

DREAMER ALLIES' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THE POSSIBLE TOTAL TERMINATION
OF THE DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS PROGRAM COULD
AFFECT DREAMERS' EXPERIENCES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A Thesis

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by

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Abstract

of

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The rescission of Deferred Action for childhood Arrivals (DACA) has been a topic of conversation during the Donald J. Trump presidency. DACA recipients all over the United States (US) have an immigration status that is currently at limbo. Without the DACA program, these program recipients (Dreamers) would lose access to the right to work, to a driver license, and to specific types of financial aid at higher education institutions. With the number of Dreamers attending higher education institutions increasing over time, higher education institutions could potentially be left to figure out how to deal with these students' shift in immigration status. The purpose of this study is to look into how Dreamer allies, higher education institution staff members that support Dreamers attainment of higher education, perceive that the possible total termination of the DACA program will affect these students' experiences at my studied institution.

In this study, I conducted in-person interviews at a Northern California higher education institution with Dreamer allies that had one-on-one experiences with Dreamers at the institution. The interviews provided me with the Dreamer allies' perceptions of how they believe the possible total termination of the DACA program will personally affect Dreamers at my studied institution. Some limitations I faced when conducting my study were having a restricted amount

of time to conduct my research. My findings indicate that my research question was partially answered by my research due to that it is still unknown how the complete termination of the DACA program will affect Dreamers given that the program has not been completely terminated yet. My major findings indicate that Dreamer allies believe that Dreamers' access to financial aid might suffer, Dreamers' lack of access to legal forms of employment might make it more difficult to obtain higher education, and the loss of the DACA program could signify Dreamers' loss of sense of campus acceptance and inclusion.

_____, Committee Chair
Su Jin Jez, Ph.D.

Date

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is to provide certain minors that illegally immigrated into the United States (US) before the age of 16 with a temporary work permit, driver's license, and protection from deportation (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012). The program was not meant as a pathway to citizenship. Nationally, about 800,00 undocumented immigrants have benefitted from the DACA program, including about 242,339 undocumented immigrants in the state of California (Gordon, 2017). The current Administration in DC has proposed to permanently terminate the DACA program and the US Department of Homeland Security began the program's rescission as of June 11, 2017 (US Department of Homeland Security [USDHS], 2017). Thus, the termination of the program would have educational and economic implications in the lives of program recipients and impact California's future. Locally, California is home to the largest DACA recipient population in the nation (Gordon, 2017).

This chapter frames my research question through a public policy lens by providing information on the identity of the program's recipients and outlines the program's rescission. In addition, I will conclude my chapter by summarizing how the rest of my thesis is organized. This thesis will use the term "DACA recipients" and "Dreamers" interchangeably, in the sense that DACA recipients are undocumented youth who are often referred to as "Dreamers" by the policymakers and the nation's mass media (Truax, 2015). To understand how the termination of the DACA program may affect recipients' lives, I seek to answer: How do Dreamer allies perceive DACA recipients' experiences in higher education institutions would shift if the program were terminated?

My Research Highlights Dreamers' Lives Without DACA

Informing the general public and policymakers who are not immigration experts on how shifts in policies affect immigrants is pivotal to creating policies that encourage the US' wellbeing and benefit the state of California. The majority of scholarly research on my topic quantifies DACA recipients' experiences at a general level but does not focus on the impact the absolute termination of the DACA program would have on their lives. The US is home to about 11 million undocumented immigrants and the DACA program benefitted about 800,000 recipients from June 2012 - March 2017 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2017). The program only benefits undocumented youth who were brought to the US as minors, have no criminal records, and have attained a high school diploma or are currently enrolled in a higher education institution (US Department of Homeland Security [USDHS], 2012). The termination of the program could negatively affect California's economy in the long-term and perhaps introduce the need for further legal immigration given the state's projected increase in demand for a college educated workforce over time (Bohn et al., 2015).

DACA Program Explanation & Requirements

As previously mentioned, the DACA program benefitted about 800,000 Dreamers from 2012 - 2017 at a national level (USCIS, 2017). The program granted its recipients temporary protection from deportation, the legal right to work in the US via a work permit, and the ability to obtain a driver's license. Given that the program provided Dreamers with new legal rights, it had many legal requirements its applicants must fulfill to benefit from the program and many of these requirements align with the federal DREAM Act requirements. The requirements that must be fulfilled to file for DACA are the following (USDHS, 2012):

- “You came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday

- You have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time
- You were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012
- You entered without inspection before June 15, 2012, or your lawful immigration status expired as of June 15, 2012
- You are currently in school, have graduated or obtained your certificate of completion from high school, have obtained your general educational development certification, or you are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States
- You have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat
- You were present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS”

Between 2012- March 2017, is estimated that 78.5% of Dreamers were of Mexican descent, with countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Brazil making up the top ten Dreamers’ countries of origin and having a recipient population that adds up to less than four percent (4%) than the total recipient population (Gonzales, 2017).

California’s DACA Recipients’ Higher Education Status

California is home to the largest DACA recipient population in the nation, with nearly 242,000 program beneficiaries (Gordon, 2017). About 72,300 undocumented immigrants currently attend California’s higher education institutions. The distribution of the recipients enrolled in higher education institutions is as follows: with 60,000 attending a California Community Colleges (CCC), 8,300 attending a California State University (CSU) and 4,000

attending a University of California (UC) and is estimated that probably half of the previously mentioned students currently benefit from the DACA program (Gordon, 2017). The previously mentioned higher education enrollment distribution reflects that it is estimated that at least a quarter of California's DACA recipient population is enrolled in a higher education institution (Gordon, 2017).

One-third of the national total of DACA recipients resides in California, the termination of the program would create various economic and educational outcomes for the state (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2019). Those targeted by the program were brought to the US as minor children and have benefitted from this nation's K-12 education system (Truax, 2015). California has allowed all Dreamers to obtain K-12 education given that legally all state residents, no matter their lawful legal status, are allowed to attain this level of education. Given that undocumented immigrants do not benefit from the same legal rights as documented immigrants, they face obstacles when attempting higher education institutions and the state is not guaranteed to benefit from K-12 education they previously provided undocumented immigrants with. At a federal level, these undocumented DACA recipients go by the name "Dreamers" given that their efforts to gain a pathway to citizenship started with the Dream Act back in 2001. Without the DACA program benefits, Dreamers might face shifts in their access to higher education attainment and their experiences at higher education institutions.

Potential End of DACA and Trump's Presidential Campaign Promise

President Donald J. Trump made the promise of putting an end to DACA and his campaign centered around the anti-immigrant sentiment, and particularly anti- Mexican immigrant sentiment. On September 5, 2017, the Department of Homeland Security announced the rescission of DACA (USDHS, 2017). The program's recession signified that Dreamers would no longer be able to renew their DACA after September 5, 2017 and would only be able to use their

DACA legal documents until their date of expiration (USDHS, 2017). According to the USCIS, if the recession of DACA continued through 2019, it was estimated that between January 2019 - August 2019, about 321,920 DACA permits would expire (USDHS, 2017). DACA recipients' economic, educational, and employment outlooks are currently at limbo and my thesis will further explore the current political uncertainty of the program.

