DEVELOPING AN UNDOCUMENTED RESOURCE CENTER: THE CASE OF MOUNTAIN WEST UNIVERSITY

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, father, tíos, tías, Mamá Chila, Papá Mailo, grandfathers, primxs, amigxs y mis hermanas who inspire me daily to be a better person and a conscious advocate. Este proyecto no se podría ver logrado sin el inmenso apoyo de ustedes. Los quiero mucho. Sus historias, y experiencias y amor me los llevo conmigo a todos lados. Gracias por ayudarme a lograr mis sueños.

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DEVELOPING AN UNDOCUMENTED RESOURCE CENTER:

THE CASE OF MOUNTAIN WEST UNIVERSITY

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This critical case study explores creating and implementing an undocumented resource center (USRC) in Utah. Using a qualitative research approach, the study draws on interviews with key stakeholders involved in the development and operation of USRCs and an analysis of policy documents and other relevant materials. The study finds that creating USRCs is a complex process that involves navigating various political, institutional, and social factors. While there is significant variation in how USRCs are structured and operate across different campuses, they generally aim to provide various services and resources to support undocumented students, including academic advising, legal assistance, and community building. In particular, the study highlights the importance of understanding the political and social contexts in which USRCs are situated and how power dynamics and competing interests can shape their development and implementation. Overall, this critical case study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of USRCs in supporting undocumented students in higher education and provides insights and proposes that leaders build a race-conscious (LatCrit) Leadership in higher education for those who are policymakers, administrators, and advocates seeking to create and sustain these critical resources

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CHAPTER ONE: THE POLITICS OF USRCS

Introduction

"Where's the Dream Center on campus?" was a frequent question I would receive over the phone as an advisor at the Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC). I would respond, "By the train tracks, near the army base, there is a small white wooden building from the World War II era with four entrances. Go to wing "C, " past the dome-looking building, and you will see the Annex Building as you walk up the hill—you can't miss it!" Telling students and the university community to come to USRC was tedious, but people found our space. Even though this new resource center was not easily accessible nor visible at first, many people were thrilled that we finally had USCR on campus. The first-ever in Utah.

This case study stems from my experiences as a member of a mixed-status immigrant family, a first-generation college student, and a student affairs professional. As a new professional in the field, I experienced how systems clashed when we tried to support undocumented immigrant students and families. Throughout the process, I asked myself how we can genuinely serve undocumented students and people if leaders, stakeholders, and policies are not race-conscious. If people do not have an inherent understanding of the environment, they are trying to advocate? Creating a USRC comes with many policy nuances and political processes at the campus level. For this case study, I draw from Cisneros and Valdivia (2020) to define USRCs as offices or campus spaces designated to operate with undocumented students in mind that either house an undocumented student program or serve as a hub for resources tailored to students without legal immigration status. A USRC is a dedicated campus where students and staff resources coalesce (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Manalo-Pedro, 2018). My experiences as a

graduate assistant at the USRC and as an advisor helped me see the intersections between education and immigration policy and understand how identity, status, policy, and the law play out in the lives of undocumented students. In my role, I could see the vast resources unavailable to undocumented students even though they sometimes pay even more tuition than their U.S. counterparts (Flores, 2009). I was informed by my experiences living with a mixed-status family, being a first-generation Mexicana college graduate shaped and expanded my consciousness. Even my familial experiences with the immigration enforcement system as I began my career shaped my professional development. This background allowed me to see better the potential of creating a supportive campus environment and the power and value of building capacity to serve undocumented immigrant students on campus. Although there have been some areas of progress in providing educational access for undocumented immigrant students in higher education, my goal in conducting this case study is to expand our understanding of the decision-making process of USRCs in the United States.

Background and Context

The Migration Policy Institute (2020) reported that more than 5.3 million students, "or 28 % of all students enrolled in U.S colleges in universities in 2018, were from immigrant families" (p. 1). Higher education systems in the United States continue to benefit from the participation of undocumented immigrant students (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020) and staff, yet, most universities and colleges across the United States do not have support services geared towards people without legal status. Xenophobic and racist exclusionary policies and practices from the state and the federal government have tied academic success and opportunities to social mobility based on the social and economic trajectories of their immigrant families (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020; Manalo-Pedro, 2018; Huber et al., 2009; Pérez Huber, 2010; Solorzano, 1992). Growing

empirical evidence shows that there is a need to examine the "true nature" of USRCs and their alignment with institutional philosophy (Manalo-Pedro, 2018). In 2017, after many years of student advocacy and support from key administrators, a USRCwas developed at Mountain West University (MWU)[1], a higher education institution in the Mountain West region. Although a small space relative to other student support spaces on this campus, it was the first of its kind for this university and the state in which it existed. This resource center became a hub on campus where students received college access information, college advising, assistance navigating educational structures, and for many, a welcoming space with friendly faces where they could speak their language and feel free to ask questions about the university, their status, or speak of the challenges they were facing in their lives. MWU USRC came to fruition because of the leadership of student organizers on campus who came from various immigration statuses and pushed for its development. While students did receive access to a dedicated space, many access strands of support were still missing when the center opened. Although it takes time to institutionalize a new support service on campus, it is critical to examine how higher education institutions replicate models of success within the higher education system. In my previous position, I had the privilege of serving as front-line staff at a USRC at a large public institution.

I was in a unique situation to see how organizational philosophies aligned with the development and creation of the USRC while simultaneously seeing how the emergence of undocumented students and resources shifted the institution's climate. My time at USRC taught me several lessons as a new student affairs professional. First, it is incredibly prevalent to have mixed-immigration status families at universities. I quickly learned that most college campus

[1] Pseudonym

resources are dedicated to the United States. citizens; I would sometimes be at a loss for words, too. I often asked myself, “How does this XYZ resource not exist?”

I struggled to find resources tailored to the legal needs of my students. Second, I learned and witnessed how one’s higher educational experiences, especially the experiences of undocumented and mixed-status families, are nuanced and heavily influenced by immigration policies at all levels of education. Most of the issues students and families confronted were affordability due to their status. Undocumented students would be categorized as international students even though they had resided in Utah most of their lives and would pay out-of-state tuition. Several students expressed being unaware of having access to in-state tuition. Their path toward higher education depends upon their place of residence, local and state policy, and the resources available to them as they navigate the K-12 system. Third, I learned that educators and policymakers don’t always know or consider what truly happens in the lives of undocumented immigrant students and families. The lack of awareness shows that higher education institutions must train employees to assist every student effectively. The policies created and enacted reflect the lack of consciousness of people in power. Fourth, I’ve learned that it is important that as new policies and programs impacting this student population are developed and implemented, their experiences are forefronted and that support services for undocumented immigrant students and students of color are designed without white normative standards of education. Lastly, I learned the most important lesson: being an institutional agent on a college campus sometimes means building institutional capacity alone to serve others better.

Politically, the United States' racist rhetoric towards immigrants dominated the conversation and impacted how the USRC was perceived and viewed (Pérez Huber, Muñoz, 2021). As the USRC on campus continued to develop in its initial stages, I learned that not many

university staff, faculty, or administration knew of the various struggles undocumented immigrants and their families faced at home or what state-specific policies blocked their access (Castrellón, 2021). I was not surprised that university staff could not assist undocumented immigrant students, but it highlighted the prevalence of lack of awareness. I vividly remember our struggles as a new resource center on campus, but two things never escaped my mind: location and funding. Funding was always a significant concern because public funds from a public university cannot be used for undocumented immigrants in Utah or within the federal government. Students often said it was unfair to come to a university, pay much tuition, and not be supported in many ways. Although undocumented immigrant students in Utah can qualify for in-state tuition, not everyone is eligible, and frequently undocumented students would pay more for education than their United States citizen counterparts.

We were expected to do our programming and run the center on a $5,000 operating budget. Our USRC survived and depended a lot on private donations and fundraising. It was stressful as a two-person office to educate the entire campus on immigration issues, serve on diversity task forces and scholarship committees, build campus partnerships and relationships while advising students, and reach out to the surrounding communities. It was a process institutionalizing the USRC because we spent most of the time letting community members and other students know that the USRC. In 2017, the USRC at MWU was the only USRC in its state.

Even though MWU sits on a hill with gorgeous views, it would take students about 20 minutes to walk from the student union to an old, white smelly building with barely functioning elevators, where the USRC was located. Regarding access, it was difficult for some students with physical disabilities to find our new office and enter the space because they had to take two

elevators to get to the USRC. So as a new USRC on campus, students could not always find us—even during hostile political times in 2016-2017. I never forgot these moments because we were only a two-person office at the time: the USRC ``director" (he was actually classified in Human Resources as a manager but asked by the administration to use the external title of director without the director-level pay) and me, the graduate assistant. I was in charge of student advising, helping with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) renewals, and helping students and their families navigate political turmoil while at the same time figuring it out ourselves as student professionals on campus.

We remained vigilant as we kept up with policy changes at the university level, the border, the city, and across the three executive branches of the government. With this political awareness, I quickly learned in real time about the impact of external forces that heavily influenced policy and practice toward undocumented immigrants. When Donald Trump was campaigning to be the next president of the United States, he shifted the sociopolitical realities for many immigrant communities. His xenophobic political campaign changed the panorama of the Southwest border. The U.S. government was in the early stage of its policy of making it legal to separate children from their families at the U.S.-Mexican border, federal agencies were eliminating processes for refugee settlement and asylum seekers, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) was revoked for migrants from many countries. The political climate of the United States continues to shape and impact the lives and opportunities of vulnerable populations. As we would see during the Trump administration, these policies and processes would take an even more cruel turn (Castrellón et al., 2017).

Policymakers were making non-discretionary decisions for deportation, further militarizing the border as had been done over the country's history (Muñoz, 2021), and making

the so-called "American Dream" much harder or impossible to obtain. The intense policy shifts and sociopolitical realities felt by students and staff at the MWU and the USRC were evident. Although students remained vigilant about what was going on with these constantly shifting immigration laws along with the unresolved stance with DACA created more bureaucracy, legal, and practice (TBS Staff, 2021), it was creating confusion and frustration, many students were experiencing the university in a demoralizing way.

The USRC at the time needed to prepare and be equipped with resources to handle the rescinding of DACA by Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the Trump Administration, but we could not do so. The USRC needed the funding infrastructure to help students in higher education. They needed funds to help students with application renewals for DACA and other immigration issues affecting their university stay. DACA, a policy program that promised relief from deportation for two years, a work permit under specific eligibility requirements was now only available to about 790,000 undocumented immigrants while the other 1.5 million DACA-eligible immigrants continue to stay without legal status. Now that DACA remains an inaccessible policy and no longer accepts new applicants, this reminded others that USRCs are not just for DACA recipients and that much more was at stake in people's lives with legal status. The reality is that most USRCs in the United States. are concentrated on the West Coast, with California leading the way.

Replicated by the success models of other Western institutions, the USRC at MWU opened its doors in spring 2017. Ultimately, suppose universities want to prepare and allocate resources toward students whose legal status is a policy change away. In that case, we need stakeholders and people to understand what support services need to unfold on campus.

Establishing resources on campus with students in mind requires college campuses across the United States to develop a humanitarian approach to building institutional capacity.

Higher education institutions across America are opening up USRCs on campuses of different sizes, urban and rural sites, and private and public institutions (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). In its “aspirational phase,” the division of diversity and inclusion at Buena Vista University (BVU)[2] Administrators and stakeholders are considering the possibility of developing a resource center or hub for students who have varying immigration statuses in the state of Iowa (Arena, 2021). This would include undocumented students, DACAmented students, or people who are refugees. The idea of developing a space like a USCR has resulted from undocumented student activism springing from the University of California, Berkeley. Student activism made waves in higher education, and more USRCs expanded across California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, to name a few. On the other hand, Buena Vista University in Iowa is looking at other states' models to create a USRC. Not all states, systems, and education structures by design provide undocumented people resources, governmental assistance, or any kind of social access to programs due to their legal status. As the state of Iowa gathers more resources to fund its USRC, what sparked the need for this support program was an increase of the Hispanic/Latinx population. At the same time, only four percent of students in Iowa’s higher education institutions are Hispanic or Latinx (Arena, 2021).

Political, social, and institutional factors inform the environmental elements for a USRC to develop. The state of Iowa is considering implementing a USRC inspired by the USRC at MWU, which they will use as their program model. Interestingly, the USRC at MWU implemented their USRC similarly to the Undocumented Student Program from the University

[2] Pseudonym in original article

of California, Berkeley. However, no USRC is created equal. UC Berkeley's Undocumented Student Program is an exemplary model because California has some policies that are more "immigrant friendly." Outside California, not every state has implemented similar policies or programs. Across the nation, only twenty-three states offer in-state tuition benefits to immigrant students (U.S. State Policies on DACA & Undocumented Students| Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2023). Local and national conversations took place to extend in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students, but not every state adopted a sound policy toward immigrant students.

The expansion of USRCs is necessary. Resources developed thus far for undocumented students are insufficient when the entire education system is designed to have students with no legal status pushed out. As Hispanic and Latinx students continue to seek higher education in more significant numbers, more first-generation undocumented students are entering the doors of public and private institutions. The fear of deportation, racial and gender discrimination, detention, and social rejection is up to institutions to create support services with intention despite the social, economic, and political exclusion experienced by undocumented students and their families (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Perez et al., 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Rosas, 2020).

Development of USRCs in the United States

The role of USRCs in higher education is to facilitate and support undocumented students throughout their educational trajectories from enrollment to graduation. However, their emergence in higher education has its roots in student activism. According to Cisneros and Valdivia (2018), "most USRC practitioners described long histories of student mobilization leading the development of institutionalized support services for undocumented students on their campus" (p. 5). This catapulted institutions to create task forces to develop a cohesive plan for

the best approach to support services for undocumented immigrant students. A standard recommendation from institutional advocacy groups was developing a USRC, funding a full-or part-time position that is only focused on supporting undocumented students. The cross-collaboration of undocumented students, staff, and faculty was central to the development process, ultimately helping establish institutional procedures (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

In its initial stages, before USRCs became USRCs, students across the United States supported their peers on campus without any institutional support. The way these informal networks supported students led to the mobilization across universities, and the lack of institutional and state support led first documented undocumented student program in the nation was developed in 2012 at the University of California (UC) Berkeley after a faculty committee and staff researched the campus climate (Sanchez & So, 2015). Their survey found that the environment towards undocumented students needed to be more informed, aware, and hostile in some instances. Highlighting the importance of support services across the university need to be aware of students with different legal statuses; there is an urgent need to create pathways for undocumented students in higher education. At some institutions across the United States, there are still students supporting their undocumented peers on their own without any assistance. The success of undocumented students is tied to the sociopolitical climate of their state and institution. USRCs reflect an “institution’s capacity, resources, population size, organizational structure” (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018, p.6). I argue that as a political structure, education is the measure and foundation of progress, and politicians have access to educational opportunities that reflect our nation’s values and history.

Problem Statement

As the number of USRCs increases across various states and on numerous university and college campuses, it is essential for higher education scholars and those seeking to understand the experiences of historically underrepresented and marginalized undocumented students to document how USCRs have been created and developed. In addition, researchers need to explore how higher education systems and services that have been put into place to support student access support students in navigating higher education institutions. Research is needed to explore the creation and functionality of these centers, and scholarship describing and outlining how these new sites of access and support impact students' experiences are also needed.

Most research literature on undocumented immigrant students sheds light on their educational experiences and trajectories. Correspondingly, literature has also demonstrated the criticalness of developing resources specifically for the educational needs of undocumented students (Cisneros & Rivarola, 2020a; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Sanchez & So, 2015; Valenzuela et al., 2015). About 11.3 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States (MPI, 2020). According to Zong and Batalova (2019), approximately 98,000 undocumented students graduate high school yearly, around 2% (454,000) of all students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (New American Economy and Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020). That means 82 % of undocumented students are enrolled at community colleges or universities (Redden, 2020). Higher education leaders and program directors at college campuses are being forced to contend with the fact that undocumented students need support and that this growing segment of the college-going age population currently needs and will continue to need in growing numbers, support and services just as their counterparts who are not dealing with immigration policies.

It is crucial to accomplish this case study because the lives of undocumented immigrants are treated as disposable in the policy-making arena. This tug-o-war of who is tougher on immigration policies with Republicans and Democrats has impacted the way undocumented immigrants access higher education. Humanizing the experiences of undocumented students via the development of USRCs is necessary given the political context, immigration, and policies that shape the daily lives of undocumented students. States experiencing an increase in their immigrant population have led to more deportations, making pursuing education a deportation risk. The development of USRCs can be seen as a direct response to promoting educational access for students.

On a national scale, there are about 60 USRCs, and there are more than 4,000 colleges and universities across the U.S. (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). USRCs are a relatively new service in some higher education institutions and emerged as a direct response to undocumented students' lack of higher education resources (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020). Each resource center functions uniquely because the national regulations and operational guidelines of each USRC depend on institutional and state-level policies (Castrellón, 2021). Establishing a USRC on a college campus acknowledges the existence of undocumented students, including their unique needs and access to resources.

Additionally, the formation of USRC centers students' experiences and depends on the socio-political climate of the state and university (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). Together, undocumented immigrant students face and must learn to navigate national, state, and institutional policies to successfully enter and persist in college (Reyna Rivarola, 2017). Although there are more educational opportunities and support services for undocumented

students, more research is needed to understand how USRCs develop at public and private universities.

Navigating multiple systems and policies in education (K-12 and higher ed) and immigration systems and procedures, many undocumented immigrants in the education system are forced to traverse a myriad of barriers in terms of access to education because of their legal status. Perez et al. (2010) assert that undocumented students experience what he calls a "triple minority status" encompassing ethnic origin, lack of documentation, and economic disadvantages (p.39). This paradox and the lack of opportunities offered within K-12 and post-secondary school systems make the college-going process more challenging than necessary. Researchers in higher education continue to assert with empirical studies that a lack of financial aid information, support services, and psychological and social support (see Abrego, 2018; Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017; Flores, 2016; Flores & Horn, 2009; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Nienhusser et al., 2020; Reyna Rivarola, 2017) impacts, retention, and persistence. Central to how resources are created for vulnerable populations like undocumented students is the socio-political climate in each state.

Further politized by their identity and race, undocumented students' access to resources becomes racialized and often debated. Thus far, only 19 states within the U.S. allow undocumented students to access in-state tuition, limiting eligibility, educational, and career opportunities for students (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2021). To further contextualize the racist complex web of state, local, and federal policies that undocumented students are forced to contend with in the sociopolitical climate, it can be assumed that it is about controlling who has access to education.

For instance, Alabama and South Carolina prohibit undocumented students from enrolling at any public institution of higher education (NCSL, 2021). In contrast, Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana deny undocumented students in-state tuition making it challenging to access educational opportunities across the United States (NCSL, 2021)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold. First, I seek to document the creation and development of a USRC in a predominantly White institution in the Mountain West region of the United States, including recording and describing the socio-political context that existed at the time and documenting the experiences of the center's founding student affairs professionals and of the student leaders who fought for its creation and benefited from its initial services. Second, I aim to outline and describe the support services provided to and for undocumented immigrant students in this USRC, specifically during the first three years of its existence from 2017 to 2020. My research seeks to contribute to the growing field of immigration and education policy in higher education and to have a deeper understanding of how leaders and administrators in higher education can learn from the creation of a USRC, its policies and programs, and the impact it can have on a growing and important segment of its student population. This case study informs new ways of thinking about leadership in higher education for colleges and universities seeking ways to allocate resources for undocumented students on campus to provide a model for engaging students and allies who are challenging an immigration system that has impacted families and communities for generations.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study attempts to contribute to the literature by examining the following guiding research questions:

1. What were the major processes, actions, and decisions that led to the creation of the USRC at Mountain West University?
    - Who were the major players that led to its development, and what strategies did they utilize that led to the USRC's development?
    - How did key university stakeholders initiate its establishment, and what roles did they play in institutionalizing the Center on campus?

2. What student services were provided by the USRC in the first three years of development and operation?
    - How did these services evolve over the first three years, and how did the staffing and resources align with its stated mission?

3. What socio-political forces external to the university influenced the USRC's creation and development?
    - What policies were being discussed and enacted at the federal and state government levels, and what influence did they have as the USRC was being created and developed?

Theoretical Foundations

This qualitative critical case study is guided by race theories and conceptual tools that enable me to understand, critique, challenge, and deconstruct the systems, programs, processes, and stakeholders that initiated an institutional unit created to aid and support undocumented students. Developing cultural centers challenges dominant forms of thinking by centering the experiences of Students of Color at the forefront. As a methodological framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT) grounds itself with five tenets (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and

racism, (b) the challenge to the dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) interdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano, 1998).

Analyzing the role of race, racism, and intersectionality with other forms of oppression in the lives of people of color confirms what other CRT scholars have claimed. A person's race and legal status can determine the quality of one's life and heavily influences how individuals access education. Scholars brought CRT into education to illuminate and reframe how people of color experience and navigate racism beyond institutions (Gomez & Huber, 2019). Looking at how power plays a role will help me see and better understand how higher education policies remain racially coded.

Race, immigration, and class status shape college and career trajectories one's entire life. Issues surrounding stress and well-being (Munoz, 2013), employment (Abrego & Gonzalez, 2010), and outlook in life (Gonzales, 2007) also impact the way undocumented students access higher education. Critical race scholars have demonstrated that dominant ideologies of race and racism shape theory, policy, and practice (Solórzano, 1998). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) highlighted several truths that policymakers often ignore: we live in a racist society, race and legal status determine educational opportunity factors, and dominant ideologies filter through people in power. It is a philosophy that centers on the experiences of color and the relationship between race, racism, and power.

