Historically, these immigrant students have gained much from these individuals. Faculty hiring committees should do their best to recruit effective, enthusiastic, and culturally sensitive faculty who have experience working with immigrant students.

**Establishing Multicultural Support Programs and Services.** Colleges and universities should establish multicultural support programs. School agents should have “a role in affirming cultural pride, hope, and dignity” with their students (Herr, 2004, p. 220–235). Students with anxiety and fear would be likely to go where they sense comfort and ease (Dozier, 1993). In fact, this attitude may encourage skeptical students—especially undocumented Latino males, who are more likely to have difficulty trusting authority figures with their closely guarded secrets—to open up gradually to culturally sensitive support staff about their personal issues. But regardless of gender, all undocumented students need institutional support agents who can be sensitive and empathetic to their needs. In addition, hiring a bilingual and ethnically diverse faculty and staff may promote immigrant student engagement and foster validation (Rendón, 1994).

**Fundraising for Undocumented Students.** In terms of funding, postsecondary institutions should engage in more fundraising to increase institutional scholarship and grant opportunities. Because many undocumented students are in good academic standing, they would benefit from these programs. Interestingly, some college faculties have developed special committees to help raise money for undocumented students; in fact, some community college faculties in California have elected to donate a small percentage of their monthly salaries for special AB 540 scholarship funds (Pérez, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortés, 2007).

**Establishing Coalitions.** College administrations can do a better job in building stronger coalitions with grassroots and community-based organizations that normally advocate for the rights of immigrants and youth community development. Often, creating an alliance to form a common interest (that is, improving conditions for undocumented families) can make a great systemwide difference. In this case, organizations like CHIRLA, MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense Fund), NILC (National Immigration Law Center), and META (Multicultural Education, Training, and Advocacy) are just a few of the hundreds of nonprofit programs that work closely with community members and political officials to improve the conditions of the immigrant community.

**Expanding and Improving College Outreach.** College outreach is another possible option for helping to reduce admission and matriculation problems. It would be prudent to disseminate to high school institutional agents and their students information about the matriculation process for undocumented students, scholarship and student services programs, and transfer policies. High school counselors also can encourage high-achieving undocumented students to take advantage of dual-enrollment programs (Pérez et al., 2007). Basically, dual-enrollment programs make it possible for students to take college courses at no cost while attending high school.

**Revamping Health and Clinically Oriented Services.** As Dozier (1993) suggested, it is essential that school psychologists and counselors receive thorough training on the socioemotional and sociohistorical experiences of undocumented students. Quite frequently these students face demanding, and competing, pressures at home, work, and school. Although all college students deal with such issues, most undocumented individuals are burdened in other ways too, such as relying on public transportation, acting as cultural brokers for parents (Buriel and others, 1998), working excessive hours to pay for college and personal expenses, and being more vulnerable to institutional discrimination.

Moreover, undocumented students suffer from anxiety, uncertainty, and fear. As a consequence, they are likely to develop physiological problems (Finch and Vega, 2003). Some may harbor anguish and resentment toward their parents and peers and may not know how to deal effectively with such emotions. Many are in danger of dropping out if an effective support system is not in place. Colleges that serve large immigrant student

populations are urged to invest in more specialized, cross-culturally sensitive psychologists and therapists who are trained in working with the issues that immigrant students so often face. Psychoeducational workshops focusing on anxiety, alienation, depression, stress management, and posttraumatic stress disorder are just some of the services that can be made available to immigrant students.

## Conclusion

Thousands of determined undocumented college students face seemingly insurmountable odds each day. Unlike their American-born or legalized peers, they are burdened with the pressures of finding ways to fund their education, while they endure socioemotional wounds caused by institutional barriers and discrimination.

Student affairs professionals face the challenge of fostering hope and encouragement in this special population while also needing to remain realistic. Never knowing the fate of these students can be difficult in the context of academic counseling and student development. Nonetheless, the first step is to take the time to understand the complicated lives of these students. Student affairs professionals can then become effective agents of change, encouraging and sustaining undocumented students so that their talents are not ignored or wasted.

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