Under the 2017 DACA rescission, USCIS stopped accepting DACA applications from individuals who never previously benefited from the program (USDHS, 2017). Under this application non-processing window, USCIS was allowed to accept renewal DACA applications until 11/5/18 (USDHS, 2017). USCIS did not stop accepting renewal applications on the previously stated deadline and has been accepting renewals up until Spring 2020, but policymakers are still in the process of deciding the future of the program. The DACA program's end could cause drastic shifts in recipients' educational and economic experiences.

California's Economy Demand of a College Educated Workforce

In the past decades, CA's need for employees with a bachelor's degree has increased dramatically (Bohn et al., 2015). If the state's rate of college degree acquisition continues to increase at the rate it has over the past decades, the state will not meet its future demand for a college educated workforce (Bohn et al., 2015). By the year 2030, CA will face a shortage of about 1.1 million employees with a bachelor's degree. Also, by the year 2030, only 33% of CA employees will have a bachelor's degree in comparison with 32% back in 2013 (Bohn et al., 2015). The slow increase in the college educated supply of labor will bring on the immigration of highly educated employees from foreign countries (Bohn et al., 2015). Therefore, CA will face a shortage of college educated employees that could be improved by not terminating DACA.

California's AB 540 Law Opens a Door to Higher Education for Undocumented Students

Before the AB 540 law, undocumented youth in California were required to pay out of state tuition when attending the state's higher education institutions. California Assemblymember Marco Antonio Firebaugh introduced the California Nonresident Tuition Exemption (AB 540) in 2001 (Public Postsecondary Education: Exemption From Nonresident Tuition [PPEEFNT], 2001). AB 540 allowed undocumented students that graduate from a California high school to pay in-state tuition at state higher education institution, but did not grant students access to state financial aid or transfer their in-state tuition eligibility out of California (PPEEFNT, 2001). Before AB 540, undocumented youth had to pay out-of-state tuition to attend the state's higher education institutions, which was oftentimes not an affordable price to students with no access to financial aid (Truax, 2015). Therefore, the law improved undocumented students' access to higher education by making college tuition more affordable.

California's AB 540 bill reflects the decision-making process in the immigration policy arena and how programs like DACA may turn into a complex decision at the federal level. After California passed AB 540 states such as Utah, New York, Washington, Oklahoma, Illinois, Kansas, and Nebraska followed the state's footsteps by passing their own in-state tuition laws for undocumented immigrants (Truax, 2015). Other states, such as Arizona and Georgia, shifted their in-state tuition laws to block undocumented students from accessing in-state tuition (Truax, 2015). The AB 540 bill is an example of how U.S. states do not share the same ideology when creating immigration policy. California's AB 540 bill reflects the decision-making process in the immigration policy arena and how programs like DACA may turn into a very complex decision at a federal level.

Undocumented students use the term "AB 540" to identify one another in different settings without having to use the term undocumented (Abrego, 2018). All youth, no matter their legal

status, have access to K- 12 education in the US. Having access to this general education allows undocumented immigrant youth to be more incorporated into American society, which in turn improves their standards of living and benefits the nation in various aspects (Truax, 2015). Before the passage of the AB 540 law, these youth were almost destined to futures without higher education attainment (Abrego, 2018). The AB 540 bill's purpose was to grant undocumented youth an equitable opportunity to attain higher education, but in return, this bill granted recipients "legitimate" access to higher education institutions and ultimately guided the path to the 2001 attempt to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, also known as the DREAM Act (Abrego, 2018).

The DREAM Act, a Failed Attempt to Create a Pathway to Citizenship

The US Congress introduced the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) (2001), as piece of legislation that would grant undocumented youth a pathway to citizenship. The US Congress introduced this act several times and was unsuccessfully put up to vote in 2011. Undocumented youth and political supporters of the DREAM Act were disappointed by the defeat of the bill (Truax, 2015). The DREAM Act would have served the purpose of protecting undocumented youth against deportation and would have provided an "adjustment of status of certain alien students who are long-term United States residents and who entered the United States as children and for other purposes" (Truax, 2015). The DREAM Act was meant to benefit only a specific desired group of undocumented youth in this nation.

The DREAM Act (2001) had very specific eligibility requirements that would qualify its recipients for conditional permanent status. Through drafting DREAM Act bill with very specific requirements, the US government attempted to screen applicants to the best of its ability and only provide permanent resident status to undocumented immigrants with the following characteristics:

- “has attained the age of 12 prior to the enactment of this Act
- files an application before reaching the age of 21
- has earned a high school or equivalent diploma
- has been physically present in the United States for at least five years immediately preceding the date of enactment of this Act (with certain exceptions)
- is a person of good moral character
- is not inadmissible or deportable under specified criminal or security grounds of the Immigration and Nationality Act.”

It is important to highlight that the term “Dreamers” originates from the DREAM Act and undocumented youth have adopted this term as a self-defining empowerment tool (Truax, 2015). The DREAM Act has never been passed at a federal level, but California has taken some steps to further expand Dreamers’ rights. Those are described below.

The California DREAM Act, a Statewide Effort to Expand Dreamer Rights

The U.S. Congress never passed the DREAM Act when put up for a vote, so former California Governor Jerry Brown decided to take matters into his own hands. Brown signed the California Dream Act (AB 131) on July 25, 2011 (Student Financial Aid [SFA], 2011). The purpose of the California Dream Act was to grant undocumented students the legal right to state financial aid (SFA, 2011). This bill allowed undocumented youth who wished to attend California’s public higher education institutions (such as the California State University, the University of California, and the state’s community colleges) to receive state financial aid, by the name of CalGrant, beginning in 2013. The California Dream Act granted undocumented youth access state funds to pay for their higher education and this was a historical move. This bill provides qualified students an average of \$4,500 in aid per semester per student (SFA, 2011). The

California Dream Act was inspired by the passage of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012.