Race Consciousness in Higher Education

Latina/o/x Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit) is rooted within the CRT framework. It provides researchers with the language, tools, and strategies for discussing topics and issues related to immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal,

2001). The framework also provides tenets or constructs for challenging the racism that impacts racialized persons such as Latina/o/x (Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Huber, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In a study by Perez Huber (2010), using CRT and LatCrit found that undocumented students feel a sense of heightened discrimination that can be emotionally triggered by educators in their college environment because of the way their race, class, and immigration status, and family histories intersect as they step foot on a college campus. Attending a college campus where one does not see themselves represented or celebrated makes it an "undocufriendly" campus Racist nativism, the conceptual framework that Perez Huber (2010) developed, highlighted the historical racialization of Latina/o/x, Immigrants of Color, and how undocumented students experience microaggressions. It is a form of everyday systematic racism to keep people in their racial margins that can become a source of trauma caused by the same educational structures. Another study by Manalo-Pedro (2018) drew from concepts of CRT. Still, it used the tool of interest convergence to shed light on the critical role that institutional allies and institutional leaders play in advancing equity for undocumented students. Central to developing resources and support services requires that top-level administrators have empirical evidence to inform their decisions. Although I am not explicitly discussing Latinx issues, adopting a LatCrit consciousness in the field of higher education can help me better analyze issues that CRT cannot, like language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity phenotype, and sexuality (Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Martinez, 1994). This way of knowing, LatCrit, complements CRT because it seeks to supplement its tenets or methodologies (Alemán, 2007). People experience their race through the social categories of class, gender, religion, nationality, legal status, sexual identity, etc. Solórzano et al. (2000) expand our thinking by revealing the embedded racism within institutions and confirming that

students of color do not have the same educational experiences as their white peers. Revealing racism in education is a conscious move toward social and racial justice and legitimizes the experiences of People of Color (Yosso, 2006). Understanding how USRCs develop in PWI can provide insight into a deeper analysis of the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the function of white supremacy (Solorzano & Yosso, 2010) in creating support services for undocumented students. Yosso & Lopez (2012) use CRT to examine how culture centers function as counter spaces on college campuses, highlighting that these spaces can be transformative for Students of Color. Having a cultural center on campus symbolizes that the institution is committed to social justice practices, places the histories, and prioritizes the experiences of students of color (Manalo-Pedro, 2018; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Providing students with a physical space where they can exist can be a site of power and liberation, even though it is within the institutional level. Ultimately, incorporating cultural centers on campus advance the mission and purpose of the institution, increase visibility and meet diversity guidelines. However, schools tend to fail because support services do not receive equitable resources, attention, or funds. Ultimately, the institutions have vast resources for permanent residents or U.S. citizens. Benavides and Yosso (2010) discuss how "diversity convenience," where students are represented but not matched with a breadth of resources, ultimately benefits white students. Understanding critically how the convergence of all educational, racial, gendered, and legal systems interferes with continuing inequities within undocumented immigrants.

As an analytical tool, interest convergence can help explain stakeholders' intentions to see how equity may be advanced in higher education. Seeing how self-interest, power, and privilege are camouflaged within education and immigration policies shows the relationship between race

immigration and highlights current sociohistorical and sociopolitical moments (Huber et al., 2008). The theory of interest convergence can be a valuable tool in analyzing the development of USRCs. Manalo-Pedro (2018) draws from concepts of CRT, interest convergence, the liminal state of immigration policy, and campus climates to examine the role of a USRC at a large public institution in California. To this date, Manalo-Pedro (2018) is the only scholar in higher education that has specifically looked at the development of USRCs using the tools of CRT to understand the barriers that undocumented students face. His study advanced the importance of institutional allies and leaders in advancing educational equity for undocumented students.

Today, we are seeing again how the U.S. makes nativist visions come true as politicians reframe for the nation that is welcomed and excluded. How immigrants are viewed, perceived, and understood naturally seeps into how policies develop in higher education. By this, society’s view of immigration constantly shifts, shaping who is the good and worthy immigrant of the time to sustain white dominance.

Significance of Study

The development of USRCs is a direct response to the nation’s inaction and the state's to provide adequate resources for undocumented students (Sanchez & So, 2015; Suárez-Oroco et al., 2015). While no federal acts regulate if undocumented students can enroll in a U.S. college or university, states are left with the discretion to determine if undocumented students can be considered for in-state resident tuition or acceptance in higher education (Nienhusser et al., 2020). The absence of federal and university guidelines rules on undocumented student resource centers on college access has created an uneven landscape across the United States. Implementing a USRC builds the path to a more inclusive and supportive environment.

USRCs have emerged due to people lacking a critical consciousness on how to support undocumented people Consequently, undocumented immigrant students and allies have resorted to finding creative ways of addressing this gap in legislation and services by creating and implementing USRCs. This study provides a valuable perspective for colleges and universities looking to implement a USRC on their campus. My research is a call to action for leaders and stakeholders at colleges and universities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

USRCs in Higher Education

In this chapter, I provide a general overview of the history of USRCS, its mission, and its role in higher education. Throughout my literature review, I use the terms "undocumented student" and "undocumented immigrant" interchangeably because I discuss how undocumented resource centers are created dependent on geographic location and the socio-political climate of residence (Reyna Rivarola, 2017). I also use the term DACAmented to describe undocumented students with DACA. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is twofold: (a) to document the creation and development of a USRC in the Mountain West region of the U.S., including the socio-political context and the experiences of the center's founding student affairs professionals, and (b) to outline and describe the support services provided to and for undocumented students in the first three years of its existence from 2017 to 2020. Interrogating these topics can help educators, policymakers, and administrators humanize debates in education and immigration. The overall goal of my study is to contribute to the growing research intersectionality of education and immigration. Given the purpose of the study, I draw attention to the development of USRCs in the U.S.

Historical Legacy of White Supremacy in Higher Education

According to the U.S constitution, all children living in the United States have the privilege to a free public education no matter their race, ethnic background, religion, or sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen or citizen or here unlawfully (National Immigration Center, 2022). However, in practice, this translates to undocumented immigrant students not accessing free public higher education, therefore, limiting their quality of life and choice to pursue a baccalaureate degree in the United States. Central to the creation of resource centers or sometimes called culture centers are the "...negative experiences of undocumented students [that] are rooted in systems of racism that pervades the very institutions [that] students navigate (Manalo-Pedro,2018; p.17)." Resource centers are born out of student activism (Patton, 2010). In the United States, education is not a constitutionally protected right (López & López, 2009). When culture centers were developed during the 1960s and 70s, they were created to be safe havens for students of color to enhance their college-going experience. At the same time, the Critical Legal Studies paradigm field was taking off in the 1970s as a response to the civil rights movement (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Matsuda, 1987). Utilizing critical race theory (CRT), helps discuss how USRCs function within the institution to understand how laws and policies work to maintain undocumented individuals at the bottom (Bell, n.d.; Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). I use CRT to account for the role of race and racism in education. I choose this framework because CRT identifies and challenges racism at the historical level and in contemporary forms that challenge all forms of subordination (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

Historically, cultural centers are rooted in the struggle to hold higher education institutions accountable at predominately white institutions (PWI). Today, during this time, we see in full force how these support services models have been integrated into the development of

USRCs. Physical USRCs are institutionally supported structures that should provide access and support tailored to the needs of high school transfer, undergraduate and graduate students, and students of mixed-status families (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020).

Within the variety of USRCs, some centers operate as standalone or collaborate with other multicultural and international student centers. Support services vary but typically receive guidance on (a) academic advising, (b) legal counseling, (c) financial aid, (d) career counseling, (e) transfer services, (f) legal services, and (g) providing Undocu-Ally training to create awareness (Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020). USRCs extend information on resources like emergency grants, lending technology, scholarships, internships, work-study, and mentorship. Although USRCs are a new phenomenon, the development of USRCs symbolizes an institution's commitment to educational equity and undocumented students. A study by Manalo-Pedro (2018) highlighted that institutional allies and institutional leaders play a critical role in developing a USRC. Promoting inclusivity can be a step in the right direction when institutions strive to support every student on campus, but institutional efforts must match resources. Particularly for undocumented students, colleges and universities need to know how their state, local, regional, and federal policies interact with higher education and immigration access. Although Manalo-Pedro's (2018) study focused on a USRC based in California, their study-built knowledge documented empirical evidence to better support undocumented students. Changes in immigration policy and local laws have affected how undocumented students seek out educational and work opportunities—most of the resources allocated within higher education benefit DACAmented students. However, there is not enough research on how organizational structures impact the development of centers for Students of Color.

Every state context is unique and reflects the institution's capacity, resources, population size, and organizational structure, so not every USRC is created equal (Undocumented Resource Centers, 2020). USRCs are developed and funded in different forms, creating inequity in access to higher education. Given the challenges associated with undocumented students' educational success, law, policy, and political climate changes impose additional barriers. However, the movement of developing new undocumented resources results from student mobilizations. Above all, USRCs should become critical infrastructures in higher education because immigration legislation, in most cases, requires undocumented students to have some educational experience, like graduate high school, GED, or attend higher education to qualify for any immigration reform. Federal immigration laws and policies have not changed for centuries and have propelled states to locally enforce immigration laws which vary drastically from state to state. While some states adopted policies like extending eligibility for driver's licenses, student loans, and professional licenses, other states across the U.S. have denied basic needs like health insurance and access to post-secondary education. As more undocumented students enroll in higher education, there is a growing need to understand how institutions develop undocumented resource centers within organizational structures. Undocumented immigrants have been treated horrendously unfairly in pursuing higher education.

By design, educational systems in the U.S. are meant to exclude people of color. The American Dream is a racist ideology in which social and governmental policies have prevented People of Color from equal and equitable educational opportunities (Lipman, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). The American Dream is a myth as additional laws and educational policies constrain their participation in higher institutions (Peña, 2021). Educational policies constrain the participation of undocumented immigrants in higher education (Peña, 2021). The historical legacy of white

supremacy can be found in the U.S. immigration system, where laws, policies, and practices continue to shape who is worthy of obtaining access to rights and privileges. Research in higher education continues to assert that "White supremacy is never incidental; it is rightfully calculated to strategically ensure white dominance (Perez Huber, 2020, p.16)." The construction of our laws and policies has shaped generation after generation.

The purposes of USRCs are to streamline student resources and institutional responses to respond to students' socio-political realities (Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020). Not only did I learn about the complexities of what it means to work for an institution as a Mexican student affairs professional, but how organizational structures are critical in securing and allocating resources for undocumented students. The legal construction of USRCs within PWIs (predominately white institutions) means that enhancing the educational experiences of undocumented students operates from a colorblind (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) unconscious racist framework.

The Rise of USRCs Across the U.S.

Across the United States, at least 60 institutions have established USRCs (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Primarily concentrated in the West part of the U.S., USRCs have designated spaces on campus where undocumented students with and without DACA receive tailored services (Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018, 2020). An estimated 122,600 undocumented high school seniors are enrolled in high school and 98,000 graduate yearly with their high school diplomas. However, about 31,850 are likely to pursue post-secondary education, and only 1,950 will graduate each year from college or university (Burrows, 2019). Under the federal government, states prohibit federal financial aid to

undocumented individuals because they are not legal citizens of the United States (Dickson & Pender, 2013; Ibarra, 2013). Proposed immigration reforms require higher education but fail to understand that students must navigate complex laws to achieve degree completion (Perez et al., 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2015). USRCs should be implemented and institutionalized on more college and university campuses to better support undocumented students and ensure they persist. Not only is the safety of students at stake, but the livelihoods of their entire families too.

Across the nation, USRCs have the power to play a significant role in the lives of undocumented students and their families. Before the formal creation of USRCs, undocumented students already participated and exerted their agency—and continue to participate in—existing informal support networks composed of individuals helping them navigate the college-going process (Perez et al., 2009). These informal support networks sometimes become the only safety net students have access to, whether it's the friend of a friend or someone they trust at school. The centralization of information at USRCs provides support and information like applying or renewing for DACA and, in some cases, helping students navigate deportation. The development of USRCs has to bridge the knowledge gap on *how* undocumented students navigate higher education.

As it turns out, undocumented students are not the only ones who seek services at the USRC. US citizens also come into the center to determine if they can navigate higher education with undocumented parents or legal guardians. The lack of comprehensive policy reform has forced undocumented students and universities to produce more systemic infrastructure because state and federal policies sometimes contradict one another and can create more legal barriers for students. We need to broaden the dialogue and talk about individuals who did not qualify for DACA and about mixed-status families. Institutions of

higher education have often placed the responsibility of serving diverse student bodies on specific offices like the Office of Equity and Diversity rather than engaging collectively in institutional change. The intersection of education and immigration can make an undocumented student's path to higher education full of insurmountable social, legal, and educational obstacles. When students reach post-secondary education, barriers such as not having financial aid to pay for their education are exacerbated. Researchers (see Enriquez et al., 2019; Flores & Horn, 2009; Gaxiola Serrano & Solórzano, 2018; Gonzales, 2011; Lopez et al., 2018; Reyna Rivarola, 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015) have addressed how invisible barriers such as policies can stunt the academic journey of an undocumented student. Thus, now that USRCs are becoming established, it must not be overlooked how these centers can play a significant role in undocumented students' life on campus.

Establishing a critical space on campus for students without a legal status sets the tone for undocumented students' college-going experience and their families. The continual bridging of resources and support is some progress, but depending on how centers were established— some centers stand-alone without institutional support, leaving many to be supported with private funds (Southern, 2016) or philanthropic donations. The way centers are established matters because those who donate monetary funds to universities or colleges have the power to establish the conditions in which they will be supported.

Universities function and operate at system levels, meaning that access structures powerfully distribute resources and information. To navigate higher education institutions, undocumented students have found support systems in institutional agents who were often not specifically hired to support undocumented students (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). On the other hand, it also provides a snapshot of the institutional agents

who support undocumented students on campus. Institutional agents refer to college personnel/ administrators, advisors, counselors, presidents, vice presidents, faculty, financial aid officers, admissions staff, etc., who hold vital institutional knowledge of access and resources. Specific student support programs are created when a group of students are not being supported on campus (Salinas Velasco, Mazumder & Enriquez, 2015). Often, undocumented students stay in the shadows because they are afraid to reveal their legal status as they try to earn a college degree, especially if the campus climate is unhealthy (Pérez et al., 2010; Katsiaficas, Volpe, Raza, & Garcia, 2017). Campus climate refers to the "current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institutions and its members (Jayakumar & Muesus, 2012; Ledesma, 2016).

USRCs facilitate access to educational opportunities, legal advising, and mental health professionals trained to assist students without legal status. The people who interact with undocumented students in higher education are what Nienhusser (2018) calls "policy implementers," individuals who enforce policy decisions and have the power to influence the implementation of such policies. Instead of formal programming, some institutional agents have supported undocumented students (Chen, 2014), translating into one or some institutional agents serving undocumented students (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). The lack of visibility also means that institutions are not meeting their mission of serving all students on campus.

Undocumented college students do not frequently have the same access to campus support structures and networks as those who have authorized status (Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Dedicated spaces specifically for undocumented students on college and university campuses are an institutional and intentional effort to provide some support to improve their

college experience (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Expanding services to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) has highlighted the reality that families in the U.S. are of mixed-legal status. Some families have citizenship and are "safe" from deportation, while others are not. Policies outside the university impact the experiences of college students as a collective.

The first Undocumented Student Program (USP) documented in higher education literature began at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Then at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) by Ruben Elias Canedo Sanchez and was co-directed by Meng L. So. Both university professionals were motivated to help undocumented students based on the experiences of their undocumented family members. They became institutional changemakers in how undocumented students are served. Canedo Sanchez and So (2015) provide critical insight into how others in the higher ed landscape can develop an undocumented program. Essentially, institutional agents Canedo Sanchez and So (2015) argue that attention should go into cultivating relationships and knowing the political and social context surrounding the university.

The program at UC Berkeley established and modeled what institutional support could look like in academic counseling, legal assistance, financial aid resources, and a vast referral network at campus structures (Sanchez & So, 2015). Ultimately, what led to this particular USP's success and persistence was that the USP directors could only establish large amounts of support due to private donations and some institutional aid. To provide more context on USRCs, they are sometimes referred to as DREAMers Centers or Undocumented Student Success Centers and are central to the persistence of first-year, transfer, and graduate undocumented students in higher education (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Olvia Rosas, 2020).

Most importantly, not only is it a space on campus where undocumented students can feel welcomed and supported (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020), but it can sometimes become a source of more stress. What I mean by this is that, before, the experiences of undocumented students were not so visible or somewhat not considered a "top priority." The change in institutional behavior results from student mobilization and the help of community members and advocates (Terriquez, 2015). To better understand how undocumented resource centers in higher education are implemented, we must research how location and socio-political climate Impact the development of USRCs at public higher education institutions. Within the last decade, the higher education landscape has dramatically transformed for undocumented students. These institutional behaviors indicate the controversy of public universities not supporting undocumented students financially and relying on private efforts that look like donations. The fine line between supporting undocumented students is always political. In the following section, I highlight how activism has been part of the institutionalization process of USRCS and provide an overview of USRC's presence on campuses across the U.S.

College-Going Experiences

In the last 10 years, the higher education landscape has evolved in response to the "plight and mobilization of undocumented students by institutionalizing undocumented student support services" (Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020, p. 658). Empirical research demonstrates that a person's legal status impacts every aspect of their life, including their educational trajectory (Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2015). Being undocumented ultimately shapes and affects social and economic stability and overall quality of life, from obtaining housing (Gonzales, 2016), access to employment (Gleeson, 2015), accessing healthcare (Fabi & Saloner, 2016) to even finding a

partner and getting married (Enriquez, 2016). Legal status in the U.S dictates how we interact with peers and institutions and how others perceive us, which impacts social mobility (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Patler et al., 2021; Terriquez, 2015). Scholars and researchers argue that educational incorporation shapes one social position and gives undocumented students a 'master status' (Hughes, 1954), which affects their sense of belonging (Enriquez, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012; Valdez & Golash-Boza, 2018). Further marginalized by their race (Chang et al., 2017; Huber et al., 2008; Perez et al., 2009; Suárez-Oroco et al., 2015), undocumented immigrants face unique systematic challenges that require the abolition of laws pertaining to legal status.

In adolescence, Gonzales (2011, 2016) noted that undocumented youth transition into adulthood differently than U.S. citizens. When U.S. citizens become adults, new rights and responsibilities are enjoyed, like voting, enlisting in the military, and applying for employment. While undocumented youth and students "transition to illegality," students find it challenging to obtain jobs and apply for college without a social security number. Having an undocumented status can significantly lessen the chances of graduating from high school and enrolling in college (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). Given these social and legal barriers, undocumented students experience higher stress and are forced to confront the social limitations of their legal status (Gonzales, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2013), ultimately taking a toll on their well-being. Another impediment during the college-going process is the fear of disclosing immigration status and not qualifying for federal financial aid. These barriers also highlight that not all campus personnel are trained to assist undocumented students and their families in navigating state and local policy when applying for college.

A recent study by Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman (2017) reported that nearly 70% of families run by undocumented parents are near the poverty line compared to 29% of students who come from poor families nationwide. Students of immigrant origin- who are either documented or undocumented born outside the U.S. and U.S.-born children of immigrants are impacted directly and indirectly by this racial and political climate. On the Southwest border, people from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, among many others, have arrived in greater numbers due to the civil war in their country of origin. So what does this mean for higher education? It means that people who enroll in higher education institutions will likely not be U.S.-born citizens and will have more educational obstacles than their U.S. counterparts.

The federal government has refused to create a pathway toward citizenship, and the lives of undocumented people did not improve under the Trump Administration. In the first three years of the Trump Administration, deportations peaked at more than 400,000, stating that he would deport "millions" of immigrants (Miroff, 2021). This political context and rhetoric instilled even more fear in immigrant communities, specifically toward undocumented Latinx people. The election of Donald J. Trump as the United States president was a turning point for American society (Castrellón et al., 2017). While immigration policies have never been favorable to immigrants, particularly those of Color (Pérez Huber et al., 2009), America's stance on immigration became more evident in recent years when the Trump Administration from hereon named 45 stepped into office in January 2017. When he started his electoral campaign, 45 used xenophobic rhetoric towards undocumented immigrants (Castrellón et al., 2017). Understandably, this presidential threat increased stress among undocumented immigrants across the United States as the anti-immigrant climate surged, deportations increased, and border security became more militarized (De La Cruz-Caldera, 2017; López & Pérez, 2018; Massey et

al., 2015). With the way the Trump Administration campaigned for his presidential elections, it can be said that more USRCs developed. The way things are set up in the U.S. makes students without any permanent legal status vulnerable to deportation at any time with a stroke of a pen.

Beyond these factors, I have stated that psychological impacts limit educational success for undocumented students. These psychological impacts manifest in ways that lead to isolation due to being cautious with the world, ensuring no one takes advantage of undocumented student status. Fear of deportation becomes an act of self-preservation (Villalpando, 2013). Individuals are aware of the dangers associated with being undocumented leading students to be consistent and vigilant. Now that USRCs are becoming established on some college campuses, how these centers can play a significant role in undocumented students' life on campus must not be overlooked. It is up to local governments and institutions to create educational opportunities and resources tailored to undocumented immigrant students because most legislative bills toward citizenship require students to have a high school diploma or college degree to obtain and qualify for legal status. The following section provides an overview of the laws that impact the success of undocumented students at all three levels of the government--state, local, and federal.

Federal & State Policies in Higher Education

Providing equitable access to higher education has caused debates among policymakers (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). Others contend that undocumented students' right to education is illegal per federal law regulations (Kobach, 2007), while others argue that providing access benefits everyone (Manalo-Pedro, 2018). The federal law that denies access to post-secondary education is Section 505 of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA); it states, "An alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible based on residence within a

State (or a political subdivision) for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such benefit (in no less an amount, duration, and scope) without regard to whether the citizen or national is such resident (National Conference of State Legislature, 2019)". Not only is this clause dehumanized, but it is another structural form of exclusion for undocumented students aiming to enroll in higher education. IIRIRA prohibits in-state residency status, while PRWORA, the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996, restricted access to federal aid. It makes it a lot more challenging for students to enroll and graduate while simultaneously subjecting changing immigration laws (Peña, 2021). Policy decisions like IIRIRA and PRWORA remove opportunities from people's livelihoods and continue reinforcing the ideology that immigrants do not belong in U.S. structures.