Thesis Structure

My thesis is composed of an introduction, a literature review, a methodology description, research results, and conclusions and implications. Chapter one, the introduction of my thesis, served the purpose of providing the reader with an introduction to my topic and introducing my problem statement. Chapter two, the literature review, consists of an analysis of existing knowledge that explains the impact the termination of DACA would have on Dreamers' educational and workforce outlooks. Chapter three, the methodology chapter, explains my research method and the reasoning behind it. Chapter four, the research results chapter, communicates my semi-structured interviews findings. Lastly, chapter five, my thesis' conclusions and implications chapter connect my findings to possible negative consequences of terminating the DACA program.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Social and Economic Effects of the DACA Program

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has served the role of an open door for undocumented youth in the United States (US). Research suggests that DACA has allowed its recipients to incorporate into American society in a positive social and economic manner (Gonzales, 2017). In addition, these social and economic benefits appear to be stronger for DACA recipients with greater educational and community resources (Gonzales, 2017). The DACA program has allowed undocumented youth to enjoy certain benefits that only individuals with a proper legal status had been able to enjoy in American history (Truax, 2015). For example, the program granted DACA recipients, also known as Dreamers, greater access to financial aid, support/inclusion on campus, and workforce opportunities (Truax, 2015). DACA is currently at limbo and the termination of it would negatively affect Dreamers' access to the previously mentioned benefits. In this chapter, I further explore the consequences of terminating the DACA program in these areas: access to financial aid, social support and inclusion on campus, and California's workforce needs.

Dreamers' Current Access to Financial Aid

Certain private and public scholarships require their recipients to have a Social Security number to qualify for them (Gonzales, 2017). By providing DACA recipients with a Social Security number that certain public and private scholarships require, the DACA program has granted its recipients greater access to financial opportunities to fund their higher education. In other words, undocumented youth had never before been able to benefit from such scholarships but are now able to benefit from them due to fulfilling their legal requirements. DACA recipients do not currently qualify for federal student aid, but are able to use their Social Security number to fill out their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which grants them access to a

Student Aid Report (SAR) that allows them to apply to financial aid at higher education institutions (United We Dream [UWD], 2015). Given that DACA recipients have a Social Security number, they are able to apply to private loans but do not qualify for federal loans (UWD, 2015). The DACA program has made all the previously mentioned student aid opportunities possible.

Possible Effects on Access to Financial Aid

If DACA were terminated, Dreamers will no longer have access to certain financial aid opportunities they had access to while the program was effective. For instance, Dreamers' access to CalGrant will remain unchanged but they will no longer qualify for a SAR report through filing a FAFSA (UWD, 2015). This change would occur due to that without the DACA program Dreamers would no longer have access to a Social Security card. Also, it is important to highlight that not having access to a Social Security number would prevent Dreamers from applying to scholarships that require a Social Security number (UWD, 2015). Therefore, the end of the DACA program would signify the Dreamers' loss of specific financial aid support in higher education institutions.

Social Support and Inclusion on Campus

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals granted Dreamers a greater sense of campus inclusion, social acceptability, and increased the number of on-campus resources available to undocumented youth (Truax, 2015). Based on my literature review findings, I have defined sense of campus inclusion as undocumented students perceiving and experiencing a positive connection to the higher education institution they attend. According to existing literature, Dreamers experience shame and fear when having to disclose their immigration status to those around them, especially to friends (Truax, 2015). Undocumented youth have a desire to be regular members of American society given that they arrived in the US as young children and oftentimes have no recollection of

living in their countries of origin (Nicholls, 2013). Also, when undocumented students feel accepted by their peers, professors, university staff and the higher education institution as a whole they experience a greater sense of campus inclusion. Therefore, the DACA program has allowed Dreamers to integrate into American society and experience less shame in regard to their legal status.

Undocumented students are able to self-identify as “DACAmended” with the help of the DACA program (Truax, 2015). Undocumented youth tend to experience a sense of social exclusion given their social status and DACA allowed them to come out of the shadows (Nicholls, 2013). The termination of the program would return Dreamers to their previous undocumented immigrant position and the fear of disclosing their immigration status would arise once again (Nicholls, 2013). The termination of the program could affect Dreamers’ sense of social acceptability and make it extra difficult for undocumented youth to disclose their legal status to their peers or to on-campus staff members (Nicholls, 2013). Therefore, Dreamer’s sense of social acceptance would shift, and this change could potentially affect their high education experiences in a negative manner by preventing them from accessing resources for undocumented students.

California’s Workforce Needs

California is home to nearly 250,000 DACA recipients and, out of that sum, about 72,000 currently attend the state’s public higher education institutions (Gordon, 2017). These recipients are potential nurses, teachers, firefighters, and many other employees that could benefit the state’s economy. California’s state population is projected to increase to 44.1 million by 2030 and slight declines in childbirth rates will keep the number of children in schools almost stagnant (Bohn et al., 2015). In addition, immigration is not projected to exponentially contribute to the state’s population growth and 19% of the state’s population will reach retirement age by the year 2030

(Bohn et al., 2015). As a result, California will experience population growth over time, and this will translate into demand for an educated workforce.

Without the DACA program, Dreamers would not have the legal right to work in the US and all these undocumented youth desires is to be productive members of American Society (Truax, 2015). Without the DACA program, higher education would become more costly for undocumented youth and the lack of legal employment would further prevent them from obtaining a high-paying job or any job (Truax, 2015). Just like any other American that was raised and has benefitted from the nation's free K-12 education, Dreamers have an American Dream they strive to achieve given that they consider themselves American (Truax, 2015). California would benefit from an increase in labor supply of Dreamers in the labor market.

Previous Research Gaps and My Contribution to Existing Knowledge

Undocumented youth's educational and employment outlooks might be affected by the DACA program's possible total termination. My research seeks to answer the research question: How do Dreamer allies perceive DACA recipients' experiences in higher education institutions would shift if the program were to be terminated? There is not enough educational research on DACA recipients' experiences while they are program beneficiaries or on what their experiences at higher education institutions would be like if the program gets completely terminated. Research on Dreamer allies' perceptions of what DACA recipients' lives will look like at higher education institutions if the program gets completely terminated has not been published. My research intends to further explore Dreamers' experiences and perceptions via their allies' voices by providing interview data. The following chapter will provide some insight into my data collection methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To understand Dreamer allies' perceptions of how Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients' experiences in higher education institutions would shift if the program were terminated, I interviewed nine Dreamer allies who work at a Northern California higher education institution. My research took place over the course of the Spring 2019 semester. To gather the desired data, I used semi-structured interviews. My interview guide originated from the literature review (Chapter 2 of this thesis) and the interview questions aimed to explore Dreamer allies' experiences and perceptions with regard to the possible termination of the DACA program. I used semi-structured interviews as the main tool of data collection and chose my research site for the reasons described below.

Reasoning Behind Northern California Higher Education Institution as the Selected Site

I chose my research location based on its undocumented student population and its Dreamer ally visibility. By Dreamer ally visibility, I refer to each ally's openness to disclose their status of allies to Dreamers on-campus. Also, this higher education institution has an ethnically diverse student population and interviewing allies on undocumented students' experiences allowed me to obtain a diverse perspective on my topic. My chosen higher education institution advocates for its undocumented student population and Dreamer allies have a strong presence on campus. The mix of a strong on-campus presence and advocacy for undocumented students allowed Dreamer allies to have discussions amongst each other on DACA recipients' experiences around campus. In addition, conducting my research at a higher education institution was ideal given that DACA's discourse centers around undocumented youth's access to higher education.

Semi-Structured Interviews Offer a Lens into Interviewees' Experiences and Perceptions

I chose semi-structured interviews as my main research tool given its ability to explore individual experiences and perceptions. My research question is qualitative, and therefore using a quantitative method was not suitable. Also, focus groups were not a suitable research method due to their inability to allow for the facilitator to look into individuals' experiences and perspectives in an in-depth manner. Since my topic is sensitive, there might have been things that Dreamer allies would not have wished to discuss while participating in a focus group. Semi-structured interviews allow for collected data to be more reliable as a result of asking interview questions in the same order every time (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Therefore, I chose semi-structured interviews as my research tool since they provided me with a lens into Dreamer allies' experiences and perceptions.

I identified allies who were able to speak to my thesis' three major themes: Dreamers' Access to Financial Aid, California's Workforce Needs, and Social Support/ Inclusion on Campus. The education institution publishes a Dreamers' ally directory, which I used to identify and contact various allies, who then referred me to additional allies that could possibly grant me an interview. Therefore, snowball sampling played a role in my sampling method (Singleton & Straits, 2010). To protect the identity of participants, I cannot provide specifics on how interviewees were selected from the directory. I emailed each potential interviewee to explain who I was, inform the purpose of my research, desired interviewee characteristics, and listed my availability for in-person or phone interviews. Each of the interviews I conducted was on average 40 minutes in length, voice recorded, transcribed, and coded. Over the course of my research methods design, I identified participant characteristics to make sure that my recruitment process ran smoothly, and my collected data were reliable.

Creation of Interview Questions

I had to be cautious when putting together my interview protocol to avoid doing any harmful to my participants and the undocumented students attending my studied institution. Asking about specific instances when staff faced an issue when providing services to Dreamers was something I avoided given that asking these questions could possibly introduce research bias or put Dreamers at risk of being identified. Instead, I created questions that centered around access to financial aid, social support/inclusion on campus, and California's future workforce/ educational needs. I focused my questions on these previously mentioned themes due to the fact that they originated from my research on existing literature on my topic. I came up with introductory interview questions to ease my participants into answering questions that required more in-depth answers. Another pivotal factor in my research design was deciding how many participants my research required and this decision was based on a variety of factors.

Quantity of Research Participants

Interviewing a total of nine Dreamer allies provided me with diverse viewpoints on the reasoning behind allies' support of undocumented students given their on-campus job tasks. I targeted allies who served the roles of professors, academic advisers, financial aid advisers, and program staff allies. I targeted the previously mentioned participants given that these are the staff that oftentimes have frequent, one-on-one contact with undocumented students and tend to be visible allies at higher education institutions. Targeting and interviewing three interviewees that pertained to each of the previously mentioned categories provided me with a better understanding of how these allies perceive the termination of the DACA program will affect the program's recipients at their institution of employment. My thesis advisors determined the total number of research participants, which was nine. When recruiting for my research, I took a close look at my

participants' characteristics given that I designed my study guide with specific participant characteristics in mind.

Participant Characteristics

In my research, I defined "experiences" as shifts in DACA recipients' current everyday lives under the current DACA program. For example, I defined "experience" as changes in on-campus social support/acceptance that prevent Dreamers from excelling academically, shifts in financial aid access, or lack of legal forms of employment that can hinder their academic performance given the termination of the DACA program. Each interviewee was able to understand Dreamers' "experiences" at my studied institution. Their understanding of undocumented students' experiences was acquired via directly providing services to undocumented students and were based on their personal experiences as staff at the institution. I conducted interviews with allies that were able to discuss themes that arose from the literature review conducted for chapter two.

These allies I interviewed fell under the following staff categories: financial aid allies, social support/ campus inclusion allies, and employment opportunities allies. The three interviewees that fell under the Dreamers' access to financial aid category in my research were financial aid advisors and scholarship panel members. On the other hand, the four interviewees that fell under the social support / inclusion on campus category were undocumented student center staff, professors, and program staff allies. Lastly, the two interviewees that fell under California's workforce needs category were a career advisors and youth workforce employer. All of the previously mentioned allies fell under major research categories in chapter two of this theses and were recruited by me over the course the course of a few days.

All my recruited participants provided higher education services to undocumented students that relate to my thesis' major themes: Dreamers' access to financial aid, California's workforce

needs, and social support/ inclusion on campus. All my participants fulfilled the following criteria to take part in my research: were employed at the higher education institution for the past year, self-identified as allies, provide services to undocumented students, and carry out work tasks that relate to undocumented students' higher education experiences. Once I had figured out my recruitment criteria, it was time to move on to the recruitment portion of my research.

Participant Recruitment

Recruiting for my research was pivotal to the successful completion of this thesis. Over the course of my recruitment process, I took various steps to inform my potential participants of what taking part in my research would entail. For example, I visited the higher education institutions' undocumented student ally online directory and contacted staff with interviewee potential. In addition, I called the higher education's undocumented students resource center to ask for potential interviewee contact information. To clearly define my research goals and interviewee criteria, I created an email template. This email informed every potential participant of my research goal, research question, the confidentiality protection steps I was taking, topics that would be discussed, asked about interviewee availability, and provided my personal contact information.

I emailed a total of 30 potential interviewees requesting their participation in my research. Once I found interested participants, I asked them to put me in contact with other allies that met my participant criteria that might be willing to take part in my research. This was an important step towards acquiring enough research participants and making my research completion a reality. Therefore, I conducted snowball sampling of Dreamer allies on dates and times that worked for my interviewees.

Time and Location

I conducted my research during various weekdays at the higher education institution's undocumented student center, at private staff offices, and via phone. A total of seven of my interviews took place in-person and two via phone. The interview locations were dependent on my participants' availability. My daytime flexibility for interviews was pivotal to my research recruitment success given that staff was only available during specific times of the day. Therefore, I made sure to make myself available during dates and times suitable for participants with a variety of availabilities. I scheduled nine interviews and conducted them over the course of four days.

Recording Semi-Structured Interviews and Voice Transcription

I voice recorded each interview with a digital voice recorder and transcribed the recordings. I informed every potential interviewee email that the interview would be voice recorded. There was only one interviewee that did not desire to be voice recorded, so I took notes on that interview instead. I would ask each interviewee for permission to start recording prior to the interview and once the interview came to an end I would inform them of the end of the recording. In addition, as soon as I got home, I made sure to upload my interviews to my transcription software in order to keep the recordings safe.

With Sacramento State University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, I used a digital application for transcription purposes that was password secure. In addition, I was the only person with access to the account, and all my collected data was uploaded into the university's U Drive. I deleted the transcribing software shortly after the completion of my transcription process. Over the course of the transcription process, I never used my interviewees' real names and instead provided each participant with a pseudonym that I used throughout my transcription process. Once the transcription software had successfully transcribed my voice

recordings, I reviewed each transcription for accuracy and interviewee anonymity assurance.