In-State-Tuition Policies

As noted earlier, a common obstacle for undocumented students is paying for college since they do not qualify for federal financial aid making the college-going experience even more stressful. In-state tuition policies have been critical to developing other educational opportunities for undocumented students on university and college campuses. Across the nation, nineteen states offer in-state tuition benefits to immigrant students. Local and national conversations took place to extend in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students, but not every state adopted a sound policy toward undocumented immigrant students. Given these policy challenges, only nineteen states out of fifty opted to extend in-state tuition access to students without legal status. Depending on the policy environment, undocumented students who are economically disadvantaged face several social injustices.

These forms of discrimination are shaped by the boundaries of citizenship and federal policy, which ultimately impact how students enter higher education. In-state tuition policies

exist in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. With the enactment of in-state tuition policies, undocumented students still struggle to pay tuition. What makes the path to college for undocumented students more complex than for U.S. citizens is that they navigate multiple social and legal systems simultaneously in conjunction with local and federal policies in their state of residence. A report by the New American Economy and President's Alliance in Higher Education estimated that 454,000 undocumented students enrolled in higher education, about 3%. Yet, higher education institutions are not adequately equipped to welcome undocumented students onto their campuses.Eighty-two percent of undocumented students are in 2-, and 4-year public colleges and universities, and the political and legal turmoil continue to deteriorate undocumented students' college-going experiences. From creating pathway programs, hubs, or an actual physical space USRCs have become critical in higher education. In many states, undocumented students are not offered select student support services. Access to loans, grants, and work-study remain a barrier, while the most common methods of financing one's education are only provided to U.S. citizens or permanent residents (Buenavista, 2018).

In framing my study, it is essential to draw attention to the legislative context because no federal mandate outlines access to higher education. According to Southern (2016) integrating support services, some institutions of higher education have decided to support undocumented students in different ways; however, often so it is done "in ways that are sporadic, unarticulated by official policy, and dependent on the personal commitment of specific" (p.312). Furthermore, states that have not passed in-state tuition laws have provided

some form of access through at least seven university systems. Universities that have extended in-state-tuition via their regional boards are-- the University of Hawaii Board of Regents, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the University of Maine Board of Trustees, the University of Michigan Board of Regents, the Ohio Board of Regents, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education established policies that extend tuition benefits due to state inaction via the board of regents.

The complexity of these different access points is confusing and scary, and often, this information is inaccessible to many individuals, creating another barrier for undocumented students. Ultimately, what is at stake here is how undocumented students navigate and experience institutional policies. However, states like Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana have restricted their guidelines to limit the enrollment of undocumented students in public higher education (Trivette & English, 2017). Alabama and South Carolina prohibit undocumented students from enrolling at public colleges or universities. Other states like California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Washington implemented sound policies and allowed undocumented students to receive state financial aid. Ultimately, political controversy has obscured educational opportunities for undocumented students and their families. Cisneros et al. (2021) point out that "Being responsive to students' needs required cognizance of the impact of students' undocumented status within local contexts (p.6)." In other words, organizational structures across universities and colleges need to rethink how they serve students beyond the need to understand that what happens at the border naturally impacts the lives of undocumented students and everyone at their campuses. What we see in the landscape of higher education is a humanitarian crisis, and the U.S. is a

primary destination for most migrants. How the U.S. legal and social system is designed; does not foster equitable educational access and opportunities. This intersection of education and immigration needs to be explored, investigated, critiqued, and reimagined in higher education.

Consequently, undocumented college experience and sense of belonging become compromised (Cisneros & Valdivia students, 2020; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000b; Strayhorn, 2012). The policies and executive actions have further complicated higher education pathways for undocumented students. Most pointedly, these include the 2017 recession of the 2012 executive order and Deferred Program Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the 2020 Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruling on *Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California*, *the* refusal of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to implement the SCOTUS ruling, and the threats by the 45 Administration to legally rescind the DACA program in 2021. Still, in limbo, the continual requirement to enroll as out-of-state or international students while also skimming past the section of entering one social security number is a constant reminder to undocumented students of their exclusion in society even if they have lived in the U.S most of their lives (Cisneros et al.,, 2020). While undocumented students across levels of education are diverse in background and national origin, parental income influences economic and educational resources (APA, 2012; Teranishi et al., 2015). The factors that impact their educational journey consist of three major challenges: they are first-generation college students, most come from mixed-status families, and many individuals express stress, anxiety, and depression (Suárez-Oroco et al., 2015).

A study by Nienhusser et al. (2016) highlighted the role that higher education professionals shape in the college-going experience of undocumented students. Results identified nine

microaggressions undocumented students face when interacting with campus institutional agents. Some of these microaggressions included the following: (a) limited college choice information for undocumented students, (b) insensitive behaviors toward undocumented students, (c) unsatisfactory college choice processes that do not focus on a student's immigration status (Nienhusser et al., 2016). Although other studies have focused on the role institutional agents and counselors play in supporting undocumented students (Manalo-Pedro, 2018), understanding collegiate campus racial climate reveals the systemic barriers that impede "college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer rates (Solorzano et al., 2000)." These realities are all part of the college-going experience for undocumented immigrants.

Research investigating USCRs is growing within the field of education, and empirical studies show that students from underrepresented backgrounds experience racial microaggressions on campus (Solorzano et al., 2002; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Terriquez, 2015). The way U.S. society has politized undocumented immigrants is what makes access to higher education political itself.

Utah Policies

H.B. 144 (2002)

In 2002, House Bill 144 passed in Salt Lake City, Utah, extending in-state tuition rates to undocumented students. To meet the eligibility requirements for in-state-tuition in the state of Utah, the student must (a) attended a Utah high school for three years or more years, (b) have graduated from a high school in the state, or received the equivalent of a high school diploma (G.E.D), (c) attended and enrolled institution no earlier than 2002-2003 and (d) students must state in writing that they will become U.S citizens as soon as they can (Utah legislature, 2002). However, since this is a state-adopted policy, over 9 years, it has been challenged 10 times in

legislature (Castrellón, 2019; Stewart, 2012). Making the college-going process even more daunting because students can lose in-state tuition eligibility at any moment. Students are at risk to In the last 20 years, there continues to be an increase in enrollment at two and four-year institutions for undocumented students at the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE; see Figure 1).

Undocumented Students Receiving Tuition Wavier
Unduplicated Headcount by School
Academic Year - Based on Thirdweek Extracts

Institution	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
UofU	89	115	132	155	123	140	157	165
USU*	63	56	22	31	24	20	31	36
WSU	52	52	90	104	118	135	163	164
SUU	11	11	3	4	2	1	12	8
SNOW	1			2	3	4	8	6
DSU	3		1	1	5	3	8	27
UVU	93	110	154	189	217	225	212	228
SLCC	157	189	237	303	343	401	479	465
Total USHE	**469**	**533**	**639**	**789**	**835**	**929**	**1,070**	**1,099**

Each state has policies and processes regarding students applying for in-state tuition eligibility. While some institutions see this as solving a barrier, it is the case that if the student decides to attend another institution or transfer, they must (re)fill out forms and (re)submit all new transcripts (Castrellón, 2021). The constant process of applying, waiting for eligibility approval, and verifying takes an emotional, physical, and financial toll on the student. This arduous process is what non-citizens go through to gain the opportunity for an education. In other words, if an undocumented student in Utah decides to attend a private institution, they have to adhere to the organization.

SB 81: Illegal Immigration (2008)

Implemented in July 2009, this bill required local police departments to serve as ICE officials and to determine a person's citizenship status when individuals are held at a county jail for some time. SB 81 is an anti-immigrant policy. This bill also forced employers to verify the citizenship status of their employees while at the same not granting restaurant liquor, private club licenses, or privileged driving cards to a person unless they legally prove that they live in the United States.. This bill impacts Utah's undocumented students in higher education because now all public campuses statewide must include on university and college IDs "For Campus Use Only," limiting undocumented student university engagement (Reyna Rivarola, 2017). Before 2008, people could use their university and college IDs to travel as a form of identification. For many, a university or college ID is sometimes the only identification they can obtain. These policy clauses created more barriers for undocumented people and students in Utah; SB 81 also requires that anyone granted a scholarship or any form of funding demonstrate that they reside in the U.S. lawfully (Utah Legislature, 2008).

Utah Compact (2010)

Utah is the headquarters of the Mormon religion. The Church of Latter-Day Saints has influenced state politicians and civic leaders to try to "limit the worst nativist impulses" by pushing for immigrant rights, which has led to the "Utah Compact," an agreement dedicated to "improve the lives of immigrant residents," including undocumented residents. This agreement shares values from business, religious, and influential community leaders in response to the circulating anti-immigrant. Similarly to today's anti-immigrant rhetoric, in 2010, Arizona implemented a racist law recognized as "Show Your Papers" and provided more power to law enforcement officers to act as border patrol officers if there is any suspicion that a person is in

the U.S. unlawfully. Requiring immigrants to carry documentation of their legal status. This declaration is in response, and it contains 5 main principles for Utah to consider in immigration discussions. I list the five below.

- Immigration is a federal issue-- not a state policy issue.
- Police resources should be focused on crime, not civil violations.
- Policies that separate families should be opposed.
- Utah policies should reaffirm the state as a welcoming, business-friendly place.
- Utah should adopt a humane approach (Compact, 2019).

A key feature of this compact is that it focuses on immigrants' economic contributions. Although this agreement has not stopped Utah from making deportations, it acknowledges that laws and policies separate families. Much has not been done to keep families together at the state or federal level. Even though this statement affirms how vital immigrants are to Utah’s economy and society, it promotes compassion and pragmatism when creating immigration policy.

HB 497: Utah Illegal Immigration Enforcement Act (2011)

This bill requires that officers verify the immigration statuses of persons arrested for felonies or class A, B, or C misdemeanors. It allows anyone in a car where a driver has been detained to verify citizenship. Allows officers to check for citizenship if the person appears undocumented. Prohibits and criminalizes encouraging an undocumented person to come to live in the state. This bill resembled many of SB 1070 from Arizona. Immediately the day it was enforced, a federal judge put a stay on the bill.

SB 253: Exceptions for Privately Funded Scholarships (2015)

This bill allows students to qualify and access privately funded scholarships at college and university campuses in Utah. In addition, students who also qualify for HB 144 automatically become eligible for private funds.

HB 470: Higher Education Residency Amendments

This bill included language to be inclusive of international students who have applied for asylum or refugee status under the U.S immigration law as resident students for education attendance and tuition purposes (HB0470, 2022)

SB 136 Utah Law passed in 2021

Senate Bill 136 Higher Education Scholarships Amendments passed in 2021 in Utah. Expanding eligibility and availability of technical education scholarships and qualifying eligible undocumented students for state scholarships. This law aims to streamline access to services for refugees and immigrants, enhancing the partnerships between state agencies, local governments, and community organizations deemed culturally appropriate.

Conclusion of Literature Review

This literature explored the role of undocumented resource centers (USRCs) in higher education, focusing on how policies limit how USRCs streamline support services. The chapter is organized around three main themes, the need for USRCs in higher education, the impact of USRCs on undocumented students, and the challenges and opportunities for USRCs in higher education. The first section argues the importance of USRCs in helping students mitigate legal, social, and financial barriers and their limited access to opportunities and support. This literature review suggests that it is critical for stakeholders, leaders, and staff on college campuses who are

responsible for supporting undocumented students to be conscious of how immigration and education policies have historically neglected and dehumanized undocumented people in the U.S. Making the case that people who support undocumented students must be race-conscious. The second section discusses the positive impact of USRCs on the lives of undocumented students. Literature in higher education suggests that USRCs serve as a method to streamline support services. USRCs provide policy knowledge, academic support, tutoring, and mentoring and share local and national financial and work opportunities. Other critical support services are also filtered through USRCs, such as the LGTBQ resource center, women's resource center, career center, tutoring services, financial aid office, admissions office, first-gen office, student transfer office, multicultural center, and the list goes on.

On top of those university support services, local services are also filtered through these spaces. USRCs are critical in helping undocumented students develop a sense of belonging and engagement within the university and the local community. The final section examines how federal and state policies create challenges for USRCs. Literature also suggested that USRCs face several challenges, from limited funding and access to critical resources, university administrators and faculty resistance, and political pressures from anti-immigrant groups and politicians. To have a USRC on a college campus means that other entities must collaborate with USRCs to continue leveraging resources and support. These centers must engage in advocacy and political organizing to impact and expand radical change. Ultimately, I suggest in this literature review that USRCs have the potential to shape access to post-secondary education and play a significant role in supporting the personal and academic success of undocumented students. I conclude this chapter with a call to action to create more USRCs on college and university campuses for leaders and staff to be race-conscious and help students equitably.

Lacking a critical consciousness as a leader has a long-term impact on undocumented students' lives, the quality in which they experience life, and how they access career and educational opportunities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Role and Positionality of the Researcher

Born in Long Beach, California, the first generation of children born in the U.S. from parents who immigrated from Zacatecas and Guerrero Mexico-- I identify as Mexicana and Latina. My position as a researcher is informed and shaped by my cultural and educational experiences growing up in a mixed-status family. I came to this work because I witnessed how difficult it was for my mother and other family members to access essential resources like education, healthcare, legal aid, and employment. Listening to my mother's and family's stories made me aware that many students and mixed-status families face challenges. I learned through them that navigating a world where one consistently has to verify their existence while simultaneously looking for points of access shows how laws, policies, and society shape and control the lived realities of undocumented people and their families. I recognize that my identity as a Mexican woman, daughter of immigrants, having a mixed-status family, and educator naturally influences the process of my case study. It is how I think, write, and process information. The research that I am engaging in is personal. For many generations, the lives of my family have been impacted by U.S. immigration laws and policies. My grandpas participated in the Bracero Program (1942-1964), did not receive pay, and were deported back to Mexico. Growing up, I did not know that my mother took about 11 years to gain lawful status. Before the arrival of her "green card," she had been detained at the California/Tijuana border several times, trying to cross over. Trauma is what greeted her at the border, along with a life full of legal and

systematic obstacles. The immigration system works. It is challenging to receive legal status and access a visitor's visa. How these laws function and manifest forces people to break and resist policies to survive. It is expensive and emotionally exhausting to also apply for a “legal status” there are not many options to do so. The immigration system is also backlogged, making applications take longer to get processed.

My grandpa would say school was only for men and was strict when my mother wanted to pursue her dream of becoming a flight attendant. She wanted to leave her patriarchal and machista household to travel the world. She did not get to accomplish that goal. Make friends. Go out. In the process of doing so, many things happened to her, but more so when she arrived at the California and Tijuana border. She and my uncle got caught by border patrol, detained, fingerprinted, and sent back until she and my uncle crossed successfully. My aunt arrived in Los Angeles at the age 15 and enrolled in a high school. She graduated with honors and received a college scholarship but could not accept it because the scholarship required her to be a legal resident U.S. citizen. Listening to stories as a young girl told by my mother, aunt, and many other family members about their U.S journeys inspired me as a researcher to learn and understand the impact of U.S immigration laws on the lives of people and how resources develop at the local, institutional and federal level.

I also came to this work from a professional standpoint because, early in my career in student affairs at the USRC, we would encounter many families and students with similar stories. I began to understand and connect how mixed-status family issues were related to the intersections of education and immigration policy. Growing my race and legal consciousness in the process, I learned how intricate education policy is for undocumented students. Working at a USRC, I would see a variety of challenges, students were not always aware of all the resources

available to them at the K-12, university and state level. Having a USRC on campus helped expand the knowledge of who could qualify for in-state tuition rates and pay out-of-state tuition. In some cases, we would assist undocumented students categorized as international students. Every student appointment was a unique case. Not being able students who are also the university's client was frustrating because they would pay so much in-state tuition, yet they could only access some university and campus resources. There was a lack of knowledge of how the university was implementing and practicing in-state tuition policies. In addition, the way undocumented students participate in college activities are also limited. For example, undocumented students are not able to fully participate and enjoy the travel programs offered by the Learning Abroad office or any gain any international experience if it is part of their major's requirement. Enjoying those kinds of opportunities is also a critical component of obtaining professional experience. Out-of-country professional experiences is not an option for undocumented students further limiting internship and career opportunities; institutions need to comprehend the social, political, legal, and economic obstacles undocumented students face outside university perimeters. Often, these unique college experiences are not told; therefore, support services miss out on opportunities to fully serve students. My growing-up experiences helped me better assist and advise my students at the institutional level. I approach my case study from an asset-based approach informed by my critical raced-gendered epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

According to Delgado Bernal (2002), a critical raced-gendered epistemology "Allows educational researchers to "bring together understandings of epistemologies and pedagogies to imagine how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality are braided with cultural knowledge,

practices, spirituality, formal education, and the law" (Gonzalez, 2001,p.643; Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 115). This sociopolitical consciousness informs how I see and understand the world. Although this research is personal, I am aware, as a researcher and educator, that it is my ethical responsibility to prioritize the experiences and stories of those who decide to participate in my study. "For too long, the histories, experiences, and languages of students of color have been devalued, misinterpreted [and] omitted from [higher education] settings (Delgado Bernal, 2002; p. 105). I recognize that I am not undocumented and have the power as an interviewer being a U.S. citizen and graduate student. Since I have not experienced the lived realities of being undocumented, I rely on the critical reflections of Villenas (1996), who refers to herself as the colonized and colonizer. This dynamic is why I rely on frameworks to remind me to continuously engage in reflexivity. I conduct this case study hoping that institutions, stakeholders, and state and federal policymakers see the list of barriers that undocumented students face when pursuing higher education. With a pen stroke, it can all change;. At the same time that occurs, I will continue to share how the intricate relationship between education and immigration policy negatively impacts the lives and resources of undocumented students and their families.

Introduction

My qualitative case study aims to understand the complex relationship between education and immigration policy that has gridlock access to higher education for undocumented students in the U.S. It is essential to document how resources are created and developed when it comes to serving minoritized populations at institutions of higher education because these centers operate and develop under various organizational models depending on the historical, social, political

and cultural context of the time the [resource center] was established, as well as how the center has evolved [in its evolving environments] (p.15, Lozano, 2010). A majority of scholarship (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Bjorklund, 2018; Nienhusser & Espino, 2017) focuses on the college-going experiences of undocumented students and the way policies obstruct access and opportunity, and while there is a growing literature on the development of USRCs (Cisneros et al., 2021; Cisneros & Rivarola, 2020b; Cisneros & Valdivia, n.d., 2020; Manalo-Pedro, 2018; Rosas, n.d.; Sanchez & So, 2015) much of the research is focused on the state of California. In this chapter, I detail the study's research design and rationale. Then I provide an overview of the strategies of inquiry. Lastly, I discuss the ethical issues, credibility, and trustworthiness associated with my study design.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study attempts to contribute to the literature by examining the following guiding research questions:

1. What were the major processes, actions, and decisions that led to the creation of the USRC at Mountain West University?
    - Who were the major players that led to its development, and what strategies did they utilize that led to the USRC's development? How did the key university stakeholders initiate its establishment, and what roles did they play in institutionalizing the Center on campus?
2. What student services were initially provided by the USRC?
    - How did these services evolve over the first three years, and how did the staffing and resources align with its mission?

3. What socio-political forces influenced the creation and development of the USRC during this period?
    - What forces at the federal and state-level influence the creation of the center in its local context?

Research Design

The need to examine and document the development of USRCs is critical. Having the presence of a USRC on a college campus demonstrates symbolically that the institution advocates for undocumented students while at the same time acknowledging that inequities exist on campus. A study by Chen (2013) highlighted that university staff was critical in supporting undocumented students. The expansion of USRCs is a step toward supporting undocumented students, but what needs to be documented is how these centers are being expanded. How these centers are growing does not mean that the sociopolitical realities or institutional culture toward undocumented students and immigrants are shifting to be more undocufriendly (Southern, 2016). The way other USRCs have expanded has depended a lot on the sociopolitical position of the state on undocumented people and immigrants. California is a prime example because the state has the majority of USRCs compared to any other U.S. state, and they have more immigrant-friendly laws. Utah, on the other hand, the location of my case study, is a more conservative state, and at the time, in 2017, it was the only USRC in Utah. I also want to conduct this case study to understand how colleges and campuses become undocufriendly (Suárez-Oroco et al., 2015). Based on a report by Cisneros and Valdivia (2019), they argue that it is essential to document the emergence of USRCs across the US to capture how support services and

institutions adopt policies and practices related to undocumented students' success at the institutional level. Lozano (2010) points out that culture centers consistently compete with other academic units on campus to secure funding and resources. It is essential to know how institutions become intentional about creating systems of support

Immigration scholars (see Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020b; Flores & Horn, 2009; Gonzales, 2015; Murillo, 2021; Valenzuela et al., 2015) call on colleges and universities to increase their competence and capacity to serve undocumented students. Although undocumented students succeed in higher education despite various institutional, political, and social barriers-- institutions cannot still serve students without legal status. Understanding how USRCs are conceptualized at the institutional level can provide significant insight into how undocumented student policy design is framed across public and private universities. Conducting this intrinsic case study will help me understand how these support systems have been institutionalized since 2017. The research questions I utilize for this case study are inherently process-based. I want to understand the policy design of USRCs within institutions. After all, policies reflect who has the power within the social hierarchy, and these power relationships exist in systematic educational structures. Since schools have the most power, these messages are expressed and conveyed via administrators and campus stakeholders' leadership.

However, full-time staff professionals, student activists, and advocates have also played a significant role in pressuring campus leaders and state legislature to construct sound policies so undocumented students can access education to a certain extent. Proactive university administrations are beginning to fund and examine how they can center the needs of undocumented students by either hiring full-time professional staff members, designating

physical spaces, consolidating student services, or even in some colleges and universities, developing a new USRC.