After my successful interview transcription, I used the transcribed data for coding purposes that would then serve as a guiding force to my research data analysis.

Coding

I coded the interview transcriptions. Coding may be defined as, “the sorting of raw data, such as field observations or response to open-ended questions, into categories” (Singleton & Straits, 2010, p.584). My method of coding required me to read over each interview transcript and code responses by placing them into specific response categories. The coding categories arose from my interviewees using certain phrases that connected to my research question. Some of the main guiding concerns of my research, from which my interview guide was based off of, were the following: Dreamers’ current access to financial aid, social support and inclusion on campus, and California’s workforce needs.

Given that my interview guide was organized according to the previously mentioned themes, I highlighted statements made by interviewees in four different colors (green = access to financial aid, blue = support and inclusion on-campus, yellow = CA’s future workforce needs, and purple = new discoveries/ other). This method allowed me to compartmentalize statements that stood out from my interviews and I was able to make sense of the responses provided to my open-ended questions given that it allowed me to group together interviewees’ responses. Once I had grouped these statements, I read over all the statements and was able to understand the bigger themes of my collected data. I made sure to write parts of my findings chapter (Chapter 4 of my thesis) while analyzing the groupings I had created.

I took steps to protect my participants’ confidentiality and the confidentiality of the undocumented student body at my research location. First, it is important to highlight that I did not include my participants' official titles or names anywhere in my interview transcripts. Second,

I did not ask for specific examples of the participants' experiences when working with undocumented students. Not asking for specific instances allowed for my research to have a conversational flow to it given that my interviewees were able to freely discuss their experiences of providing services to undocumented students. My thesis does not mention the specific names of programs or resources for undocumented students that are specific to the higher education institution at which I conducted my research, so instead I gave specific programs a name that emphasizes the services it delivers to students instead. Once again, the purpose of omitting these details is the protection of my participants and the undocumented students they serve.

Chapter 4: Findings

Main Findings

The allies I interviewed for my research project were very useful for my research. This chapter presents my study's major findings: Dreamers' Access to Financial Aid, California's Workforce Needs, and Social Support/ Inclusion on Campus. These themes arose from the literature review I conducted, which is chapter two of this thesis. This chapter serves as the foundation to my conclusions and implications chapter (chapter five of my thesis) and will provide the reader with information on what my major findings were based on the research question: How do Dreamer allies perceive DACA recipients' experiences in higher education institutions would shift if the program were terminated?

Before I begin exploring Dreamer allies' perceptions, I want to further explore the concept of a Dreamer ally from the interviewed allies' standpoint. When I asked the allies in my study about how they defined being a "Dreamer ally," most of the allies defined being an ally as "doing the right thing" and in a sense using the resources they have to help undocumented students in need of help at my studied institution. The allies I interviewed were knowledgeable of the hardships faced by undocumented individuals and applied this knowledge of the population to make a change at an institutional level. The complete loss of the DACA program would impact DACA recipients at both personal and institutional level. This section of the thesis will explore the possible effects the complete termination of the DACA program could have on recipients' Access to Financial Aid, California's Workforce Needs, and Social Support/ Inclusion on Campus.

Dreamers' Current Access to Financial Aid

I was only able to interview three Dreamer allies that provide financial aid services to Dreamers at the higher education institution where I conducted my research. Chapter two of my thesis, my literature review, highlighted how certain private and public scholarships require their

recipients to have a Social Security number to qualify for them (Gonzales, 2017). The DACA program provided its recipients with a Social Security number that certain public and private scholarships require, therefore the DACA program has granted its recipients greater access to financial opportunities to fund their higher education. This section of my chapter will discuss how the Dreamer allies that provide financial aid services to Dreamers perceive the complete termination of the DACA program will impact the students they serve.

Over the course of my interviews, the allies I interviewed discussed that Dreamers would not lose access to CalGrant, the only state-funded financial aid they currently qualify for, given that this type of financial aid does not require its recipients to have a Social Security number. According to the allies, as long as Dreamers meet the AB 540 student requirement, discussed in chapter two of my thesis, they will be able to benefit from CalGrant's financial aid funding. The Dreamer allies also mentioned that higher education institution receives state funds that are allocated to undocumented youth on campus, but if these students' enrollment were to decrease my studied institution would lose the funding. In addition, the interviewed allies mentioned that Dreamers would no longer be able to benefit from scholarships that require recipients to have a Social Security number.

The interviewed Dreamer allies mentioned that in Fall 2020 my studied institution will receive its first wave of undocumented students that have never previously benefitted from the DACA program. This shift in the campus' undocumented student body will take place given that the program's recession took place before this incoming Fall 2020 undocumented youth were of an eligible age to apply for the program (age of 15). Therefore, the Dreamer allies do not exactly know how the total termination of DACA will affect the previously mentioned incoming students' experiences at my studied institution. Lastly, according to the interviewed financial aid

allies, the higher education institution still lacks a clear protocol on how to go about approaching this shift in student body demographics.

The Termination of DACA Could Negatively Affect Dreamers' Professional Lives and California's Workforce Supply

In chapter two of my thesis, I explained how California is home to nearly 250,000 DACA recipients and, out of that sum, about 72,000 currently attend the state's public higher education institutions (Gordon, 2017). For this thesis, I interviewed an ally that provides career advise and one that works with programs that hire undocumented students at my studied institution. This section of my chapter will discuss Dreamer allies' perceptions on Dreamers' need of a work permit and how the termination of DACA could affect their job perspectives.

Under California law, employers are barred from hiring undocumented individuals. Therefore, if the DACA program were to be completely terminated, Dreamers that are current DACA program recipients would not be able to legally work in the US. According to the interviewed, allies, Dreamers would have a harder time financially affording their attendance of the higher education institution if they were to be barred from the legal right to work in the US. In addition, the interviewed allies mentioned that the Dreamers would not be able to work on- campus given that my studied institution abides with federal employment regulations that prohibit the employment of undocumented individuals.

The Dreamer allies mentioned that without a Social Security number, undocumented students would no longer be able to be employed by the higher education institution or its employment affiliates. For example, the allies mentioned that there are some undocumented students that have been able to attain on-campus employment given that they have been able to benefit from the DACA program and are paid via stipends allocated to students who work on campus. In other words, Dreamers who currently work on-campus or work with external partners of the higher

education institution will no longer be able to benefit from those forms of employment.

Therefore, if the DACA program were to be completely terminated, Dreamers' employment opportunities would be narrowed down by employment opportunities that are deemed unlawful given their immigration status.