These newly constituted physical spaces need to be better understood because society's stance on immigration shifts with U.S. political elections. Cisneros and Valdivia (2018) released the first report on USRCs on college campuses via the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, stating that more research is needed to understand the true impact of these new centers on public and private campuses. Essentially USRCs are extensions and part of the legacy of cultural centers. In other words, support services for undocumented students were created out of necessity due to their exclusion. Institutions of higher education are not isolated organizations. They function in ways shaped by people's actions, social systems, and oppressive ideologies. As a society, we are socialized to believe that post-secondary education is the way toward upward mobility. Yet, school systems continue to fail undocumented students because exclusionary federal, state, and local practices prohibit full access to opportunities and resources at these institutional types.

Policies and practices are designed to foster student success rather than limit undocumented students' full potential as contributing members of society. Ironically, the same institutions that take away educational opportunities simultaneously have prided themselves in providing and creating access and safe spaces for undocumented students. Garcia (2019) explains that inequities persist in the educational pipeline rooted in the racialization process of society, and these historical actions have blocked and prevented the academic success of undocumented students. Conducting a case study design allows me to see the external forces outside university policies that inform how support services develop. Using a qualitative case

study design will help me describe the complicated and complex narrative associated with the gray areas of education and immigration policy.

Defining a Case Study

This intrinsic case study explores how a USRC developed in the Mountain West using an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 2000). Intrinsic provides critical insight into a particular case of interest to create new knowledge (Stake, 1995). My rationale for this case study is to better understand the primary processes, actions, and decisions that led to a USRC. My research design was influenced by Rosa's (2020) intrinsic case study design. Her case study was conducted at a large, public, four-year institution that had a significant number of undocumented students and also developed as a result of advocacy by students' efforts and staff. Although Rosa's (2020) intrinsic case study does not focus on the development process of the USRC, hers focused on understanding the role of a USRC at Westside University to know if the USRC influenced students' college-going experiences. Similar in nature, my case study focuses on the development process and is bounded by the first three years of the USRC at Mountain West University. Stake, Yin, and Merriam argue that case studies must have multiple sources to accurately depict the phenomena. A case study is bounded by a single unit, a system, or space and time (Hancock et al., 2021). To provide triangulation, I used various data sources such as the gathering of interviews, strategic plan, mission and goals of USRC, campus-wide announcement and my personal notes--anything related to USRC development. Case studies can serve as learning instruments to improve and build knowledge of contextual and social conditions of specific settings. An advantage of case study methodology is that it provides a flexible approach to the data collection process. A more than in-depth analysis is used to explore complex phenomena like social processes, organizational behavior, and decision-making processes. Yin (2018)

suggests that case studies can influence policymaking and procedures directly, making them valuable tools for research. Since the 1980s (Nath, 2005), case study design has been introduced into the field of education, making it possible to; influence stakeholders to make policy changes at the local and federal levels. Generally, case studies are narrative and focus on exploring specific settings (Cousin, 2006).

Critical Elements for Case Study

The critical elements of a case study, according to Yin (2003); (a) should be to study to answer "how and "why" questions; (b) the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions because they believe they are relevant to the phenomenon or study; and (c) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yazan, 2015). These approaches require the case study to be rich in description and capture multiple realities and meanings within settings (Cousin, 2015). Yin (1981, 2014) introduced the idea that case study methodology is appropriate when "an empirical inquiry" examines a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context--in other words looking at a case in real time. However, Yin believes in having a tight, structured design, whereas Stakes argues for a more flexible approach that allows for changes if needed after research is conducted (Yazan, 2020). I specifically follow the Stakes approach. I decided to implement this flexible approach because the sociopolitical climate shifts constantly, and so is this pandemic. Stake (1995) refers to a case study as a methodological approach to examine and explore the complexity of a single case and the "understand[ing] its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). From his point of view, there are two approaches to conducting a case study; there is an intrinsic and instrumental case study (Stake,

1995). Intrinsic focuses on the case (entity, system, program) itself, whereas instrumental (issues related to area of focus), the researcher can make generalizations from the case study itself and form new knowledge and understandings. I conducted an intrinsic case study design to effectively depict an accurate picture of an organization and understand the decision-making process of USRC development within an institutional entity. Ultimately, case studies have the power to highlight neglected issues in higher education that can help other educators make sense of "what is going on." Conducting case studies allows the researcher to delve deep into the political, social, moral, and ethical issues (Nath, 2005).

Capturing a snapshot of the (1) conditions that motivated the development of support services for undocumented students and (2) outlining and describing the support services provided to and for undocumented students at MWU, specifically during the first three years of its existence from 2017 to 2020 bounds my case study by space and time. I will examine the implementation waves throughout three years, 2017-2020. Below, I provide the implementation phases for MWU's USRC. The USRC first opened in 2017. The vision by year four at MWU's USRC consists of having a Director/Program Manager, Program Coordinator, Future-Student and Families Liaison, Two Graduate Assistants, and Two Undergraduate Dream Ambassadors. I have received the MWU'S USRC proposal (2017) to determine this. Below, I share the Five-Year Plan to further contextualize my research setting.

Study Context and Site Selection

Location and Site

The site selected for this study is Mountain West University (MSU), a public four-year university and is the state's oldest, largest, and established research 1 university. Utah's higher

education system has had an increase in undocumented students enrolling at MWU, and the USRC is in its nascent stages of institutionalization. An overwhelming majority of leaders and decision-makers are white cis men. While a majority of people who are “unauthorized” reside across California (2.2 million largest population), Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois, Utah has a sizable population of 95,000 people who do not have legal status (Pew Research Center, 2019). In Utah, 90.6% are white, 14.4% are Hispanic or Latinx, 1.5% are Black or African American, 1.6% are American Indian, 2.7% are Asian or Asian American, and 1.1% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In comparison, 2.6% identify as two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau). Over the past 20 years, legislators and policymakers have pushed the passing and enactment of immigration-related policies that impact educational access. The three state-specific policies that affect educational access are (H.B 144: Exemption from Nonresident Tuition (2002); S.B. 81 Illegal Immigration (2008); HB 497: Utah Illegal Immigration Enforcement Act (2011); SB 253: Exceptions for Privately Funded Scholarships (2015). These current state policies complicate the path toward higher education, not including federal guidelines.

I selected the State of Utah because it was the first among other states to adopt an in-state tuition policy in 2002 that allowed Utah high school students the opportunity to attend the nine major public institutions of the state under specific provisions (Castrellón, 2019). While 82% of undocumented students attend public post-secondary institutions, research shows that approximately 60 USRCs exist nationwide, with 47 located in California. Undocumented resource centers have been developing in certain pockets of the U.S., with more located in the West in states like Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Oregon, and Texas. Support services for each resource center are based on the state's laws, policies, and immigrant climate. For example, while

Utah is unique because of its conservative nature when discussing undocumented resources, Republican Senator Orrin Hatch was the first in the nation to draft an early version of the DREAM Act.

Additionally, Utah is an ideal candidate for this dissertation because of its official designation as a refugee and "immigrant-friendly" state. Despite the support of Republican Hatch for the first DREAM Act and Utah's official welcoming intention for newcomers, it took 15 years to have developed its first USRC. With the growing number of unauthorized individuals in Utah and the supportive nature of specific state officials towards newcomers, this dissertation case study explores the initial decisions and actions that led to the development of the USRC at Mountain West University. The legal recognition requires an investigation of how key stakeholders implemented and initiated new support services on campus based on legal status.

Participants

One of the ways I primarily gathered participants for my case study was by looking first at the USRC proposal and leveraging the professional relationships I built over the years as a student and employee at the USRC at MWU. The people who signed the USRC proposal varied from professional staff, upper administration, and students. To capture a richer narrative of how the USRC developed, I also implemented snowball sampling to obtain the full picture and document historical information as accurately as possible. My intention with this strategy was to ask my participants if they recommended other people that I should interview for my study. Implementing snowball sampling allowed me to get a better sense, and feel-- of factors from the people and organizations that USRC advocates were part of the process. The participants I

gathered included people who work directly with equity and diversity, former administrators, former directors and former student activists, and student affairs professionals from other cultural centers on campus. Initially, I had planned on conducting eight semi-structured interviews but instead conducted twelve. Below on Table 1. I list my participants.

Table 1.

Number of Interview Participants by Categories

Participant Category	Total No. of Interviewees
Former student activists	4
USRC Directors front line staff members	2
Student affairs professionals	2
Student affairs upper-level administration	4
Total	12

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted some interviews virtually via Zoom and in-person. Using qualitative interview protocols, I conducted a round of interviews in three months (June, July, and August). I provided participants with an informed consent process in which I described the study, risks, and rewards. To protect the identities of my participants, I only audio recorded my interviews, did not include their real names in any of the data documents or audio recordings, and also provided pseudonyms throughout the case study. The interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Upon receiving an email confirmation of my initial invitation, I sent an informed consent of my study.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews

Following qualitative protocol, the interviews took place wherever the participant felt most comfortable, either via Zoom or in-person, or by phone. Once participants felt comfortable, I began the semi-structured interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which ranged from 45-75 minutes, and were audio recorded either in-person, via phone call, or Zoom platform with the participant's consent. Some of the questions I asked included the USRC's origin and operating mission. Further, to protect the identities of my participants, I used pseudonyms like "Student 1" & "Administrator 1" to identify what category of participants I coded. To maintain anonymity in my study and protect participants' identities and any type of legal action from campus police or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), I stored my interviews in an external hard drive and deleted respondents' identities after completing my study.

For my data analysis methods, I collected four sources of data: (a) interviews, (b) an examination of documents, and (c) a reflection journal. After conducting semi-structured interviews, I followed qualitative protocol and transcribed and coded the interviews manually (Saldaña, 2016). First, I did what Saldaña (2016) calls holistic coding. I uploaded my transcribed documents on my drive and coded them electronically manually. I organized my data in an Excel spreadsheet and included entries and participants' responses in themes like support, identity, and institutional racism. As I read the excerpts on the right side of my documents I added comments and sentence descriptions in the first and second rounds. I would select passages and insert comments which were my codes and include them in my Excel spreadsheet. I implemented the same process for all twelve interviews and then put all the codes and descriptions in an Excel spreadsheet. Every interview had about 30-60 codes, and I put them into themes in my Excel spreadsheet. I came up with 19 themes which ranged from student activism, partnerships,

development process, and political climate Once I analyzed and coded data, I followed Saldaña's (2016) code-to-theory model for qualitative research, which is (1) coding the data; (2) categorizing the data; (3) theming the data. To narrow my thematic analysis, I will also utilize Dedoose software to facilitate themes' coding and manage my data through a secure, password-protected, and encrypted project management system. This method allowed me to analyze more critically and create codes completing my data collection processes by summer 2022.

Self-Reflective Journal

What happens when you become the researcher of your own community? As a Mexicana qualitative researcher, holding the identity of a first-generation college student from a mixed-status family has allowed me to step into places and spaces that the contours of academia are not familiar with. As a novice researcher, I am intentional about navigating these new spaces. Conducting research translates into having the power to make meaning of other people's experiences. Given that doing research is a way to construct new forms of knowledge, a lack of consciousness related to class, race, and gender impacts the relationship between the researcher and participant (Seidman, 2019). Since I am part of the same institutions that limit access to undocumented students, and doing research is a way to construct new forms of knowledge, I engaged in critical self-reflection. I kept a journal as I analyzed my data and interviewed participants. Through this process, I put into perspective the dynamics of being a researcher who does research in my own community. Villenas (1996) affirms the importance of critical self-reflection and knowing one's identity to dismantle and challenge oppressive structures because otherwise, as researchers, we become their tool. She urges educators and researchers to engage in critical self-reflection because the colonizer and the colonized paradox complicates how

institutions consume and use people's knowledge. Engaging in this process will help increase my consciousness of issues related to class, race, citizenship, and gender and the theoretical frameworks of CRT and LatCrit. It also helped me better understand the relationship between the researcher and the participant's relationship (Seidman, 2019; Villenas, 1996).

Documents and Archival Data

In addition to using semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019), I will gather additional information and review documents to help contextualize programs and initiatives implemented in the first three years to help answer and formulate my research questions. For the document analysis process, I collected documents from the (a) USRC website, (b) campus newspapers, (c) USRC strategic plan (Five-Year-Plan) (d) planning meeting notes from the president's office. I analyze multiple sources to better understand the major processes, actions, and decisions that led to the creation of the USRC. Gathering these sources can be valuable in helping me see how services evolved over the first three years and whether their staffing and resources aligned with its mission.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was continuous throughout my study. The data I collected via interviews and documents were coded manually (Saldaña, 2016) and was my method of providing a descriptive, detailed, and rich understanding of the major processes, and actions that led to the creation of the USRC at Mountain West University. I manually organized and coded my data. After I completed the transcriptions, I followed Saldaña's (2016) code-to-theory model for qualitative research. I searched for themes and revisited my reflective journal for a deeper

analysis. Before I delved into my data, I did a brain dump of my preliminary findings and wrote analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016). As I prepared for my case study, as a qualitative researcher, I used an iterative process (Maxwell, 2013) to create a deeper meaning within the data I came up with a list of "pre-codes" (Layder, 1998) to find illustrative examples in my case study. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. After conducting a thematic analysis, I provided what Clifford Geerz (1983) calls a "thick description."

Ethical Issues

In my position as a researcher for this project, I will ultimately benefit from this case study (Estrada Calderón et al., 2023). Although my research topic is personal, I use my privilege as a U.S. citizen to create dialogue and awareness on how to better support, advocate and develop support services for undocumented students in higher education. Having insider knowledge and previously working at MWU's USRC, I will be upfront about my research intentions: not to exploit but to illuminate the geographical and systematic challenges that limit the success of undocumented students. I hope to collaborate with others based on the results of my project so USRC members, student affairs professionals, and community members can innovate support services across the country.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

To reduce bias and risk chance associations, I built the trustworthiness of my work by implementing triangulation through the collection of documents (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Manalo-Pedro, 2018) where the data was reviewed for consistency. This conscious process also aligns with the intentions of CRT by sharing counter-narratives to the stereotypical portrayal of

undocumented students and the immigrant justice movement (Manalo-Pedro, 2018). In addition, because of my personal relationships with previous staff, student participants may provide me with the “best” or “appropriate” answers. In addition, I have previously established relationships with high-level administrators to demonstrate how supports look within the hierarchical and organizational structure. Thus, from the beginning, I was transparent about the intentions of this case study.

CHAPTER 4: MAJOR PLAYERS AND STRATEGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE USRC

INTRODUCTION

> I remember 10 of us or something or a ton of us literally walked into her office, and we just sat down and came with our thick-ass proposal and we [the other student leaders] kind of looked at each other… I remember that the email or invitation was originally just for Benjamin and Melissa or only a couple of us. And we told everyone in the group to just come with us. And I remember 10 of us or something or a ton of us literally walked into her [senior leader's] office. - Sebastian, member of the SOMOS student group

When Sebastian, a member of the student group called SOMOS Dreamers, and a group of his peers walked into Dr. In Infante's office, they were helping found an undocumented resource center (USRC) in the Mountain West region of the United States. Benjamin, a Latine/x undergraduate student at a predominately white institution (PWI), was frustrated with lack of resources available to undocumented students on his campus. Across the United States and at different university campuses, students were speaking out and being critical of the education they were receiving. Challenging universities to keep their promises regarding access to higher education, funding, and student support services, these student leaders were explicitly arguing to access opportunities that would allow them to live up to their fullest potential and demanding that university leaders be more student-centered when support services were proposed. They were also imploring leaders in positions of power to leverage their privilege, provide equitable resources, and develop programs that would provide opportunities for students, especially those impacted by unjust immigration and educational policies.

The SOMOS Dreamers leaders who participated in my study and who I interviewed did what many may deem impossible. Along with a group of first-generation college students, they

equipped themselves with institutional knowledge. They organized and positioned themselves to argue for establishing and centralizing support services for undocumented students. Their student activism is one of the reasons why the USRC at MWU was founded, and their student organization was a primary driver in encouraging and empowering immigrant and first-generation college students to continue pursuing a college education.

As I write this section, I recall when I met my participants for this study. I was working at the USRC at MWU as a graduate assistant. MWU's USRC helped advise the SOMOS Dreamers student group. Throughout my time at the center, I cultivated relationships with other student affairs professionals on campus and was able to connect via cross-collaboration. The changing political landscape has impacted immigration policy affecting how people access education, so it was vital in my role as the graduate assistant to cultivate campus partnerships. That dynamic allowed me to immerse myself in this case study fully. This study utilized case study methodology to facilitate the depth of understanding of how support services for undocumented students develop in predominantly white institutions.

Per the Institutional Review Board's approval of this study at the University of Texas at San Antonio, as well as the site of the study, all participants, institutional offices, and departments have been assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews via Zoom and two in-person in an open area. I completed a round of interviews during June, July, and August in the summer of 2022. To protect the identities of my participants, I audio-recorded and did not include any of their names or personal information in my data collection process. The interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. I invited my participants to interview via email and text message. The interviews were scheduled based on participant availability, and there was no pre-established order. Each

participant brought a different perspective to this case study; I journaled my thoughts about the interview process after each interview after each interview. The discussions were in a library and two coffee shops in Salt Lake. Below I list the participant's pseudonyms and their current or relevant professional roles indicated in Table 2.

Participants Demographics

Major Players	**Position**
Francisco	USRC Program Manager
Gonzalo	USRC Director
Lono	University Staff
Beatriz	SOMOS Member
Benjamin	SOMOS Member
Sebastian	SOMOS Member
Dr. Ismael Infante	Vice President for Equity & Diversity
Dr. Hilary Madris	Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Studies
Dr. Maria Jose Viramontes	Vice President for the Division of Equity & Diversity
Dr. Roberto Lozano	Assistant Vice President for the Division of Equity & Diversity

In this chapter, I encapsulate the perspectives of these students, describe their stories, and share the strategies they utilized and enacted by the major players who influenced and drove the creation and development of the USRC. These players prompted the creation and assisted in developing the proposal that ultimately became the undocumented resource center at this public institution. I document and historize how these students consistently reminded university leaders

to formalize institutional support for undocumented people for many decades. SOMOS Dreamers, a university student group, was key in pushing forward the founding of the undocumented student resource center at the university.

The Case Study Site: Mountain West University

During the lead-up to the creation of the USRC, approximately forty students held weekly meetings to discuss issues about the undocumented community on campus. Students from MECHA, the First-Gen Scholars Program, and the Black Cultural Center came together to form SOMOS Dreamers, a new group that had never been formed. At the time, no specific student group focused on undocumented issues on campus. Despite their consistent activism, the efforts to institutionalize the center did not happen overnight. It happened slowly over time. From 2015 to January 2017, the political environment in Utah and nationwide sparked students to rise and demand a more equitable education. In the summer of 2014, students began protesting for racial justice, beginning in Ferguson, Missouri, after the murder at the hands of law enforcement of Michael Brown, into the fall of 2020, after another police murder and the airing of the viral video of George Floyd. In between those years, campuses saw a dramatic increase in student uprisings. Increased police brutality and racial injustices under the Trump era led to 472 administrative changes, including immigration policies (Bolter, Israel & Pierce, 2022). When Trump took office in 2017, his administration stifled the nation's civil and human rights progress. On January 27, 2017, he implemented discriminatory policies against Muslims and refugees, not allowing them into the U.S; on February 21, 2017, the Department of Homeland Security updated its guidance on how immigration policies are enforced, which led to high amounts of people being subjected to detention and deportation; on March 6, 2017,

updated Muslim Ban by limited travel to the U.S to people who are citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen which led to a decrease in the admission of refugee individuals from that region; on March 16, 2017, Trump released the proposed budget to begin the construction of a border wall in the U.S-Mexico Border; on September 5, 2017, Attorney general sessions announced the removal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program; on October 8, 2017, stalled a bipartisan agreement to protect undocumented students legally and his administration demanded Central Americans to be deported including children seeking asylum (Trump Administration Civil and Human Rights Rollback, 2022).

In the midst of this social unrest and in reaction to presidential mandates such as these, Mountain West University (MWU) sought to be proactive and hosted a forum to listen to students' concerns. It was also in January 2017 that Mountain West University opened the doors of the first undocumented resource center in the state. Meeting as a group almost five years after its development, I gathered its founding members over Zoom to listen to their stories on how they pushed university leaders to take further action and to prioritize the academic success of undocumented students. Brave, bold, and strategic in their approach, these students understood that they first needed to get their institution to recognize and legitimize the needs of undocumented students if they were to have their proposal for a center accepted. It would not be easy, yet students navigated a contentious political atmosphere while questioning just how progressive the higher education systems were and how they were not.

With social capital and experiential knowledge, SOMOS Dreamers secured a $5000 operating budget, a private office, and space to host small group meetings in a World War II-era wooden building. Within months, the room received six chairs, a small sofa, a circled working table, a small corner desk, a bookshelf, and a part-time funded graduate assistant. While this

would be a temporary-permanent space, students continued to push for a more centralized private location. Many other members only saw the fruit of their labor after graduating.

As microcosms of society, campuses across the U.S. have seen increased student activism during these years. This generation of students has targeted their messages toward campus leaders, senior administrators, and college presidents (Burrows, 2019; Kantamneni et al., 2016; Nájera, 2020; Streitwieser et al., 2020). This type of activism is not new in higher education. For decades, students have been fighting inequitable treatment on college campuses and have fought to create college degrees like Chicanx/Latinx Studies, Black and African American Studies, and Mexican American Studies (Patton, 2010). Using activism to provoke critical consciousness and begin conversations about equity and access is labor-intensive, slow, and can be long. College students who bridge their critical consciousness with their experiences are powerful advocates. In this case, the overall goal of the student leaders was to centralize support services for undocumented students. These particular students could effectively strategize because they understood much of how these systems of oppression had shaped their college experience and had become attuned to how one can access the necessary resources.