The interviewed allies mentioned that without the DACA program, youth that are currently enrolled at the my studied institution might end up dropping out of the higher education institution given that they might find it harder to afford to pay for school given the barriers the total termination of DACA would present. The interviewed allies also mentioned that there is no way of accurately predicting how exactly the complete termination of DACA will affect Dreamers in the short and long term. The allies are only aware that they might eventually have to deal with the consequences of the total termination of the DACA program at the higher education institution and they are unsure of how the institution will approach Dreamers' shift in legal status. The allies I was able to interview provided me with some pivotal insight into the efforts carried out in an everyday basis to make Dreamers' social support and inclusion on campus a reality.

The Termination of DACA's Impact on Dreamers' Social Support and Sense of Campus Inclusion Uncertain

Back in chapter two, I brought to light that according to the existing literature, DACA granted Dreamers a greater sense of campus inclusion, social acceptability, and increased the number of on-campus resources available to undocumented youth (Truax, 2015). In addition, undocumented youth have a desire to be regular members of American society given that they immigrated to the US as young children and oftentimes have no recollection of living in their countries of origin (Nicholls, 2013). Therefore, the DACA program has allowed Dreamers to integrate into American society and experience less shame in regard to their legal status. In addition, back in chapter two, I defined a sense of campus inclusion as undocumented students perceiving and

experiencing a connection and sense of acceptance into the higher education institution they attend. This section of the chapter explores how Dreamer allies perceive Dreamers' current sense of campus inclusion and what the complete end of DACA could signify for Dreamers' sense of campus inclusion.

Current Sense of Campus Inclusion

Dreamer allies at the studied institution created a sense of campus inclusion for undocumented students and if the DACA program gets completely terminated, these allies plan on adapting to any policy changes that take place. Dreamers' sense of campus inclusion was created via the creation of an informal chain of on-campus resources where allies put Dreamers they come in contact with to other allies on campus that are able to meet their educational and personal needs. According to the allies I interviewed, students' sense of campus inclusion was at the center of many of the events taking place at my studied institution and that was a predominant reason why the allies chose to become more visible figures on campus. Majority of the allies I interviewed perceived that undocumented students attending my studied institution experienced a sense of campus inclusion at the point in time when I conducted my interviews, Spring 2019.

For many of the interviewed allies, the students' sense of campus inclusion was pivotal and that is why they focused on welcoming students on-campus and providing them with campus resources when needed. These allies knew that undocumented students face unique life situations when navigating higher education institutions, therefore allies created the previously mentioned campus referral system. The referral system took the shape of an unofficial resource referral chain, which allows allies at my studied institution who come in contact with undocumented students to reach out to various allies at the institution in order to meet Dreamers' personal and educational needs. In addition, I found out that the undocumented student center was often a major resource for both undocumented students and allies at the higher education institution.

Whenever I asked the allies about Dreamers' future sense of campus inclusion, life after DACA was approached with uncertainty.

Future Sense of Campus Inclusion - Life After DACA

In Dreamer allies' perspectives, the DACA program provided its recipients' many legal rights these youth had never previously experienced before and allowed them to navigate higher education in a similar manner to their peers. In allies' perspectives, the loss of the DACA program signifies a loss of rights that allow these undocumented to have more "normal" experiences at the higher education institution and allows them to come out of the shadows. Every ally I interviewed vocalized taking some type of action (i.e. connecting students to other allies, making classroom announcements on resources available to students, attending on-campus events aimed at supporting Dreamers) to ease undocumented students' navigation of the higher education institution and allow them to develop a sense of campus inclusion.

Back in chapter two, I pointed out that DACA improved Dreamers' sense of campus inclusion, social acceptability, and increased the number of on-campus resources available to undocumented youth (Truax, 2015). I asked allies whether the complete end of the DACA program could shift students' sense of campus inclusion, the majority of the allies interviewed perceived that this shift in policy could bring a certain level of uncertainty for undocumented students currently attending the higher education institution. In the allies' perspectives, the shift in legislation could translate into a sense of public rejection of undocumented individuals in the minds of Dreamers. The majority of the allies perceived that if the DACA program comes to a complete end, Dreamers at the higher education institution would experience a sense of fear around disclosing their legal status to campus and would perhaps return to a life of navigating the higher education institution as undercover undocumented students.

Dreamer Allies' Strategies- Life After DACA

When I asked allies two questions, if DACA were to be terminated, how would Dreamers' use of academic/personal support systems on campus shift? if DACA were to be terminated, would Dreamers still be able to use the campus resources they currently use?, allies would express feelings of uncertainty. Allies would often mention that if the policy around the DACA program were to change, they would need to change gears and prepare for the worst. Two allies went on to mention that in 2020 the first wave of undocumented students that have never previously benefitted from the DACA program will begin attending the higher education institution where my research took place. These undocumented students will be students that have never been able to apply to the program given that when the program was rescinded back in 2017, they were still under the age of 15 years of age. In other words, they have never previously been granted the legal right to apply for the program even though they meet all of the program's original application requirements. Therefore, these students will be barred from applying to scholarships that require students to have a Social Security number.

Dreamer allies are aware that in the upcoming school year (Fall 2020) the higher education institution will be composed of a variety of students, for example, those students that are citizens/residents, those covered by the DACA program, and those students that were too young when the program got rescinded and are no longer able to apply for the program. Therefore, these two allies understand that my studied institution will have to find a way of helping all the undocumented non-DACA students navigate the institution. This incoming group of non-DACA recipients will face financial aid and workforce obstacles given that they have never been able to benefit from the DACA program. Therefore, allies have already begun to analyze how to better support undocumented students on campus, but that is still greatly on the works. According to the interviewed allies, some students are already afraid of disclosing their undocumented status to

staff at my studied institution and the end of the DACA program might make it more difficult for the institution to help undocumented students navigate it.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented my research findings using the following four themes: Dreamers' Access to Financial Aid, California's Workforce Needs, and Social Support/ Inclusion on Campus. The main findings that came up from me conducting my research were deeper knowledge on allies' understanding of who Dreamers are and the hardships they face as undocumented students at an institutional level and at a personal level. My research reflected that Dreamer allies are aware that without the DACA program undocumented students at my studied institution could have less access to certain financial aid opportunities, will most likely be barred from legally working legally in the US, and could in turn experience a decrease in sense of campus inclusion. My thesis' major themes findings arose from my interview response analysis and have allowed me to form an answer to my research question, how do Dreamer allies perceive DACA recipients' experiences in higher education institutions would shift if the program were terminated? The following chapter will summarize the conclusions and implications of what I have done in each of the previous chapters and I will then draw conclusions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter provides the conclusions and implications of my research. Over the course of this chapter, I discuss my analyses and explore the answers I have derived for my research question. In addition, I summarize what I have done in each of my previous thesis chapters and discuss how my research findings compare to existing knowledge on my topic. In this chapter, I also explore the following based on my research findings: how my research contributes to the understanding of how the possible complete termination of the DACA program will affect Dreamers' experiences in higher education institutions, surprising findings and unanswered questions, and research limitations.