Mountain West University (MWU) has existed on a hill overlooking the city since February 28, 1850. Originally named the University of the Desert, it was the largest post-secondary institution West of the Missouri River at its founding (Thompson, 1994). With a campus size of approximately 1,600 acres, MWU serves about 32,000 students. The majority of its student population comes from local communities, 31% of its freshmen enrollment are domestic students. Also like a number of other state institutions of higher education, MWU's demographics are shifting rapidly. Walking onto campus on a hazy summer morning, I decided to take a walk with a researcher lens. The same campus I walked across as an undergraduate felt

different this morning, almost ten years to the day that I came onto campus as a first-year student. Feeling grateful, I breathed deeply, smelled the fresh-cut grass, and listened to birds chirping. Taking in the moment, I walked towards the library plaza past the flowerbeds between the walkways. I could hear *cumbia* in the distance. I looked up, and there was a group of gentlemen fixing something on the roof of the science building. Jotting some notes in my notebook, I see the library and hear the water fountains. This campus is truly breathtaking. I remembered why I loved coming here as an undergraduate. From any location on campus, one can see the Rocky Mountains. MWU’s architectural design shows its appreciation of the natural landscape.

Utah Policy Context

Immigrants are integral to Utah’s economy. Utah has about 95,000 undocumented immigrants, 38% of its immigrant population and 3% of the total state population (American Education Council, 2020). Unsurprisingly, students at a large public research institution decided to mobilize and propose an Undocumented Resource Center. A majority of Utah’s residents have European ancestry. Primarily known for leading the world for people of the Mormon faith--Utah has a complex history like the rest of the U.S. Originally the ancestral homelands of the Shoshone, Paiute, Goshute, and Ute Tribes. Utah has welcomed many immigrants through the Mormon Church and increasingly welcoming immigrants from other backgrounds. So much so that the state created a Compact for Immigration Reform where Mormon and business leaders, community, and other faith groups crafted five principles for discussing immigration reform in Utah. The compact acknowledges that 1) immigration is a federal policy issue, 2) local law enforcement should go after only dangerous criminals, 3) family immigration is essential, 4)

immigrants add to the local economy, and 5) that Utah should welcome immigrants (Immigration Impact, 2010). These guiding principles inform local policymakers' decision-making to address barriers in the state. Although California leads in spearheading the development of services for undocumented students and communities, Utah has, too, in other ways.

Politically conservative and headquarters to the global proselytizing efforts of the LDS Church, the state ironically has a large population of immigrants, mainly from Mexico, due to the 2000 USA Olympics (Perlich, 2004) and has for several years been a refugee resettlement city. The early nineties were transformative for Utah’s economy. According to a census report in 1970, Utah’s racial diversity did not exceed 2 percent (Perlich, 2004). The Second Great Migration Wave changed Utah’s monolithic culture and brought ethnic and racial diversity. According to the Higher Education Immigration Portal, Utah is comprehensive regarding providing access to education for undocumented students. Able to operate bipartisanly, immigrant entrepreneurs of Utah generate about $349 million of business income, and their taxpayer money fund social programs like Medicare and Social Security which is inaccessible to them (New American Economy, 2020). Nationally, about 1.8% of students in higher education are undocumented, and in Utah, demographers estimated that about 1000+ students are pursuing a bachelor's degree on college campuses. Although most anti-immigrant legislation failed in Utah (Garcia Torres, 2010), Utah’s sociopolitical structure is neutral but varies by case and local administration.

In addition, public and private sector leaders have collaborated to launch the New American Task Force established by a group of offices: the Governor's Office, Center for Immigration Assistance, the Economic Development Corporation of Utah, and the Center for Economic Opportunity and Belonging, the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce and the World

Trade Center of Utah, --together they developed a comprehensive strategy create more opportunities in the states economic, social, educational, and civic sectors. Today, many American workers work at immigrant-founded and owned companies. One could say with compactness that "Utahns understand that welcoming isn't just a moral imperative, it's an economic opportunity" (Garcia Torres, 2010). This collaborative strategy has allowed for the retention of global and local talent, making this initiative ideal for helping workers find jobs in the state.

This collaboration between local businesses, communities, and dominant faith groups reinforces that being inclusive of different legal backgrounds is a human rights issue and a solution to the growing labor demands of the state.

Utah is a Republican trifecta--the Republican Party controls the office of the governor, attorney general, and both sides of the legislature (Party Control of Utah State Government, 2023). Politically, Republicans control the House of Representatives and Senate in Utah (U.S. Census, 2020). Industries such as manufacturing, government, professional services, and retail contribute to Utah's local economy. Although not necessarily known nationally, the state has also historically had the lowest unemployment rate compared to the rest of the nation. Among those who are unemployed at higher rates include those who identify as Hispanic. If eligible, undocumented students in Utah have access to post-secondary education in four key policy areas: in-state tuition, state financial aid, professional and occupational licensure, and driver's licenses

Among another set of policies and laws that add to the state context is Utah House Bill (H.B.) 144. It is a policy signed into law on March 26, 2002, that allows undocumented and DACA recipients to pay in-state tuition if individuals meet specific eligibility requirements. The

second law, Senate Bill (S.B. 111), permits undocumented students to access in-state tuition if they file an affidavit with the institution they intend to enroll in and must promise to adjust their immigration status as soon as possible. In addition, a third law, Senate Bill (S.B) 253, was signed into law in March 2015 and allows DACA recipients to access privately funded scholarships administered via public institutions regardless of their immigration status. Regarding employment, the Utah Supreme Court ruled on December 9, 2019, that only DACA-eligible residents can be admitted to the Utah Bar if they meet admission criteria from the law school. Another policy allows undocumented people to contribute about $35.3 million in federal taxes and locally about $25 million (Higher Ed Immigration Portal, 2022).

University Context

The university opened its doors only to white men in 1850, this large campus holds seventeen colleges, and its buildings vary in architecture. With connections worldwide and high rankings, by 1990, MWU's faculty's research had generated 57 companies (Thompson, 1994). In addition, the university is also home to the state's public television and radio station and is essential to the well-being of Utah's economy. Mostly new buildings; the university immediately invested a lot in its image. The names of buildings tell guests who have had opportunities to participate in the knowledge discovery process. More domestic first-year students are attending MWU and seeing this information on the presidential dashboard. I could see how steadily the number of first-year students of color increased at the MWU. Filled with life, you can find students walking, biking, and skating to school. MWU is known for Housing a majority of Among the first universities within the U.S to adopt Utah's in-state-tuition policy in 2002-- any

Utah high school student attends one of the nine public institutions in the state of Utah could be eligible for in-state-tuition (Castrellón, 2019).

Students at MWU are among the 427,000 students who are undocumented across higher education institutions. Within the Utah System of Higher Education, about 1,300 undocumented students attend their college campuses (Castrellón, 2018), and that number is increasing. Mountain West University is located in Salt Lake County and has a total enrollment of about 33,000 students. Demographically, the university has approximately 4,000 Hispanics/Latinx. Recruiting and enrolling undocumented students on college campuses requires staffing, knowledgeable staff, and critical services. Mountain West University was one of the many institutions that attempted to host a forum to hear students' concerns amidst the spark of the Black Lives Matter movement. In efforts to keep university racial tensions low, MWU was proactive in fostering dialogue, ultimately creating a student protest. Many student groups during this time frame took action. They demanded that the university provide diversity training for faculty and staff members and prioritize retaining underserved students on campus. The U.S. was also beginning its presidential election, which shifted how immigrants were treated and further restricted by policies. Seeing first-hand the wave of activism on college campuses motivated students at Mountain West University to join the rest of the nation to protest.

THE MAJOR PLAYERS

The participants in my study consisted of administrators, staff, and members of student groups. Several continue to work and attend school at MWU, and some are no longer employed or attend there. The interviews were conducted both in-person and via Zoom, and each

participant determined the location of the in-person interviews. We met at a time, date, and location that was convenient for them and met their availability. Each of the names used is a pseudonym, and their professional roles and departments have also been masked to protect their anonymity. I prioritized interviewing the major players who had a role in the USRC development process. Each of their stories highlights the importance of each leader's power and influence in development. They shared how institutionalizing a USRC while navigating social and political turmoil influences how university leaders perceive it on their priority list is complex, tedious, and not without risk. Many staff who participated in this study eventually left the institution due to what they described as burnout and lack of support.

Francisco

I met Francisco outside a busy Starbucks on a Thursday afternoon at the conclusion of the work day. I took a quick glance at the mountains and tried to enjoy their beauty before we walked in to place our orders. It had been a long week already, and I was looking forward to seeing him after many weeks of not having visited with him. Francisco currently serves as a mid-level student affairs leader in a local community college and is one of the key figures in developing the first undocumented resource center in the State of Utah.

Originally from Belize and a first-generation college student, Francisco possesses a unique knowledge that no one teaches you in a graduate program or that is easily found in books. It comes from personal experience of advocating for himself and his loved ones and friends whose similar situations have challenged him. Francisco's background of working with the community on undocumented immigrant issues, and being an undocumented activist who is

publically open about his status while working in student affairs with undocumented students, has set him apart from many. His background and expertise, and years of commitment to these issues, made him uniquely and personally qualified to be a major player in the forming of the USRC. Identifying as a Latinx, his personal experiences with the educational system as an undocumented person, student, and now professional allowed him to navigate the higher education system along with all the complexity that comes with the legal intricacies of being an undocumented college student and then a young professional. As he shared his lived experiences, we began our conversations on the ways that institutions and university leaders can and should humanize undocumented students.

Francisco himself presented multiple times at task force and committee meetings, visited the board of regents meetings, attended the Utah System of Higher Education meetings, established partnerships with local consulates, visited high schools to share state and university resources, conducted interviews with local media, and established a partnership with the local community college. He was integral in the foundation and development of the USRC. As he described, there were many components in confirming the presence of an undocumented program at the time, including one person and one graduate assistant. Francisco's awareness of navigating multiple social systems simultaneously while also having a presence in the community before the creation of the USRC was also instrumental in securing over $150,000 in scholarships and grants for first-generation, undocumented students. His relationships with advocacy, small business, and immigrant groups in and around the local community benefited the institution financially. Because some of these donors personally knew his work in the community and understood the issues because of the way he was able to educate non-immigrant communities, Francisco was able to garner trust for MWU and position the institution as a safe

institution for the undocumented community. His knowledge of navigating social systems, his cultural awareness, the culturally responsive and bilingual ways he was able to communicate, and his tireless, after-hours availability (including evenings and weekends), ultimately benefited how the USRC strategized and prioritized certain partnerships. His awareness of how these systems clash with undocumented people helped other university staff and administrators make critical decisions about allocating resources and services with the current political climate at the time. Even before starting my research project, I knew that interviewing and learning about Francisco's experience and perspective would be vital for my project.

Francisco served as the starting point of my snowball sampling procedure. He helped fill the timeline of events, pointed me to other professionals who were crucial to the development of the USRC, and provided me with access to archival documents and policies, including the USRC proposal written by the Somos Dreamers, which I discussed and expanded on later in this chapter.

It had been a year since I had seen him, so meeting outside the office and away from the campuses where we worked was good. During our previous work meetings, we would plan events, prepare for meetings, and sometimes vent. In one of our last meetings, Francisco was saying how unfair and racist the media coverage had been regarding the latest DACA inaction occurring in Washington, DC. “It is more racist that they do not give people a path to citizenship.” The media during the 2015-2019 years was hard for undocumented people, Trump's political campaign dehumanized immigrants by painting them as animals and as criminals--ultimately ending DACA and deporting several people like Obama did. I remember jotting down in my notepad the rush of memories that came over me when we met. It was bittersweet because, in this coffee shop, we celebrated and cried several times about our families, early career

challenges, and constant struggles that many in the community could never escape. Sitting with him, I could not believe it had already been four years since we were both strategizing and drafting a letter to campus officials explaining how DACA had been rescinded. While working in the USRC, it was customary for us to write both positive and negative letters about any policy change toward undocumented people at MWU.

As Francisco arrived with an iced coffee for me and a chai latte for him, we greeted each other awkwardly because of the COVID precautions that were still in effect. "How is your family?" I started. The pandemic had been taking a toll on our lives, and the weight of all we had been going through was evident. We were both at different points in our lives, yet he was still the same Francisco, and it was good to see him. He was now working at another university, and I had moved to San Antonio, Texas, to begin my Ph.D. program, but we couldn't help but get caught up a little before getting started, and I thanked him for meeting with me. "Of course. You know, I'll share whatever I know. This is a topic that I live with everyday whether I want to or not." With this, we started the interview.

To begin, I asked him to share a little bit about himself. He stated

> I came to the US at 11. I grew up undocumented. I still am undocumented but have DACA, so I understand the privilege of having that piece of paper. And what got me interested in higher ed was my own undocumented experience, not knowing how to navigate higher ed.

Francisco was able to cultivate campus and community partnerships amidst all this turmoil. He stated, "I had all these connections and networks or all this capital, right, and because of that, we were able to make the Dream Center happen." He collaborated with other professionals and departments in the business school, financial aid office, admissions office,

legal counsel, Graduate School, Career Center, and surrounding community colleges and universities, to name a few. However, as he reflected on his experience developing a center at one point, he did not feel it would be possible to implement a resource center. He shared how he thought the political will and leadership to make the decision to start the center would never happen. Francisco stated, "So it had been in conversations for a while. So people have been-- as soon as I brought it up, maybe even two or three years prior, but it seemed something so distant that would never come to fruition."

Years earlier, students brought concerns to the university administration about the lack of resources for undocumented students at MWU. However, there needed to be a designated space for students to receive undoc-support. Although a handful of professionals on campus knew how to help students navigate the state educational system, Francisco strongly believed that "the campaign of President Trump became the catalyst for school to be like-- for administration to be like, 'We need to support our undocumented students. Let's go ahead and do this.'" During the campaign, one could say that it forced institutions to either show support for undocumented students or stay silent. According to Francisco, his feeling was that MWU's university administration ultimately listened to the students and wanted to understand their needs for multiple reasons. "On one end, students expressed that they needed it." It was helpful to meet with him because he had a valuable perspective on how the USRC went from being a Dream Program to a center within months. However, he gives all the credit to SOMOS Dreamers, the student group that mobilized on campus. He stated:

> In my work with USRCs, I founded the Undocumented Student Resource Center in Utah, but that was all due to student labor. Students wanted it, and then-- administration wanted it, so it was effortless for me to put two and two together and make it happen."

Francisco's organizational knowledge of how the center functions within the institution and the clash of policies at the university, local, state, and federal level government informed his leadership and practice. He was able to navigate multiple spaces where power and privilege were constantly present and spoke candidly about the challenges he faced as the program manager. Although we worked together through one of the most challenging days, I was not always aware of all that he endured. I will, however, always remember the day DACA was rescinded. Students, staff, and faculty came by the center to be with students and just to talk. Weeks earlier, before the Supreme Court verdict, we announced to the campus community that we would hold space for students. However, he found himself in a paradox. While also trying to digest that DACA would be federally phased out amidst the announcement at MWU, he ended up comforting a member of the upper administration while simultaneously wondering how he would be employed if his DACA was ending at the federal level. Francisco states

> I remember the university president coming to our event that we were hosting to hold space for undocumented immigrant students and staff to process the big announcement. So we watched it together. We were all in shock. Some students were really affected and moved by it, not knowing the consequences and what the outcomes meant for their families and loved ones and themselves. And then the college president comes and hugs me and then starts crying on my shoulder, and I had to console him. And I'm still not over that. That was a lot. The fact that here I was, an underpaid undocumented immigrant at his institution of higher ed, being overworked, holding up space for undocumented immigrants affected by the decision, also having to console a grown-ass man with a Ph.D. who was also the college president. And that was not okay. Right?

I also recall an upper-level administrator coming to our event to hold space for students and staff to process the big announcement. Everyone was devastated. There were students in that room who only knew life and whose university experience had been someone with DACA. Others were troubled knowing that their siblings, friends, and family would no longer have access to apply to such a program. We all watched the announcement together and were all in shock. Even though we had a sense that the program would end, it was still sad and devastating to see it materialize in the policy. Although the news was also hard to stomach for Francisco, he was already thinking ahead. He knew that processes had to be integrated within the university-wide system. He recalls

> We had to develop things for students, right, so we developed a list of scholarships for students to access and apply to, and then that had to evolve to students within [Mountain West University] as well as students outside of [Mountain West University] because we were getting requests for both. Then we also had to be more specific about scholarships for grad students and undergrads. We also had to be specific about scholarships for students who didn't qualify for local policies or did. So there were a lot of layers to this. Right?

Even though another battle had been lost, he kept reminding students, staff, faculty, and leaders what was still available at the state level. Institutionalizing services is key for undocumented students. It took so long for advocates, and undocumented students to secure a program like DACA after so much work and Trump made it clear during his campaign that this would come to an end. Now there are about 600,000 DACA recipients left. A lot of students were affected and moved by it, not knowing the consequences and what the outcomes meant for

their families and loved ones and themselves. This ambiguity was familiar to undocumented students or other undocumented professionals on campus. Francisco continued to say,

> The emotional labor we're expected to perform as undocumented immigrant workers on college campuses is beyond our pay. And that's undocumented immigrant professionals in student support centers and custodial and food service staff, too. Our labor is recurrently underrecognized and underpaid. Ultimately, the work of all undocumented immigrant professionals on college campuses leads to undocumented immigrant student success and not just the labor of those of us who are paid to do so exclusively.

About seven months later, he was approved to hire a graduate assistant after opening. To provide context, the USRC began when Trump took office, and DACA was rescinded in its third month of being open for services. Not only did he prioritize the needs of students first, but his attention was also divided between creating new processes for a center and representing a USRC at a PWI PAC-12 institution. However, doing so was not easy for someone living those same realities. Francisco noticed how people would forget that he was also living the same realities as students as a professional. He states, "My average week, and I'm not kidding, was 60 hours a week, right, which essentially led to me having to go to an emergency room and nearly having a heart attack. They told me I had a mini one. And you're welcome to put this down. And that's important to acknowledge and write that this type of exploitation leads to actual health outcomes that are not favorable for undocumented immigrants. And we see that in the workforce. We see that in higher ed. It replicates and mimics what the theory tells us about or the research about employment for undocumented immigrants.

Based on my observations, Francisco deeply cared about students and his community. He knew how to develop strong relationships with students, staff, and faculty and established several

community partnerships. He is fully committed to his students and community. I was intrigued by Francisco's decision to leave the institution because he had planned on staying for a while. What caused him to leave? Ultimately, his work at the USRC led him to get sick; being a highly visible center with lots of institutional and community needs led him to work over 60+ hours a week. There was only one full-time staff advocating, strategizing, advising, training, and developing programming while building a website and building a social presence to keep the community updated and engaged. His ability to collaborate across departments and state institutions in English and Spanish provided critical services for undocumented students, which increased specialized support on campus. This collaborative approach appeared in our conversation several times. The fact that the office needed more resources and high visibility created a lot of pressure on Francisco and future staff. Francisco left Mountain West University in the spring of 2020 due to burnout.

Gonzalo

I met up for my first interview with Gonzalo in the middle of the Summer. At one point, he was also the director of the USRC at MWU. That day, Gonzalo was finishing up a workshop for students in an after-school program, so we caught up in the study room where the workshop had been held. He walked into the space and students immediately greeted him. With his backpack on his shoulder, I observed from the study room and could see how connected he was with his students. As he entered the room, I greeted him, "Hey man, *como haz estado*? (How have you been?)" We both sat down and reconnected by sharing what our families had been doing and catching up on how our day-to-day lives had been going. At the time of the interview, he was no longer working at MWU and had taken on a director role elsewhere. A few months

earlier, I attended his going away party and witnessed students sharing personal anecdotes about how Gonzalo had supported them in their educational journey. This interview, filled with emotion and remembrances, proved to be emotional in that same way.

As with most participants in this study, it was evident that Gonzalo also had strong relationships with his students and their families. It influenced his perspective, practice, and leadership, and he shared just how important his own educational journey and struggle had been in the formation of his leadership and advocacy. I met Gonzalo when I was a student myself, and collaborated with him when I worked at the USRC. We began the interview with him sharing a bit of his background. Gonzalo's parents immigrated to the U.S. from Sonora and Jalisco. Born in Utah, Gonzalo was also a first-generation college student from the West Side of Salt Lake City. Proud of his roots in Mexico, his activist background was an aspect of his identity that informed his perspective. Gonzalo joined the USRC team in the Spring of 2020, bringing his higher education experience with leading a federally funded program and having already built a presence on campus with first-generation college students, he leveraged his cultural and professional capital and was a key player by bringing this expertise.

Working at MWU for over fifth-teen years, he was committed to helping first-generation students of color navigate busy university environments. Before his role at the USRC, he was an associate director leading a federally funded program for first-generation college students. His background in developing support for first-generation college students and working with youth in college access programs made him an active community member in his neighborhood and university community. Gonzalo states,

> My entire educational career has been about access. So whether that's youth access to education, if that's current college students' access to the resources they need, or

> if that's just different community individuals getting access to something that's going to help them progress and go further.

During our interview, he shared how his professional identity was formed:

> It takes a community to run a resource center. We can't have one person in charge of it all, especially someone like myself who does not identify as undocumented. I'm coming in with citizenship privilege, being born and raised here, and understanding the language. My only connection, as I said, was that my friends and family did experience that. I am a son of immigrants. But I am not. And so, even though I stand with and support folks who are immigrants and who are undocumented, I simply don't have that full experience.

Although Gonzalo did not have first-hand experience living the realities that undocumented people are forced to contend with, he was aware of the systematic issues and barriers that students and families face once they are admitted into the institution. Being part of a mixed-status family informed his leadership awareness on how to guide students at MWU. His personal experiences navigating school and college as a first-gen college student allowed him to use his past experiences to share the opportunities and services available to students. Leading a USRC during an ongoing racial pandemic, Gonzalo was solely focused on providing access. He describes access as

> I always set out to provide what I call the theme of access. My entire educational career has been about [creating] access. So whether that's youth access to education, if that's current college students' access to the resources they need, or if that's just different community individuals getting access to something that will help them progress and go further.