Previous Chapters Overview

All of my previous chapters served a specific purpose in my thesis. For example, chapters one and two of the thesis served the purpose of providing contextual information about my research topic. In chapter one of my thesis, I introduced my research question and explained its importance. Chapter one also provided the foundation to basic terminology in my research; therefore in that chapter, I defined terms such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Dreamers, AB540, and Dreamer allies. Thus, chapter one informed chapter two of my thesis by providing foundational information.

Chapter two provided knowledge on my research topic based on existing academic literature. For example, this chapter answered the question: what do we know about DACA? how could DACA's complete termination impact its recipients' experiences in higher education institutions? The literature review originated from my review of a selected sample of academic literature, existing reports, and policy history on this issue. This chapter highlighted the experiences of undocumented youth in California. Chapter two allowed me to narrow down my research question to the perspectives of Dreamer allies, therefore it allowed me to narrow down my

research topic. This chapter concludes with a summary of gaps in our understanding/knowledge of the topic and points out how my research will contribute to already existing knowledge.

Chapter three introduced and provided a comprehensive outline of my research methods. In that chapter, I explained that I chose semi-structured interviews as my research method. I chose semi-structured person interviews given that they provide the interviewer the opportunity to have a one-on-one with an interviewee. I also provided details on how I went about creating my interview guide, explained where I conducted my research, and why I chose to conduct it at my studied institution. In this chapter, I provided the reader with an explanation of how I recruited participants for my study and who they were. Lastly, I explained how my research's interview guide originated from the literature review (Chapter 2 of this thesis) and how the interview questions aimed to explore Dreamer allies' experiences and perceptions with regard to the possible complete termination of the DACA program.

In chapter four, I highlighted the themes that arose from the literature review I conducted (Chapter 2 of my thesis). This chapter served as the foundation to chapter five of my thesis. This chapter provided the reader with information on what my major findings were based on the research question and the qualitative data gathered via semi-structured interviews. Thus, chapter four presents my study's major findings: Dreamers' Access to Financial Aid, California's Workforce Needs, and Social Support/ Inclusion on Campus. In other words, this chapter highlights the findings and major themes of my research.

Research Contributions

My research question is, how do Dreamer allies perceive DACA recipients' experiences in higher education institutions would shift if the program were terminated? The major questions that this research focused on centered on the following: Dreamers' Access to Financial Aid, California's Workforce Needs, and Social Support/ Inclusion on Campus. My research found that

Dreamer allies predict that DACA recipients will lose access to financial aid that requires having a social security number and this will affect these students' ability to financially afford their higher education. Also, DACA recipients' possible loss of their legal right to work is something that Dreamer allies predict will take place if the program gets completely terminated. In addition, the allies predicted that Dreamers' social support and sense of campus inclusion would decrease as a result of the program's termination. While this research sheds light on Dreamer allies' perceptions, it does not illuminate what will actually happen if DACA were terminated.

Dreamers' Access to Financial Aid

The theme Dreamers' access to financial aid theme allowed me to bring to light DACA recipients' current and future access to state-funded financial aid. My literature review reflected that even if the DACA program gets completely terminated, Dreamers without a Social Security number would still be able to apply for a CalGrant. Simultaneously, these Dreamers may lose access to certain scholarships that require having a Social Security number. Some of my interviewees mentioned that DACA's complete termination would likely mean that students would have to look for scholarships that do not require having a Social Security number. Many of my interviewed Dreamer allies believe that with a lack of enough financial aid DACA recipients might find it harder to obtain a higher education.

By providing DACA recipients with a Social Security number that specific public and private scholarships require, the DACA program has granted its recipients greater access to financial opportunities to fund their higher education. As previously mentioned in chapter one, Assembly Bill 540 allowed undocumented students who graduate from a California high school to pay in-state tuition at state higher education institutions, but did not grant students access to state financial aid or transfer their in-state tuition eligibility out of California (AB 540 Affidavit or the California Nonresident Tuition Exemption, 2001). Therefore, the State of California passed

legislation that facilitates undocumented students' attendance of higher education institutions regardless of the existence of the DACA program.

Termination of DACA and Dreamers' Workforce Needs

My research showed that Dreamer allies are aware that the complete termination of DACA will prevent Dreamers from acquiring legal employment on campus and off campus. Some of the Dreamer allies I interviewed mentioned that without a Social Security number, undocumented students would no longer be able to be employed by the higher education institution or its employment affiliates. These interviewees mentioned that my studied institution has allocated stipends for students that work at my studied institution and that if DACA were to be completely terminated these students would no longer have access to employment opportunities on-campus. Conducting my research allowed me to discover that most Dreamer allies are in the dark about exactly how current DACA recipients will be affected at a professional level. Dreamer allies deem themselves allies, but do not know enough about how the complete termination of the DACA program will affect Dreamers.

According to previous research, without the DACA program, Dreamers would not have the legal right to work in the US and all these undocumented youth want is to be productive members of American Society (Truax, 2015). In addition, without the program, higher education would become more costly for undocumented youth and the lack of legal employment would further prevent them from obtaining a high-paying job or any job (Truax, 2015). According to my previous research, Dreamer allies care about Dreamers and their financial well-being, but my research supported and expanded knowledge on this topic. My research confirmed that Dreamer allies care deeply about DACA recipients' ability to hold a job, but also reflected that they do not exactly know

how these Dreamers will be able to financially afford to attend higher education institutions without the legal right of employment. My research findings indicate that Dreamers are not knowledgeable enough on how a lack of employment will affect Dreamers and how they could help these Dreamers afford their higher education if they are barred from obtaining legal forms of employment.

The Termination of DACA's Impact on Dreamers' Social Support and Sense of Campus Inclusion Uncertain

The themes of social support and inclusion on campus contributed to answering my research question in the sense that it allowed me to understand that Dreamer allies contribute to Dreamers' sense of campus inclusion at my studied institutions. If the DACA program were completely terminated, Dreamer allies perceive that my institution of study's leadership team would provide further support to undocumented students on campus given that they already support Dreamers' sense of campus inclusion. Dreamer allies sensed this given that the institution's leadership already hosts and attends various institutional events that target the creation of Dreamers' sense of campus inclusion. The majority of the Dreamer allies perceive that if the DACA program gets completely terminated, the higher education institution leadership team would step up and provide further support for undocumented students at an institutional level. Given that the DACA program is currently at limbo, at an individual level, Dreamer allies are planning on adapting to any policy shifts that might take place by changing the type of resources available to undocumented students. According to my interviewed staff, Dreamer allies currently have a resource chain in place that allows them to refer undocumented students to other allies or resources around campus that fulfill their immediate needs. Therefore, this theme provides an answer to what could happen to undocumented students' sense of campus inclusion at my studied institution.