Gonzalo understood that many students had to make the hard decision to attend college or help out their families. Listening to Gonzalo discuss his challenges as he tried to allocate more resources for the center shed light on how difficult it is to secure funds and support for newly opened resource centers. I kept thinking as he talked, "How can a center with such high visibility not have a complete team of professionals?" Four years earlier, I had been at the beginning stages of the USRC as a graduate assistant, and it pained me to hear the second director was also having similar issues as Gonzalo.

He states, "It took me about a year to finally get the approval of a second full-time person. I started that month, a couple of weeks after I started there. I petitioned to start another full-time position in the USRC." Entering year three after the center opened in 2017, the USRC could not secure a second full-time person. However, there needed to be a pipeline of students to cover the graduate assistant role that had been previously filled. The first director, Fransico, also pushed for the hire of a second staff member to be full-time since its initiation but was granted a to offer a graduate assistant position until more funds came in. In year three, since its inception, the second director also pushed for hiring a second full-time person, and it was successful but tedious. I was able to sense his frustration because there were times he got emotional.

While waiting for approval for another full-time staff member, he was "able to secure positions for other folks, part-time or graduate assistantships, things like that. The graduate assistantship (GA) was already established before I boarded, so we had to renew that. But I took the opportunity for the previous GA when I was there, and when she graduated, I kept her on board. She was no longer a student, so she was just a part-time employee. And then, when she left, I just kept that position open. So we had a part-time person that's not a student, which I think

was great because they could still dedicate their whole time to working at the Dream Center. They didn't have to worry about being a student."

Short after that, they were able to secure a second graduate assistant who was also a student and an undergraduate assistant who "became king of the advising assistant, so a person who helped us book appointments, and get with the students, and initially create those success plans with them so that when they come to the program coordinator or me later, we were the actual advisors supporting them in that. But that helped so much because the bulk of the work was created before it got to the directors. You know what I mean?" This strategy helped alleviate some stress and allowed him to focus on supporting the staff he was building, awaiting more approval of funds. However, the waiting time meant Gonzalo was spread out trying to advocate and serve. While he still needed leadership approval to hire a program coordinator to help him with community outreach, he implemented a new clause in the scholarships that students were awarded. It required that students assist the USRC throughout the semester.

Since the USRC needed more critical support structures like other full-time employees, the USRC at MWU relied on students planning fundraising centers. Adding a service clause to the scholarship requirement created another support structure for students and alleviated some stress from Gonzalo. Gonzalo remembers how he came up with the strategy. He remembers it this way:

> I didn't have a certain amount of hours or pay because it's not a job. But that person who got that [opportunity], [their] [title] [would] call them a student leader. The student leader had some design experience, so we had them create our newsletters and send out messages on the listserv. So the communications person. So I had six people in the Dream Center after a few months. And then, after a year, I got a full-time person after

> a year and a half. And so six people in the USRC were doing whatever we could, and we built that. And everybody, except for myself, or at least at one point or currently, was undocumented. And now, we have people who represent the community we serve, understand their needs, and know the right questions to ask. And together, we created pieces of training. We created programs. We created all kinds of stuff, not only for the students but for the campus community.

One of the strengths that Gonzalo brought to this role was that he was also bilingual, which allowed him to provide financial aid and policy information in English and Spanish during orientations and other onboarding campus activities. Yet, this, too, naturally attracted Spanish primarily speaking communities creating that piece of trust for the USRC. The primary strategy utilized was community-building with the university and locally. Not only is this strategy foreign to higher education institutions, but if the person is aware of how oppression works, they can see those connections. Connections happen if the person is familiar with how systems of oppression work. His exclusive expertise helped me understand what strategies he used to further develop the USRC at the incision and community level.

Gonzalo was critical in staffing and retaining students on campus. How he connected with students and stakeholders further secured academic and funding opportunities for students. Shortly after completing major hiring initiatives, he states that he was able to,

> turn it into more of a cohort model. And so, we created success plans for students. So whenever they came to us, no matter who they were, or whenever we recruited them, we said, "These are your successes. Here are your goals. Tell us what you want to accomplish. Tell us where you're at." And then we check in every once in a while." This other method allowed for the continual building of rapport with the student, and this type

> of model allowed practitioners to find out who they are and where they are. And if I lost communication with somebody for even a couple of months, I'd reach out. So I knew where they were.

Creating success plans like these allowed him and his team to follow up with students, ultimately showing the university where the center focused its services. This method also proved beneficial to demonstrate that the center was also serving the broader state. This approach came in handy when Gonzalo met a couple of students who still needed to finish high school. He had met them at a recruiting event. The center did not only serve university students but also aspiring college students. Gonzalo recollects, "In fact, a couple of students I met did not end up not finishing school. However, I could still support them in what they were doing outside of their education, but I couldn't get them back. Right? But at least I knew that they were reaching their goals." Following up also made me more likely that they might decide to come back in the future, which is often true for students from underserved backgrounds. Another strategy Gonzalo implemented was adding a new clause when the center created a new scholarship. He stated,

> And then, at one point, we created a scholarship where we said, 'This scholarship requires that you provide some assistance to the USRC.' It didn't have a certain amount of hours or pay because it was not a job. But that person who got that, we call them a student leader. The student leader had some experience in design, so we had them create our newsletters and send out messages on a listserv. So they became our communications person. So I had six people in the Dream Center after a few months. And then, after a year, I got a full-time person after a year and a half. And so six people in the USCR were doing whatever we could, and we built that. And everybody, except for myself, or at least at one point or currently, was undocumented. And now, we have people who represent

the community we serve, understand their needs, and know the right questions to ask. And together, we created training. We created programs. We created all kinds of stuff, not only for the students but for the campus community.

The hiring of more staff took work. Gonzalo recalls:

> I slowly built it to show that there is a need, data in getting more people, and success. So once I provided numbers, "Look, our advising assistant is doing this, and these many hours are going towards it, thus freeing up my that many hours to go do other things, policy, and whatnot," then I could show, "See, I need a full-time person. Because these people are students, they could leave at any time.

After working at the USRC for almost two years, he also left the center. His spirit got burned out emotionally and physically.

To this day, the USRC just hired its third director for the fall of 2022. The USRC continues to need help to retain its leadership. Although, the USRC is still going through staff and institutional changes. The USRC was also moved to another division, impacting its access to resources and already established partnerships. New relationships had to be cultivated and sustained. Separating divisions and reporting to two supervisors create clarity and speed up the center's progress. I left our meeting with a powerful statement that Gonzalo said

> If you truly want to be inclusive, and talk about diversity and access, then you need to do these more "experimental programs," quote-unquote, because the students who are first-generation, or students who are undocumented, you just have to try to think, "The law and the police are not in their favor." So do things outside the box to ensure it does.

Lono

Like many of his students, Lono entered college unprepared to succeed, and he became the student affairs professional he yearned for as a student. He teaches students how to navigate aspects of college by telling them what resources and opportunities were available for students and student groups. Earning his master's in Justice Studies, Lono strived to make communities more equitable and inclusive. Coming from a mixed-status family, he, too, understands the complex dynamics that students must navigate at home, school, and their professional careers. Born in Taiwan, they identified as Asian American, they moved to Utah to pursue educational and professional opportunities with his family. Tailoring first-gen programming by addressing barriers and dispelling successful notions of people of color, Lono's role at MWU made him a role model in the community. For 15 years, he has dedicated his career to advising first-generation college students and student groups.

His role in the USRC process was to help student groups raise funds for undocumented students. I reached out to speak to him because he had a valuable perspective on the dynamics of student groups. As a practitioner, he provided insight into how students resisted the shift in the political climate. This led MWU to be a more community-oriented and engaged university. Speaking to him allowed me to understand better how students drafted the USRC proposal in the midst of it all. I was also curious to understand the university and how students responded to political acts of violence. Lono states

> It was a pre-conference or a conference session where they discussed creating an undocu center at their campus. I know they started trying to meet with the person who leads equity and diversity on campus to talk about the center. I think they were talking with undergraduate studies, too, at the time.Students took the initiative to meet with key people on campus and inform themselves as much as possible before visiting with other university stakeholders.

Directing first-gen programming, he was heavily involved, and many students overlapped with USRC students. He states, "I advised students with a similar background as me, they were also first-gen, and so I was given that caseload and would support undocumented students too." Knowing that the USRC was a new office and severely short-staffed, Lono dedicated some of their time to unofficially advising undocumented students and employees on campus. Lono is the type of advisor that builds bridges, a fierce advocate at the university, local, and state levels. Fiercely proactive, SOMOS Dreamers worked throughout the year on their proposal. Lono remembers this: "Before Trump, SOMOS Dreamers already drafted the undocumented resource centers program proposal." At the time, a sense of urgency around the country led many students to upraise and spark on-campus conversations about student and human rights. Lono remembered when the USRC was being developed. He recalls, "Well, it was like the start of the Black Lives Matter movement. I even remember there being kind of this tension." The tension that Lono refers to is between student groups and political pressures. Before SOMOS Dreamers became an institutionally recognized student group, most Latine/x/os/ students were also part of MECHA, which stands for Moviemiendto Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MECHA) and First Gen Scholars. MECHA and the Black Student Union are the largest active student groups on campus. Out of those groups, some student members created SOMOS

Dreamers, in which students from both groups shared and built a coalition. However, these coalitions were not established before the creation of the Black Cultural Center.

MWU has student groups that represent different races and ethnicities. At one point, the Black student union and MECHA students could not agree on what issues to prioritize at an upcoming university town hall meeting. To this day, these student groups remain the largest group at MWU. Every student supported the creation of the USRC and a resource center for Black students. But there were only so many funds in the university. Since the university does not have an intersectional lens on how it services Black students, it failed to think that Black people can be undocumented too. However, this support came after the university held a town hall meeting to discuss campus racial climate issues at MWU as students rose in Missouri. University administrators wanted to dialogue, hear students out, and start a conversation on how to support Black, Indigenous people of color on campus. These tensions rose during the inception of the Black Lives Matter movement. Deeper into the interview, he confirmed what other professionals shared, that some students had attended a national conference called NCORE to become more informed about proposing a USRC in Utah. Not only was attending this conference a catalyst for drafting the proposal the way students communicate the needs of undocumented students. The lack of resources on a college campus led students to begin conversations and illuminate the areas where universities were short of serving and supporting. Student advocacy led leaders to be systematically aware of oppression in students' lives.

Lono did not work for the USRC students who knew who they could go to campus for tailored support. Although we met shortly on Zoom for about thirty minutes, I gained a sense of understanding of how much invisible labor also occurred in the development of the USRSC. Working across the USRC, he was able to affirm other professionals and also pointed out--that

the needs of undocumented students should be more often prioritized. Hence, the work falls on already over-burden professionals. Usually, the system oppresses students who take on the social responsibility of addressing inequities on campus (Linder et al., 2019).

SOMOS Dreamers Build Institutional Capacity

The mission of SOMOS Dreamers is to empower and advocate for undocumented students through scholarships, workshops, and community engagement (One U Thriving, 2022). Based on initial assumptions and member checks with SOMOS Dreamers members, students identified as bi-racial, Black, Nigerian, Mexican, Peruvian, Salvadorean, Laotian, Cambodian, and Phillipino, among many more backgrounds. Some students had DACA and TPS (temporary protected status), some had no legal status, some had just arrived, and others were members of mixed-status families. While there are a lot of variations of legal statuses, everyone had one desire, to acquire resources for undocumented people on campus. In efforts to hold the institution accountable, students attended meetings with administrators in large numbers to make a statement—to feel listened to. SOMOS Dreamers thought it would take more years beyond achieving their degree on campus to see the results of their advocacy. It took several moments over two years to accomplish that goal. From initiating a new university-recognized student group, applying for student group funding, developing the USRC proposal, and showing up to the Racial Dialogue with black tape over their mouths, holding up signs that stated, "Solidarity takes work, put in the work." SOMOS Dreamers articulated their needs and demands by holding meetings and fundraising all semester. Institutional leaders nationwide have missed many opportunities to address the inequities and oppression undocumented students face on campus due to their legal status. While some college campuses aim to support, institutions sometimes fail

because they do not recognize that resources and access must shift as the sociopolitical landscape shifts.

According to Sebastian and Beatriz, who were student leaders in SOMO Dreamers at the time, they began their group by "[building] the committee model, we had one of us in different committees to facilitate more than anything, and we would just facilitate the ideas of the group." Later in the chapter, I share more about these student members. The older students and those who were further along, pursuing their degrees, became the leaders of those committees. Students capitalized on their strengths and created responsibilities based on what their members felt comfortable handling. When the group began, students initially needed an advisor. SOMOS Dreamers students had to apply for student funding and to find someone to advise their group. During the interview, one of the members stated, "I think that's when I had a ton of people. There's a picture of us with 40 or 50 people. It was crazy big, and a lot of them were first years. And so we were trying hard to keep them because we recognized early that we were struggling to retain many undocumented students for all the reasons we were fighting for." As I relistened to the audio, I could hear students' excitement retelling how they began SOMOS Dreamers. There was a lot of energy and desire to change how MWU could support undocumented students and mixed-status families. Students spoke of the main barriers for undocumented people, particularly Sebastian, who says, "Funding is hard. They have to work, and they have to go to school. And so really early on, we would recognize that. So we were trying our best to grow the leadership across the board so that the kind of change persisted and we could build to a point where we could provide funding. It was a lot."

On top of creating a student group, writing a proposal for student funding, and for the USRC, students were also working and attending school. For many students, with time, this took

a toll on their mental health, and they also suffered academically. Their Students would gather to discuss issues related to immigration, advocacy, community, and financial aid. They understood how traditional systems operate within educational institutions because many members experienced being undocumented, had undocumented family and friends, or met professionals on campus for the first time who were undocumented. Bridging their personal, academic, and professional experiences, SOMOS Dreamers helped inform how they navigated institutional power and politics.

SOMOS Dreamers gathered in earlier meetings to discuss how they would approach their V.P. of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. During the interview, Benjamin stated, "I'm glad we're all together and remember this because there are so many floating pieces out there. I think the way I remember it was--so we started in the 2014 fall, and we had a lot of goals, but the first one, we concluded that undocumented students need funding now. And so that's why we started the fundraising initiatives". This sense of urgency drove SOMOs Dreamers to set up a meeting with their V.P.

Students gathered and researched other undocumented resource centers across the U.S. They reached out to Emily, a doctoral student studying issues related to immigration on their campus. She assisted students in contacting schools along with other students. Together, students reached out to others on campuses outside of Utah. They got many universities in the California U.C. system, which had already established an undocumented resource on campus, and asked for guidance on beginning one at MWU. What has built the capacity to serve undocumented students on campus thus far has been college students, faculty, and staff who take the time to support students. Beatriz recalls when they gathered information on what their process was to reach the proposal stage: "Me and Emily-- I don't know at what point she joined, but I remember

I called a California school-- a university that already had a dream center, and they didn't answer. And so then we looked another one up, and they answered. And I was like, "Hi. I know this is really weird, but I'm from Utah. I see that you just got a dream center, and I was hoping you could share with us what you did" and things like that. And they were so happy. They were so happy and excited. And I was shocked because, at that point, I had worked many customer service jobs, and I honestly wasn't expecting a good response. But I wish I had written down the school or person's name. But that was my only interaction with them, walking us through it. So we took a lot of notes, and then they shared their proposal with us that we-- or, well, they gave us the skeleton of their proposal or something like that. And that's what got us started writing it.

Benjamin recalls how they organized the V.P. meeting, I turned up the volume to my computer, and he states, "I distinctly remember that sometimes, I think in the summer of 2015, we set up a meeting with Dr. Infante, who was the associate V.P. of Diversity or something like that at that time. And I remember that the email or invitation was originally just for Benjamin and Beatriz or only a couple of us. And we told everyone in the group to just come with us. And I remember 10 of us or something or a ton of us walked into her office, and we just sat down, and only a couple of us talked. But I do remember our meeting and the purpose of that meeting was to ask for the Dream Center and see what we can do". Another student leader Beatriz remembers the meeting this way, she states, "I do remember the V.P. meeting. We were all there. I swear I was the closest to her, and Alicia was beside me. And I don't know why I felt like, yeah, we disagreed about who was going to talk or who was going to say something". There was a moment of silence. Then Sebastian says, "So we come with our thick-ass proposal, and we look at each other, which is interesting. [laughter] Yeah, I do remember just her being like, "Okay,"

[laughter] reading through it. It was so funny". While SOMOS did get to this stage of proposing a USRC, it took work.

At the time, SOMOS Dreamers were told by other professionals that they had to follow a process and be professional. Benjamin discussed that they were told to present their proposal professionally. He states, "So our adviser at the time, Trenton, was like, "Let me arrange a meeting to discuss the proposal." At the time, he said, "There's a process, and there's a blah, blah, blah." Just trying to ensure we were-- we kept being presented with, "This has to be presented professionally. This has to be presented with some sort of decency," just so that the administration will respect us, right, and respect our proposal, respect our idea, which, at the time, I think, for a lot of us, was a little frustrating because asking and demanding that the institution do better and do more was just frustrating to have to wait, right?".

As students reminisced about how they organized the meeting, I remembered reading earlier that day documents about a town hall meeting that occurred in 2015 at MWU. In 2015, other student groups on campus protested in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement in Mizzou. As I went through my data, I noticed that the students remembered the day they also attended the town hall meeting earlier that year. Benjamin vividly recalls, "From there, I remember that there was the protest in 2015 that happened in Missouri, And then, from that town hall, right, the 12 initiatives were born. Originally, they were only 10. But afterward, when they met-- or, yeah. Originally, it was a set number. But then, after that meeting, they charged [Tracy, the V.P. of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion] to go around to every student group, show them the initiatives, and get their feedback from it…." Here, Benjamin recalls the Open Dialogue on Racial Climate that they had on campus at a town hall meeting. At that time, a lot was happening socially and politically for immigrants in America.

The 13 responses are a composed list of action items ranging from mandatory diversity training for all faculty and staff to departments collaborating on proposing to create the School for Cultural and Social Transformation and the creation of a Dream Program. One administrator stated

> We're going to find space. At the very least, we'll have to find space." We couldn't call it a center because centers have to go through an entire approval system at the [university], which is cumbersome and time-consuming. So then when the election rolls around, I say to [the university president], "My God. This is a crisis. We cannot let one day of Trump's administration happen in January without having resources." So that, I should say, too, was our deadline for ourselves like, "When he gets inaugurated, January 2018-- I mean, sorry, January 2017, we have to have our act in gear here because he's saying he's going to do away with DACA the first day. We got to take that seriously." That became our established internal deadline, so we texted on Thanksgiving and then got this great band of people together. By the time Trump was inaugurated, we had this plan fully hatched.

While there had been efforts several years earlier on behalf of students to establish undocu-resources, the result of Trump taking over the White House motivated administrators to take action. By November 2016, MWU had hired an Undocumented Student Program Coordinator, and on January 3, 2017, a dream program began at MWU.

SOMOS Dreamers

Beatriz

Beatriz was the second person to join our Zoom meeting and was also a SOMOS Dreamers member at MWU. A first-generation Latina with a background in K-12 education and Disability Studies, Beatriz is passionate about social justice and providing equitable education. Learning from an early age how people treat others differently based on ability motivated her to continue her education. Earning a master's of education and currently working with students as a student affairs professional, she was pivotal in jumpstarting the USRC proposal with other peers.

Once SOMOS Dreamers became a recognized student group at MWU, they were able to secure funding and were given a space in a small white little building on the outskirts of the university (the old USRC building near the train tracks, she recalls:

> I remember all of us cleaning it, and then when we were meeting up there, we would discuss what kinds of resources we wanted and hours things like that. I also remember nothing working on that floor, the bathrooms, phones, and printers. And we needed to print resources.

Students were now a recognized student group but needed to be provided usable spaces. One of the main priorities for the student group was to secure funding for undocumented students on campus and to raise awareness. They partnered with other student groups to raise scholarship funds for students. Beatriz stated, "Students planned events like UndocuWeek, where they would raise awareness about undocumented immigrants while at the same time fundraising" -ultimately bringing both the local and university into one space in the Salt Lake City area.

As student leaders continued to raise awareness across campus by being part of meetings with administrators, they also made it a goal to draft a proposal for the USRC. All of this was

going on while the political campaign of Trump was launching, and there was an increase in rampant hostility and growing ambivalence of undocumented immigrants. Driven by their desire to transform spaces on campus and combat racism, I understood the motivations behind their actions better. Engaging the community and university stakeholders in discussions surrounding supporting undocumented students allowed others the opportunity to share their experiences. Students humanized their experiences to others through music, film, photography, poetry, dance, and storytelling, leading some people to reflect on how they view the dominant narratives associated with undocumented people. Listening to Beatriz share her insight helped me fill gaps in my timeline, and I learned that SOMOS Dreamers divided their work as a student group to cover more ground.

Humanizing the experiences of undocumented people is a non-stop job. Not only were students mobilizing on campus, but they were also full-time students working to support themselves and their families. Beatriz states,

> The SOMOS Dreamers group decided to do committees at some point, which allowed for leadership to develop across the board for all the students involved. And I think that was great. I remember that fundraising year. It was like so many people, there were so many members, and I do credit that to the structure of having committees versus having specific leadership. So within these committees, we all felt like we had input, and we all had input and leadership.

It was important for Beatriz to contribute to a cause she cared about and to be heard—this model of setting up committees as a collective allowed for focused strategizing. Students created space to provide thoughts and input making it possible to fundraise and recruit more members and supporters.

The second goal that student leaders had was to begin drafting the USRC proposal. This strategic collaborative structure helped students advocate for the development at the USRC. By demonstrating fundraising events and constant pressure on the administration, they showed the need to prioritize the financial markets and experiences of undocumented students on campus. The pressure created By creating committees within the group, they could cover more ground strategically. In the Spring of 2016, the student group SOMOS Dreamers attended a national conference. I used that moment to connect with other students and staff working at an undocumented resource center or help start one. While attending student meetings, raising funds for undocumented students, and operating a part-time job, Beatriz graduated, pursued a master's degree, and is now on her way to earning a Ph.D. in educational leadership and policy.