Social support and campus inclusion makeup a theme that allowed me to dive into what Dreamers' current sense of campus inclusion feels like at the moment. This theme allowed me to understand the actions already being taken by Dreamer allies to support DACA recipients on campus and actions they are willing to take in the future if the DACA program gets completely terminated. At the moment, Dreamer allies have created a system that supports Dreamers, but if the DACA program gets terminated these allies perceive that the need for stronger links between allies will feel more urgent and this might propel them into action. This theme also allowed me to answer my research question given that it allowed me to understand that Dreamer allies perceive DACA recipients to have a strong sense of campus inclusion at my studied institution.

From a policy perspective, the theme of social support and campus inclusion allowed me to understand the lack of uniformity around my studied institution's approach to shifts in the DACA program. My studied institution currently has no uniform protocol on how each dreamer ally may support undocumented students. This theme has helped me understand that there might not be a protocol to how higher education institutions go about helping DACA recipients. Higher education institutions provide services to Dreamers by providing them with the same services they provide to any other student, such as classroom courses, financial aid assistance, mentorship, and many other services. My studied institution focused on Dreamers' sense of social support/inclusion on campus in order to further incorporate DACA recipients into campus life. The leadership of my studied institution made it easier for the higher education institution's staff to navigate their roles as Dreamer allies, but support for DACA recipients varies across the state of California and across the US. The underlying message of this theme is that there might be lots of confusion on how Dreamers' lives would be affected if the DACA program gets completely terminated.

My research's findings support my literature review research findings. My previous research on the topic pointed out that DACA's termination signifies a loss in sense of social acceptability. Undocumented students are able to self-identify as "DACAmended" with the help of the DACA program (Truax, 2015). Undocumented youth tend to experience a sense of social exclusion given their social status and DACA allowed them to come out of the shadows, but the termination of the program could cause a fear of disclosing their immigration status once again (Nicholls, 2013). My research fully supported my previous research given that the Dreamer allies I interviewed communicated to me that they fear the termination of the DACA program will cause Dreamers to feel as if they do not belong on campus or fearful of disclosing their undocumented status. Therefore, existing literature and my research on the topic align.

Surprising Findings and Unanswered Questions

The qualitative research I conducted aimed to answer my thesis research question but produced some unexpected answers. First, I was surprised to find out that my studied institution's leadership support plays such a pivotal role in the Dreamer allies' perspectives of acceptance of their work and the sense of hope allies at my studied institution experience. Existing literature does not mention higher education leadership as the main driver behind Dreamer allies' efforts. Existing literature would at times mention that Dreamers found it easier to disclose their undocumented status at certain higher education institutions. On the other hand, my interviewees disclosed that the higher education institution's leadership played an enormous role in making Dreamer allies feel comfortable to identify as allies. To a certain extent, my research brought to light just how important it is for Dreamer allies to feel like their status of allies is being supported by the higher education institution's leadership.

Second, some allies thought that the terms “Dreamer” and “allies” were very political and not reflective of the population being discussed. In the allies’ perspectives, the term “Dreamers” divides undocumented populations between those that are deserving and not deserving of higher education or even of the right to have an American dream. In other words, some Dreamer allies perceived the term “Dreamer” to be one that frames a very concrete population as the individuals deserving of opportunity of legalization in the US. On the other hand, the Dreamer allies did not agree with the term “ally” either given that they also perceive that the term was popularized by mainstream academia and does not appropriately reflect the reason why they support DACA recipients. In the Dreamer allies’ perspective, they are not allies and instead are just human beings supporting others given that is the right thing to do in their eyes. The literature I reviewed prior to conducting my research rarely mentions Dreamer allies’ reasoning behind identifying as “Dreamer allies.” Over the course of my research, I found out that almost all Dreamer allies I interviewed experienced a strong sense that becoming an ally was the right thing to do given that over the course of their lives they have witnessed undocumented immigrants struggling in the US.

Certain questions arose from me conducting my research that will remain unanswered. The questions that arose were the following: how does information on how to help DACA recipients circulate at my studied institution and do all allies have access to this information? If DACA gets terminated, will allies at my studied institution be able to better communicate with one another to strategize on how to help undocumented students? How many DACA recipients will drop out of school at my studied institution if DACA gets completely terminated? These questions are questions for future research.

Limitations

If obtaining IRB approval to interview undocumented students were easier, I would have chosen to interview both Dreamer allies and DACA recipients at my studied institution. I could have interviewed both DACA recipients and Dreamer allies to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the possible termination of the DACA program. Perhaps interviewing both DACA recipients and Dreamer allies would have provided a much deeper understanding of what both groups perceive will take place if the DACA program gets completely terminated. I also believe that interviewing DACA recipients would have provided me with a better understanding of undocumented students' sense of campus inclusion at my studied institution. If I would have interviewed DACA recipients I would have heard directly from the students who are experiencing life as undocumented students and who will be affected by the decision made on the DACA program.

My research had some limitations that prevented my research questions from getting completely answered; therefore, my research question has been answered partially by my research. My research took place at only one higher education institution in Northern California. My research would have been more generalizable if I would have interviewed Dreamer allies at a variety of higher education institutions. The problem with my research only taking place at one higher education institution is that the protocol around how to be a Dreamer ally is created by each individual campus. I do not know how Dreamer allies differ in their efforts to support DACA recipients across the state of California. However, my limited individual capacity to conduct this research meant time was of importance, and I did not have time to conduct interviews at multiple higher education institutions.

Final Remarks

My thesis was a project that was inspired by the current status of the DACA program. As mentioned at the beginning of my thesis, the US is home to about 11 million undocumented immigrants and the DACA program benefited about 800,000 recipients from June 2012 - March 2017 (Gordon, 2017). In addition, California is home to the largest DACA recipient population in the nation, nearly 242,000 program beneficiaries (Gordon, 2017). About 72,300 undocumented immigrants currently attend California's higher education institutions. The distribution of the recipients enrolled in higher education institutions is as follows: with 60,000 attending a California Community Colleges (CCC), 8,300 attending a California State University (CSU) and 4,000 attending a University of California (UC) and is estimated that probably half of the previously mentioned students currently benefit from the DACA program (Gordon, 2017). The Trump Administration in DC has proposed to permanently terminate the DACA program and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security began the program's rescission as of June 11, 2017 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017).

My research has demonstrated that Dreamer allies at my studied institutions have been working to improve DACA recipients' experiences and are willing to form stronger ties with one another if the DACA program gets completely terminated. My research has also demonstrated that without the existence of the program undocumented students will lose access to essential things such as the legal right to work in the US, will be barred from receiving specific scholarships, and their campus sense of inclusion might diminish. My research questions were not answered by my research and I am unable to answer the question unless the DACA program comes to a complete end. The future of DACA recipients is currently still at limbo and the US Supreme Court is scheduled to make a decision on the program no later than June 2020.

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