Benjamin

Another student leader and member of the group was Benjamin. A first-generation Latine student from a mixed-status family, he graduated from MWU and is currently a student affairs professional, and is also pursuing a master's degree at a local university in Utah. Listening to him on Zoom with the rest of the student group was insightful, and I could tell they were close peers. They each filled in the other's gaps as they shared experiences and memories of their undergraduate days. Vocal about these views toward the institution's values on how resources become allocated in public institutions, Benjamin was frustrated with how professionalism was something he had to be mindful of as he was told he was not. One of the student advisors had expressed that they would facilitate the meeting.

At the time, Benjamin was not fond of that idea. He felt that it was all taking too much time. He remembers it this way,

> They would say let me arrange a meeting to discuss the proposal." At the time, he was like, there's a process. There's a blah, blah, blah." Just trying to make sure that we were--we kept being presented with, "This has to be presented professionally.

> Some institutional agents felt that students should give "with some sort of decency" just so that the administration would respect us, right, and respect our proposal, respect our idea, which, at the time, I think, for a lot of us, was a little frustrating because asking and demanding that the institution do better and do more was just disappointing to have to wait, right" Many students felt similar to Benjamin they felt that resources were overdue for undocumented people on campus and even more so as Trump targeted the Latinx population.

He was right. Right-wing organizations expelled negative stereotypes associated with immigration. College campuses nationwide began to see more acts of violence toward students of color on campus. SOMOS Dreamers students responded to these political acts of violence by starting conversations on how it impacted their college-going experience and their families. Benjamin says, "As you can see, we started in 2014 and didn't think it would take somebody like us to change things quickly. But for us, it felt like, "Holy shit, this is taking too long," right? The institution is taking too long to address undocumented students because, at the time, it was just HB 144. And no one would advise or assist students in processing HB 144 besides the person who was assisting informally who was housed in the Student Equity Office right, which was not even his main role necessarily" Benjamin brings up a critical factor.

Although some state policies provide access to higher education, like HB 144, people and people at the post-secondary level only sometimes know how to make sense of these

policies, leading to misinterpretation and ultimately impacting whether some students are admitted into Utah colleges, students were aware of these policies and how they affected their close friends and family, and they wanted the university to respond similarly. SOMOS Dreamers' policy knowledge led them to see glitches and barriers in the system. This is stated in the following," there was no direction as to how admissions or the institution would help students who were needing or unaware that they required HB 144, right? And then, years later, came SB 253. And again, the lack of that, what is it called, that system translating for students to have that into their hands, to be like, "Oh, I could qualify for these privately sponsored scholarships, or I could receive instant tuition." Or summer, all students in the state of Utah have instant tuition. All of that still needs to be translated. None of that was accessible. There needed to be somewhere on a website where someone could access that.

Policies in place, not much of the general public or university community knew these policies existed." Benjamin continues to express how "there was no direction as to how admissions or the institution would help students who were needing or who were unaware that they needed HB 144, right? And then, years later, came SB 253. And again, the lack of that system translates for students to have that into their hands, to be like, "Oh, I could qualify for these privately sponsored scholarships, or I could receive instant tuition assistance." Or qualify for in-state tuition in the summers regardless of residency status. All students deserve to know that there are institutional opportunities to obtain financial assistance. All of that still needs to be translated. None of that was clearly accessible, and there was nowhere on a website where someone could access that."

Benjamin is alluding to the lack of cohesiveness within the institution. Stakeholders, leaders, and board members needed to be more engaging in conversation with one another to

support all students, not just undocumented students. So SOMOS Dreamers began to "pull out the old documents that we have [about previous conversations] that were ignored, and let's start having a conversation about what it means to ask and demand administration, right, cabinet, to implement a dream center." Courageous out of necessity, it was still "a little frustrating because asking and demanding that the institution do better and do more was just frustrating to have to wait." SOMOS Dreamers began thinking of asking for a dedicated university space to meet as a group to divide the work on campus. Benjamin says, "We talked about hours, but then we talked about being unable to work hours and things like that, and the space to be our resource. So at the time, he recalls, "I remember we met as a group-- because we would meet as committees individually, but then either at the end of the meeting or every other week." The older students would "be the ones who would start a conversation and then provide for the distribution of tasking roles."

Alicia

I started the meeting on Zoom and began audio recording on my phone. Alicia was the first to join; it had been almost four years since I last saw her. I was excited to hear about her journey. After graduating with a degree in Ethnic Studies, I remembered briefly meeting when I worked as a graduate assistant at the USRC. I remember seeing her with other SOMOS members at the fundraising events and just heavily involved on campus and in her community. She intended to graduate with a math degree, but her grades slipped due to heavy involvement on campus, and she had to switch majors. Alica illuminated how sometimes students sacrifice everything to seek social transformation and have zero regrets. But at an unnecessarily high cost.

During the interview, I asked SOMOS Dreamers how you became involved with SOMOS. She stated, "I came because I think Benjamin took me to a meeting along with, I think, another friend of ours who asked the question," Do you care about undocumented students? And I was like, "I don't know any. What is that?" Alicia was aware of other forms of inequality but needed to be fully aware of how the legal system impacted student success. She made friends who were undocumented at her college campus--this approach of recruiting members provoked individuals to pause and reflect on their stance on the issue. For Alicia, it sparked curiosity. She wanted to assist her peers in changing the experiences of undocumented students at MWU. She now dedicates her career to helping other students get involved at the college level.

Also, a first-generation Asian American student, she attended MWU to be a math teacher. Aware of how systems of oppression function. As an aspiring teacher, she knew it was important for her future students to have college access. During high school, Alicia was passionate about influencing social change in the classroom, and teachers influenced her to see the world differently. Alicia thought it was essential to humanize the experiences of others by sharing their stories. Her involvement in SOMOS Dreamers heavily shaped her college experience. She graduated with her math degree and now works helping other students get involved at the college level, and she is a role model for her community. During her involvement, she learned of the barriers that undocumented people face. Alicia recalls, "At first, being in those spaces was more uncomfortable. But I came to the meetings not knowing anything and stuck around because I saw a lot of folks who felt very passionately. I wanted to learn more and see how I could help." Alicia had a human connection to the impacts of these policies. She wanted to learn more and help her friends out. She decided to get involved and "stuck around, and I helped." I slowly joined the different committees that they had. The structures were very different from that of the student

groups housed in [the multicultural center] at that time." One of the ways she got involved was to table with other SOMOS Dreamers members, offer students hot chocolate and raffle prizes, and discuss who they were as a student group to gain members. The art from students whose paints they would auction in university galas. She states, " We had UndocuWeek and events like that during that week. We would plan events by humanizing the needs of undocumented students by sharing different narratives. Alicia and other members reframed and started the conversation on why people should support funds to support undocumented students. Many members enjoyed the fostered camaraderie, which sparked many moments of joy for students. Alicia is a prime example of what it means to let allies join groups like SOMOS Dreamers. She became an agent of change by engaging in the university and the local community. The awareness that this student group provoked in her consciousness made her a better leader.

Sebastian

Sebastian, a graduate of the newest college at MWU, received his bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies. Joining the Zoom meeting with the rest of us, we talked briefly about their lives during their undergraduate years. I also remember seeing him at some of the USRC events at MWU when we organized fundraising events with SOMOS. Filled with several transformative experiences, he was heavily involved on campus with social justice organizations like MECHA; advised and coordinated social gatherings with students in university settings. Sebastian's academic, personal, and professional experiences informed his activism and helped him navigate life at the university. Building awareness around the campus community by recruiting and calling in administrators, Sebastian was one of the members who also went to Dr. Infante's office to share the USRC proposal.

More outspoken than other members, he was passionate about creating an equitable college-going environment for all students at MWU. Seeing his friends struggle to obtain federal financial aid like him to attend college and coming from a mixed-status family fostered genuine peer connections among students. He was also involved in the community throughout his high school years in food drives and organizing events with other student clubs to raise scholarship funds for underserved students at his local high school. Majoring in Ethnic Studies with a minor in Communication, Sebastian sparked many conversations about creating undocumented student success with his other peers.

As all members shared their stories of that day, he recalled vivid moments. Sebastian recalls how initial conversations began among student groups and administrators. He unmutes on Zoom and states, "[From] [the [years] 2014 to 2017, [there] were typical conversational moments that we were having in terms of forming the undocumented student resource center or even just more or less like having a group that could be legitimized to the institution, I think it was the most important part that we had our conversation."

Leaving out student voices in conversations about access takes many opportunities away from students because only some leaders or staff members are aware of the local and federal barriers that students face in society at large. Leaders at the top sometimes need to catch up on what is happening with the student's college-going experience. One of the main reasons why SOMOS Dreamers was formed at MWU was because no specific group was dedicated to supporting undocumented students on campus. However, other student groups did discuss undocumented issues now and then. It was not the same. Sebastian brought up how other racial groups on campus supported issues related to their own identities. He says, "I mean, just like with any racial-ethnic group, I think once folks leave, let us say to support another part of their

own identity, I think it's almost-- for the most part, I remember it's almost being referenced to a lot as an alternative form of a Latinx group. But even in our conversation, "Well, what does it mean to support undocumented beyond Latinx," right? There were always those conversations. So there was, to some degree, some pushback regarding, "They're creating the division, or there's no need for this division. This group can do X, Y, and Z." Right? Sebastian, with solid conviction, knew that their student group was different and that it was common for the universities to pit student needs against each other. Which takes time away from the focus of their group to support undocumented students.

He says, "I think this one is different. Functionally and structurally, it was different. And institutionally, we weren't supported funding-wise." SOMOS Dreamers applied for student group funding to become recognized as a student group. Reinforcing the need for SOMOS, Dreamers created committees within their student group, and these task forces propelled their activism on campus. Nodding my head, I began to connect how important it was for students to hold administrators accountable. Inherently, students know that by design, higher education institutions now know how to serve people who look like them humanely, so it is critical to listen to the student body's concerns, asking to be heard.

Students wanted the administration to acknowledge undocumented students' lack of support structures. Students expressed anger and frustration towards the administration for not prioritizing services and financial access to undocumented students long ago. However, universities needed to begin listening, especially MWU. The students said that administrators were responsible for serving and advocating, and they were right. The university's social responsibility is to support undocumented students at the higher education level. Students felt that the institution had failed them and their community. Like other members, Sebastian thought

the institution could do more if it wanted to. Although Sebastian does not outrightly state it, he is referring to power. Higher education institutions have a lot of power to change how students are treated, admitted, treated, and retained.

Another salient theme in this case study was listening to students' experiences on how their activism impacted their academic performance and engagement. Students, in this case, study expressed how the sociopolitical climate locally and on campus shifted their ability to concentrate in class and keep up with their daily activities. For some students, relationships with professors and friends were severed, grades dropped, which led them to be on academic probation, and others changed majors. However, at the end of the day, all students affirmed it was worth it because they tried their best to hold the institution accountable, and a USRC was the result.

Student activists across the U.S. have shifted how institutions and administrators respond to the needs of students amidst local or national spotlight. Historically, student activism has been a way to raise awareness and bring change. Munoz (2015) recorded how undocumented individuals shaped the national narrative of what it means to be undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic in the U.S. However, sometimes it comes with risks and consequences. One participant, Benjamin, demonstrated this and stated over Zoom,

> I, at least, burned every bridge on my way out of MWU. So it didn't stop me from reapplying to these places they were hiring. So, I applied for the first round of the dream center back when they were hiring for that coordinator position. I applied when they opened up the new MECHA advisor position for the first time. And so, in the offices, we essentially grew up in. I knew no one would hire me, especially after they knew all this

shit that would say to them and stuff… but my grades were dog…because of that (activism).

Benjamin shares that his activism as an undergraduate impacted his educational and professional opportunities at MWU and maybe elsewhere. He struggled to enter competitive graduate programs, dropping his grades below 3.0. Ultimately, Benjamin attended graduate school, but not at the institution of his choice. He found another graduate program in Utah where they weighed his graduate application more holistically. He reflects: "Even now that I think about it, there's so much that has suffered. So, I'd sacrifice my GPA any day of the week to do what we did, but it cost a lot". Benjamin was passionate about ensuring the university responded to the needs of undocumented students.

He still desires to be a student affairs professional at the MWU campus and a graduate student to keep advocating for students of color on campus.

Although he spent most of his undergraduate degree pushing for the development of the USRC at MWU, it did not help that he and his peers had to deal with the racist rhetoric and policy decisions from both D.C. and the Utah State Capitol. Undocumented students and students like Benjamin, who come from mixed-status families, pioneered the creation of resources on college campuses and, in general, policies that provided some form of relief and access. He was part of the early stages of this activism and, together with his colegas, pushed the university administration to listen. Educational administrators influence how support services are allocated. Not all universities have a process for including student voices and narratives when developing new support services. The relationship between SOMOS Dreamers and university administrators was tense from the beginning. Students were frustrated that the university had not done enough

to support undocumented students. I interviewed four university leaders through Zoom and in person who initiated conversations at the cabinet and presidential level of MWU.

University Leaders

Using pseudonyms to protect the names and divisions, I documented the collaborative process between university leaders. Dr. Infante worked alongside the university president and was tasked with collecting information from student organizations on campus on how MWU could be more inclusive for students of color on campus. Dr. Madris was the Assistant Vice President for the division of Undergraduate Studies and Drs. Viramontes, the Vice President for Equity & Diversity, and Inclusion, and Lozano, the Assistant Vice President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. I discuss more of the leader's role below and share the story of how it all began in the narrative. There was a lot of back and forth between students and university leaders.

Dr. Ismael Infante

Dr. Infante was the first university leader I interviewed during the summer of my data collection. As the university's first responder to student protests on campus, I began by asking about how it was to begin conversations with undocumented students and student leaders regarding the need for an undocumented student resource center. As a Latina researcher that day I learned about the significance of having a race-consciousness and leadership style on a predominantly white college campus (PWI). Dr. Infante had an essential role across the college campus in laying out the university's strategic oversight of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Working closely with other key leaders like the president, provost, cabinet, and college deans, he filtered the message of the university president and critical leaders of equity, diversity, and

inclusion. His role symbolized the university's commitment to equity, student success, and anti-racist campus practices.

Dr. Infante has a long history of interacting with college students. With over 30 years of higher education experience, a professor who taught students in the social sciences with a history of activism, the new Dean of Freedom Studies College, and the Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity--Dr. Infante was a crucial figure in the development process of the USRC at MWU. As part of the Dream Committee on campus, they would invite other stakeholders to help remove barriers within the institution. One of those initial barriers was the university should have advertised the state policies that did benefit their college-going trajectory. Announced its support to undocumented people through websites, making it known there was an access issue. The people and students who needed this resource were not being shared intentionally. No policy dictates that universities need to.

Stakeholders knew issues were also being discussed with the Utah System of Higher Education at the state level. Students initiating these conversations created a ripple effect where leaders began talking to one another due to students. He used his leadership position to help leverage resources for Students of Color and undocumented students. As I listened eagerly to his perspective and role in the process, he responded,

> The first time I remember entering into those conversations was after the Open Dialogue on Racial Climate. So that open dialogue took place in November 2015. The president and the senior vice presidents asked me. According to the paper, we were walking through the ballroom, and maybe around 406 hundred people had attended. And they said, "Would you draw up a list responsive to everything you heard in that ballroom?"

And that list became known as the 13 Immediate Responses to the Open Dialogue of Racial Climate.

Dr. Infante is referring to a town hall meeting MWU had during the time there was a surge of student uprisings across the U.S. Two years earlier, female leaders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi started a political movement with a hashtag the #BlackLivesMatter movement that centered the experiences of Black people protesting police brutality, and systemic racism (Carruthers, 2018). The Association of Students on campus organized the Open Dialogue of Racial Climate. At first, it was conversation, but then things quickly took a turn. Students from various social justice organizations interrupted the conversation by filling the auditorium with a silent protest at MWU. Holding up signs like "Solidarity Takes Work, Put in the Work" and put black tape over their mouths to symbolize that the university did not do enough to represent their identities and experiences or have a voice within the university. SOMOS Dreamers and the Black Student Union showed up during these conversations. They said the university needs to be held accountable for how students feel on campus. Previous acts of violence on campus towards students of color, like bomb threats at the Black Cultural after it was created to black students reading racist things on their dorm room boards to a nearby white-nationalist group saying over the mountain near the university that says, "Stop the Invasion, End immigration" several alarming students and although the incident was not the college campus specifically the message was made clear to everyone who the did not welcome near the university furthering fear. Although the undocumented resource center did not make it to the original 13 things on the list, students continued to push for it.

The thirteen immediate responses were:

1. Mandatory diversity training.
2. Extend physical space for students at the academic success center.

3. Provide additional financial support for student equity and diversity groups.
4. Launched initiative to recruit diverse faculty and post-docs.
5. Develop various staff hiring plans that include recruiting diverse people with different backgrounds.
6. Develop a mentoring program for faculty and staff.
7. Increase staffing to respond to racial microaggressions.
8. Establish a student diversity council.
9. Implement a new communication tool to share "Diversity in Progress."
10. Creating a Diversity Coalition group.
11. Develop a pipeline of diverse scholars to the honors college.
12. Develop financial support for Native American students on campus.
13. Establish Freedom Studies College to raise the stature and status of programs.

These discussed initiatives with various campus groups, such as the Council of Academic Deans, the Academic Senate, the President's Cabinet, and student groups advocating for campus social justice initiatives. With similar movements happening across the country, Mountain West University was included. Student activism sheds light on the misalignments of its mission and values (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016) and demonstrates that change is possible. The main instrument of these changes on campus is rooted in the work students did that afternoon in November 2015. Protests, by and large, respond to the resistance to policies. Universities must learn how to accommodate people they never intended to serve. Dr. Infante continues, "The question of a dream center just didn't ever emerge. We were all down inside so many other issues at the time. So the next thing I did after I created the list was to meet with every student group on campus that I could meet with and to present the list of them and say, "Do you like the list? Are there things you want me to take off or anything you think I missed from that day? These back-and-forth meetings between students and other campus groups carried over to the spring of 2016. Dr. Infante states, "Then, as I say, I spent the spring semester of 2016 meeting with the student groups. By that following fall, as we will all remember, that's when the presidential election was happening." He recalls, "But the other thing I'll say just to pull back from the election to that

moment when I met with MECHA. I also remember meeting with SOMOS Dreamers, right, talking with them. And I remember a couple of the students saying-- because I said, "What would matter to you? What if we could do it?" You would say, "Yes, that's a real thing accomplished." Right? That's always my question, not, "Here are the things we're going to do," but also, "What would be the real thing you would want to be done?" And if you saw the real thing, you would say, "Yes. The university has responded." Students asked for a fully-staffed functioning center with ample space for student meetings and events.

Dr. Infante remembers students saying,

> Oh my goodness if we could ever have a dream center, even just a space, that would be so meaningful. But the ultimate dream is a dream center." And I said, "Okay. That is now on my to-do list. Not sure [laughter] how I will get that done." And then, that was probably that spring of 2016, then the fall, and then the conversation. Okay. As I remember then, it was January 2017 when we looked to find a new coordinator and when the excellent Francisco came our way and agreed to be the coordinator. And then the dream center, we had to do some things to get that. So Dr. Madris relinquished her space in the annex. And then, I talked with the First Gen Office, Nancy Shing, and others, and they gifted some of their space in the wing, creating the area for the dream center. So that was super exciting that it could be done. So that's how that came about, the program coordinator and then the dream center.

Based on conversations with my participants, advocacy efforts escalated and made university leaders listen even more when Donald Trump intentionally used his political campaign and platform to attack immigrant communities. Fueling fear of undocumented populations by

continually saying that his administration would rescind DACA as soon as he took office motivated students and other leaders to take action.

> I remember when the [university president] and I were watching that and thinking about that-- and I think, like everybody else, we thought Hillary Clinton was going to win… We did not see the results happening. And as things started to go in the direction of Trump becoming president, she and I immediately started texting each other and saying, "We are going to have to get after this. We have got to protect our undocumented and documented students. That's got to be-- this is just like an urgent crisis level now." So as often happens, a crisis does lead to action. And I'm very happy to say that she felt that way and that the university president gave his blessing. So immediately, I was crafting documents and statements, and she and I were texting over Thanksgiving. And so the very next thing we did was to call together a team of faculty and students and many SOMOS Dreamers on that team of people. It seemed like a group of 15 to 20 people because we met in the conference room.

A meeting initially intended for a small group of people, SOMOS Dreamers used this opportunity to show up in numbers at the VP's office and handed over the proposal of the future USRC at MWU to Dr. Infante. This specific incident committed MWU to create an undocumented resource center;

> It was a great process, and we were trying to put into place as many safeguards and as many resources as we could," says Dr. Infante. "Then came the commitment to hiring a dream program coordinator, Francisco, who we found, and establishing a dream center. But that was the commitment that emerged from that. And indeed, we started making a

list of other resources that we might need to put aside. But immediately, we created a dream program coordinator position, as I recall

says Dr. Infante." The combination of events and constant push from students to administrators created the urgency to expedite the process. Students did get a small space for their center but located in the basement of a centralized location on campus.

Dr. Hilary Madris

"It all started with students saying, "I literally have to choose between my rent or my tuition because I can't get access to any financial aid here," says Dr. Madris. She learned of a student who could not afford the semester at MWU. The undocumented resource center of Mountain West University was born under the office of undergraduate studies. It was housed under this department in its nascent stages because its mission was to broaden college access and engage people in the community from all life backgrounds. It seemed appropriate at the time. However, before the USRC was founded in the office of undergraduate studies and SOMOS Dreamers became a formal student group, the Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Studies reached out to other university leaders like the Vice President for Government Relations, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Vice President for Student Development, leadership in Admissions, and the Financial Aid Office. Inviting everyone to converse about serving undocumented students without student input also affected how students held the university accountable for not asking students directly what they needed. The process was the other way around. Students raised concerns, and meetings took place. It was causing SOMOS Dreamers a disconnect and distrust towards university leadership.

In July 2022, I invited Dr. Madris for an iced coffee. We caught up a little that morning, and it had been almost four years since I last saw her. Her role as an Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Studies allowed her to influence parts of the conversation. Dr. Madris states, "in the early days, I would just spend time talking with other administrators saying, "This one thing, this one policy, this one piece of language is creating a barrier for students that don't need to be there." And it started a kind of a series of conversations and became a group." She is referring to the Dream Taskforce created on campus. From about 2012 to spring 2016, many conversations took place about providing support services for undocumented people at the university level. Eventually, these conversations became task forces and initiatives and started the Dream Committee on campus.

One of the significant outcomes of this task force was that the Vice President for Government Relations was strategic in his advocacy. His law background helped the committee "figure out a way to accomplish what we were trying to accomplish through the legislature, using language that they could hear and using language that would accomplish the goal without sending anybody into a frenzy about it," Dr. Mardis emphasized the importance of being bilingual in a completely different way, like in politics." A humanizing language that allowed others to see the systematic structural challenges they had to face while pursuing a college degree. Those strategies allowed undocumented students, TPS, and asylum-seeking students to access scholarship dollars. Policy SB253 enabled undocumented students to access private funding, alleviating some stress. Expanding the policy to be more inclusive meant that any students who qualified for HB144, which allowed students to pay in-state-tuition , meant that students had more of a pathway towards securing a degree. The argument for this action was that donors had a say in how they wanted those funds to be used, allowing institutions to accept

private funds for undocumented students. External funding sources helped significantly because the university still needed to commit financially.

In addition, before securing any space, SOMOS Dreamers asked Dr. Madris and other university leaders where they should house the USRC. She recalls,

> I really appreciated the question to the students. Like, where should this live in the institution? So the institution was not saying this belongs here, belongs there, or is a standalone entity. It was like, "Hey, SOMOS Dreamers. Where would you like the Dream Center to live"? And they said in the office of undergraduate studies because that's where I think they already felt supported and safe, even though we were trying hard to just be like, "Hey, here's a little bit of money to help, and here's space you can meet," but we turned that into something bigger.

I took another sip of my coffee and continued to listen attentively. As I pieced in critical moments with Dr. Madris, I learned that SOMOS Dreamers drafted the proposal with the help of a staff member on campus. Dr. Madris affirmed that The Dean of Undergraduate Studies was determined to find adequate resources,

> Yeah. It wasn't like, "I wrote it or [her] or anything." Tell us what you envisioned for this, and then let's figure out how to get and put resources towards it." With the green light, SOMOS Dreamers did not hold back, "And it's all credit to the students because they said, "Here's what we can imagine that it would be, and here is what the team could look like." And it was like, "In the short term, this is what we need, and in the slightly

longer term, this is what we need." And I give a lot of credit to the Dean for helping us find the money.

As a result of these efforts, SOMOS Dreamers secured a $5,000 operating budget for the first-ever USRC at MWU. Dr. Madris expressed, "We were able to carve a little bit out of the Office of Engagement's budget and forwarded dollars that we had. But really, she helped make sure that the money was in place." Although it began with this amount, SOMOS Dreamers helped fundraise from 2017 forward. As MWU was a public university, it was difficult for undocumented students and anyone without legal status to obtain financial assistance without access to state or federal grants. This policy pushback created another barrier for students.

The rescinding of DACA, Trump's xenophobic political campaign, and students demanding that leaders take action across other campuses propelled people in Utah to donate to undocumented students. Furthermore, Dr. Madris reinforced, like Dr. Infante, that "Trump rescinding DACA pushed it forward because there was a sense that if people wanted to give money to the students. They had to give it to the student organization and then go to the students, and they're like, "This is a step in the process that doesn't need to be so laborious. And why do we have it like this? Why can't we just give students the money within the university's context?" And so having a dream center where students are holistically supported. We don't have to have those ridiculous, "Give the money over here, and then we give the money over here, and then we're having these conversations with people," that changed everything." "But if anybody else is giving money to the university, there's no reason we should be saying that you can't have access to it. It's literally just a change of a scholarship application. Just a change, a tiny, tiny little change that changed everything." This showed the benefits of leadership coming together to strategize institutionally supporting undocumented students.

Dr. Maria Jose Viramontes & Dr. Roberto Lozano

Dr. Viramontes, the inaugural first Vice President for Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, and Dr. Lozano, the Assistant Vice President for Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, and I sat together in a conference room in August 2022. "Que gustas de tomar (what would you like to drink?) says Dr. Lozano," this was my first time meeting both university leaders, "Agua, por favor, (water please), I state. I was eager to meet them and learn from their perspectives. Three of us were in that conference room, three Latine people in higher education. That day I also learned the importance of knowing one's roots and who they are because it influences praxis. Dr. Viramontes's role was to "grow a new division, to move it from an office to a division." They state, "There's an office for the vice president, but "the division itself is much larger than that, so there are multiple spaces within the division, and so within the leadership portfolio, there is a national leadership program, growing a research arm, and then we have the core, the legacy work." Dr. Viramontes oversees diversity and inclusion initiatives across MWU's academic and health campuses.

Dr. Virmontes has focused her career on cultivating student success and equity in higher education, and their advocacy work has impacted how other leaders think about equity and inclusion. A first-generation college student from a small rural town in South Texas, she is informed by Latinx, Mexican-American, and U.S. history. Dr. Viramontes has spent years providing strategy and direction to campus initiatives. Her organizational change and cultural background build the university's intercultural capacity and critical consciousness within programming and campus-wide initiatives. Their role is vital in the sustainability of diversity-related initiatives.

In this interview, I enjoyed interviewing the VP for Equity and Diversity and the AVP, Dr. Lozano. Also, a first-generation college student from Aguascalientes, Mexico, Dr. Lozano's background is in developing first-gen programming that centers on the values of equity and justice. With a history of being an activist during their undergrad days, Dr. Lozano brings a different lens to MWU. He states, "I oversee the cultural centers, the [USRC] being one of them. So I get to work directly with folks on the ground supporting our students. I think it's important to note, at least for this interview about myself, that I came up as an undocumented student. And so, through DACA, I could, like other folks, start working. And then eventually, after that, I did advanced parole and gained a path to citizenship. So not only is this work close to my heart because I lived it and care about justice work, but it's also my job." Dr. Lozano also has a background in building equity through shifting organizational culture in their approach to programming to students with diverse backgrounds.

Given that education and immigration policy is fresh on the minds of campus leaders, we are seeing how the university and federal laws influence the development of support services with a current politically charged nation against undocumented immigrants. We began discussing how external political factors like the Trump administration made university leaders assess concerns about possibly being subpoenaed for documents containing information about this student demographic. Another legality comes into play. Dr. Viramontes said,

> So when we were going through 2016 with Trump, many public universities were legitimately concerned about being subpoenaed for documentation. This scared a lot of students, and for various reasons, folks have not kept data with this demographic. Our

utilization data of the [USRC] we've collected in the last year speaks to a wide reach of students."

In other words, USRCs serve beyond undocumented students. These centers also serve first-gen, LGTBQI, trans, mixed-status families, asylum-seeking, and refugee students, among many more identities. Dr. Viramontes refers to the moment in Trump's campaign when his administration was focused on targeting sanctuary schools putting into question what educators can do when faced with ICE officials on a college campus. Some say administrators can cooperate with authorities if there is a court order. Schools and universities have the challenge of balancing students' safety while needing to comply with the law, depending on the situation.

Although school leaders prioritize keeping students safe, the political violence made educators question if they could do so. So far, there are no federal protections for undocumented students on college campuses, making their college experience vulnerable. For instance, when the COVID-19 public health crisis began in 2020, it impacted international students and faculty regulatory compliance concerns. Students could not get jobs on campus, secure scholarships, internships, or study abroad--having a legal status is part of the American educational experience, and in doing so, we limit opportunities to theirs even though they are paying more in tuition to attend U. S American schools. This double-subordination within the educational and legal system highlights how colleges and universities must be at the forefront and engaged in conversations about immigration laws and policies. The intricacies of laws impact the college-going experience, and students are caught in between for legal status. Another factor considered in the development of the USRC was how universities and other university officials keep track of students and how MWU as an institution understood and applied HB 144. Dr. Lozano states,

In the fall of 2021, the USRC, "[We] connected with 1,200-- I gave you the exact numbers of individuals who showed up in the presentations, and that's both on and off campus, so the reach of the center is wide. Even though we may not know exactly who [is undocumented or not], we can look at national trends, and at least at the state level, we can look at who uses HB 144 as the waiver to kind of give an indicator as to who those students might be, but that's something that happens at the state level.

The nuances of directing a USRC within a public institution require innovation. How do university leaders build institutional capacity for a demographic of students with very little federal and senate support? For Dr. Viramontes, she has focused on,

Building the mechanisms will allow us to say, "This is our impact on our students." I don't need to know their name to understand whether or not the experiences of their engagement with their offices have been fulfilling for their development and their journey here and where they're going to go. Our goal is if a student walks into the doors, as you know, we're going to support them, but also go out and do education and outreach for other folks. Their strategy has been to develop belonging instruments that will allow us to connect to the folks connecting with the center, right, to fill out the survey that will say connect belonging with whatever development support they might have experienced, whatever workshop, right? So I think there are ways to understand our impact without connecting it to an [ID].

Success for undocumented students looks different. Both leaders should be more focused on the numbers. Dr. Viramontes continued to share,

What I appreciate about Dan's vision and ability to lead is that we are not a numbers game division, right? So if we're chasing that we serve X number of students, I have to

ask that. I ask that internally. I don't talk about that publicly, right? Because it raises questions about value and resources and doesn't address exactly what Dan has framed. And that is an impact, right? Because the impact isn't just on the individual student. The impact may be how we impact the community. How do we impact the culture of the university, right? And I can give you some examples of that when we get a little bit further down, that we'd miss that opportunity if we're just talking numbers.

I take a sip of water. I appreciated how Dr. Viramontes shared her perspective. Telling the stories behind those numbers is equally valuable and equity-centered, evident in her values.

So if you're going to hold something up and elevate it, and this is what we talk about here, then you have to make sure that you have the resources, that you have the institutional commitment, right, that you are aligned with it. It's not just a performative holding up as the first; it has to have meaning and impact. Right?

Building support services with intention, carefully strategizing solutions, and being proactive about future obstacles is a comprehensive practice. One of the values of MWU is that it centers research on this mission. Dr. Viramontes shared, "Our mission is research. So we have to integrate research into the work of our centers." A significant challenge that the USRC is experiencing at MWU is that it has always responded at a crisis level. Given the history of how the center began and now the COVID-19 pandemic, its development journey has been tumultuous. This was evident when Dr. Viramontes stated that "[USRCs] [have] a particular role of getting students to be their enterprise when they leave. Some laws keep us from being hireable. But no laws prevent us from doing our work, right?"

A critical strategy to facilitate students' success is to prepare them to navigate the world. I continued to listen, and she raised important questions,

> So how are we setting up students to be in their enterprise when they leave here, right? So by moving that model so that we're not a crisis response place, then we can think long term as to how are we going to get the students to have better lives when they leave here, and that the other piece is then we have to do that through policy change. We have to do that through best practices, right? How will we advise universities so that they're not freaking out like, "Can we use public dollars?" Or what I just said, in terms of students being unable to be their enterprise, how do we get people to know through our policies and practices that we can do that?" Part of shifting a campus culture requires building new knowledge, but to do that, leaders must remain proactive. Noted in the conversation, Dr. Viramontes's perspective comes from observing that most people are unaware of legal statuses or terms such as "DACA or TPS or undocu, right? I mean, they don't know the difference. So we're an institution of higher learning. That should be our teaching. And we should be talking about what the-- people should know about the Presidents' Alliance, right, that these institutions are always supported and watching. Our students should know that we're watching these pieces, right, that they don't have to be afraid of me or [Dr. Lozano], right? and that the directors are only one safe person, right, that they-- or that they need to find a safe person. This should be their home, their campus, right? So I think that's our future, right? That's how we need to move towards-- I think the other transformation is when a center is born out of student activism.

Conclusion: Constructing a LatCrit Consciousness

> We're frustrated that this is a Latin support group and that immigration and undocumented status weren't being discussed. So we were like, "Okay, you know what, we can't push the leaders of that organization at the moment to provide a space to have a conversation regarding [legal status] [and] immigration" -Sebastian SOMOS Dreamer member.

SOMOS Dreamers' leadership and activism strategies helped transform and influence how undocumented people are served at MWU. One of their goals was to center undocumented students' needs in spaces of power where decisions are made. Higher education institutions play a prominent role in educating and socializing populations. Undocumented students, children of mixed-status families, and children of immigrants pushed for creating the first undocumented resource center for the State of Utah, elevating the institution's excellence, access, and diversity. However, it also questions what else post-secondary institutions can do effectively and intentionally to serve undocumented people for future generations. Until there is no more war, hate, racial, gender, legal, and class disparities, universities must continue thinking about how they will serve everyone. When you serve and include undocumented people, you also think of everyone else.

In recent years, some universities have been sending the message that undocumented students and people have a place within institutions and that they belong. Students captured university leaders' attention by humanizing undocumented students' experiences. Exposing the barriers and legal challenges that complicate the path to education is an opportunity to build community and coalitions. It will remain challenging for institutions to serve undocumented people of color when it's used to serving people from dominant groups. The laws and policies of universities favor people with citizenship status and those who are white and white-passing. A manufactured global immigration crisis will continue to make people undocumented in the U.S.

Ahmed (2012) states, "When history accumulates, certain ways of doing things seem natural. An institution takes shape as an effect of has become automatic” (p.19).

Higher education is critical in helping address society's most pressing problem--our immigration system. The legal system is racist and a by-product of white supremacy. Therefore these systemic inequities manifest in higher education as excluding students from accessing federal financial aid and denying access to a pathway to citizenship in the U.S., limiting career, academic, and professional development opportunities. This double subordination (Crenshaw, 1991) prevents undocumented students from having an equitable college-going experience. Analyzing my findings through a race-conscious lens, results suggest that to understand how to serve undocumented students, campus leaders must develop a LatCrit consciousness to inform policy decisions impacting undocumented people and students. Second, USRCs are critical in advancing advocacy efforts across all levels of educational access for undocumented people and mixed-status families. Streamlining resources and building strategic partnerships on and off campus is a way to keep people and stakeholders engaged in the conversation. Making space for undocumented people in higher education requires reframing how one thinks and leads. We need to teach leaders how to inform their thinking. How can USRCs pave the way towards equity rather than focusing on inclusion? A USRC helps students feel included; equitably, developing a resource requires a specific lens and consciousness.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPING A LATCRIT FRAMEWORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE POLITICS OF USRCS

Summary of Findings

My critical case study looks at the initial development period of a USRC at Mountain West University (MWU). Findings demonstrated that for the full benefits of a USRC to be realized on a college campus, leaders must be aware of how social and political systems impact students without legal status. These leaders must also embrace and leverage the intersectionalities that students bring with them. Given the political climate in 2016, the SOMOS Dreamers student leaders wanted MWU to support undocumented students by institutionalizing support services for undocumented students. SOMOS Dreamers students attempted to hold the institution accountable, yet MWU did not create an undocumented resource center out of sheer student need. Instead, SOMOS Dreamers forced the institution to be responsible for its support with its activism, resistance, and organizing. Support for undocumented students at MWU was long overdue, and change resulted from the many years (before 2017) that students led the efforts to highlight the needs of undocumented students. The lack of funds and institutional commitment highlighted how privilege and identity play a role in the decision-making of educational leaders. Findings also illustrated how USRCs can be used as a mechanism to facilitate social and institutional transformation. My study was in Salt Lake City, Utah, where 93.3 % of its population is White. Other student demographics include Black/African American 1.5%, American Indian/Alaska Native 1.6%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders 1.1%, Two or More Races 2.8% and Hispanic or Latino 14.8% making this critical case study ideal for applying

CRT and LatCrit frameworks. Finally, the SOMOS Dreamers student leaders enacted forms of activism that disrupted the traditional notions of higher education leadership that had long denied sustained institutional support for undocumented students. The three major themes of this study consist of (a) the creation of undocumented resources as a result of student activism, leadership, and organizing; (b) a leader's positionality, identity, and experiential knowledge influence the process of development; and, (c) undocumented resource centers benefit college campuses and support, in particular, a growing population of undocumented college students. Scholars and practitioners must problematize how USRCs operate and function in higher education because it matters who and how institutions serve undocumented students. After all, by design, this student population was not considered in the U.S.'s initial period of school implementation in public and private education. The strategies used in this case study reaffirm how support services are filtered through staff, faculty, institutional agents, and students. In this case, specifically, there were three essential elements to developing this undocumented student program and opening a center, including (a) establishing an Undocumented Student Club, (b) hiring a USRC Coordinator, and (c) creating an Undocumented Student Support Taskforce (Immigrants Rising, 2022). Each component requires a specific and concrete purpose and intent. Although the SOMOS Dreamers student group operated structurally and functionally different than other campus groups, they nonetheless were able to lay the foundation for change at MWU and to prompt other university stakeholders to take action when students barged into a leader's office.

SOMOS Dreamers enacted a form of LatCrit educational leadership at MWU-- or also what other scholars argue, an elevation of a LatCrit political consciousness. In 2009, Aleman (2009) proposed a social justice framework that examined and centers "the permanence of racism, values multiple voices, understands and utilizes the histories of Latina/o peoples, and

endorses activism to achieve social transformation (p. 195." After analyzing the stories of the participants of this critical case study with the analytical tools of interest convergence and the permeance of racism, I also understand how MWU benefitted from these students' activism and their initiative to develop support services. A win that SOMOS Dreamers did not anticipate was the creation of a new college that housed multiple departments with majors that provoke and invoke social change through the understanding of systems of power. These changes now attract intellectual diversity from all over the globe and promote inclusion. As a result of student disruptions--over time on campus arose a new division for equity and diversity, and it stopped being an office. MWU focuses on inclusion and on preventing racism on campus with its new anti-racism task force.

Although there were some conversations years prior, it took the political campaign of Trump for stakeholders to expedite advocacy efforts seriously. Sebastian, a SOMOS Dreamer, remembers it like this, "So we're like, 'Okay, you know what, we can't push the organization's leaders at the moment to provide a space to have an immigration conversation, but we can focus our attention on how the institution is [currently responding].'" MWU responded to Trump's xenophobic claims about undocumented students on November 2016, almost two months before he took office on January 20, 2017, a public university statement was released:

> As a School, we pledge to work to the fullest possible extent to protect our community members from intimidation and unfair investigation; to encourage all School members and campus members who share our commitment to take the immediate action of contributing to the new DREAMers Scholarship Fund, as established by the President's letter of November 17, 2016; to advise and lend our labor to key campus leaders so as to

> establish a new resource space for DREAMers students, an entity that will provide guidance to financial and legal services and will coordinate closely with University mental health services to help assure cultural competency in working with trauma-related issues due to unique circumstances faced by undocumented students; to help create contingency plans for students' completion of their degrees, should such plans be needed; to use and strengthen our campus ties to University Neighborhood Partners and other entities that can assist in accessing resources for undocumented people in our midst; and to share in fostering, alongside our student groups, knowledge and dialogues concerning undocumented and immigrant experiences.

Now more than ever, universities are publicly expressing their commitment to equity and diversity to combat white supremacy on some college campuses and dealing with the backlash as "anti-CRT" and "anti-DEI" legislation has been introduced, debated, and passed in several state legislative bodies. In elevating DEI dialogue on campus, some campus leaders have bargained that their university's institutional prestige would benefit and that more undocumented students would be attracted to campus, thus, boosting their reputation. Equity is a business, too, and it matters who is at the decision-making table leading institutional efforts to shape policies and practices that suit the institution's self-interests. Publicly saying that a university supports undocumented students and communities is another marketable enrollment strategy that still centers on the dominant culture, white citizens' interests up to a certain point because students of color are not graduating or being retained like their white counterparts let alone undocumented students. Cultural centers are considered safe havens for racial and ethnic minoritized students where they can seek support. Although [institutions] "remain difficult places for students of color

to negotiate [their identity]" (Ladson Billings & Patton, 2010), without student activism on college campuses, students would not have support services.

According to Haney Lopez (2013), in U.S. law, a review of opinions and articles by judges and legal academics reveals a startling fact: “Few seem to know what race is and is not (p. 193)." The purported role of USRCs in higher education is to position colleges and universities to support undocumented students, engage with the discourse on race and educational policy, and purposefully center and challenge the ways that undocumented people in higher education are ignored and denied services. SOMOS Dreamers students did just this by focusing their mission on the experiences of undocumented students and by adhering to social justice principles of disruption. About 40 students organized in committees to carry out their work, creating space for undocumented students on campus. They formed coalitions, made space, and utilized their talents to fundraise because financial aid was a primary barrier for fellow students, especially undocumented students. Leading fundraising efforts motivated students to do more and to propose institutional support services. A group of the majority of children of immigrants and undocumented students from mixed-status families achieved social transformation on campus. The courage of SOMOS Dreamers pushed to create an undocumented resource center. Frustrated with the reality that no student group was advocating for undocumented students suggests that issues of immigration were not discussed as heavily before at MWU, even though Utah was one of the first states to enact in-state tuition resident policies.

Trump's Presidential campaign inflicted danger on the lives of undocumented immigrants, also impacting them psychologically. He swept the nation by increasing fear and anxiety in many vulnerable populations. His xenophobic anti-immigrant rhetoric turned into actual policies; according to a report by the Pew Research Center, apprehensions at the border

rose to 851,508 people in 2019 along the U.S.-Mexico border (cite pew research). Pledging to build a wall, the message of his political campaign focused on dehumanizing undocumented immigrants. His “zero tolerance policy” separated more than 5,000 children from their families without leaving any records behind. These horrific practices also impacted mixed-status families and international students. The education sector in the U.S. was once considered a top destination for pursuing higher education in other countries. Many students across the seas who plan to begin their academic careers in the U.S. have become terrified of the hostile political climate, limiting the experiences of all university students' global perspectives. The changes in visa requirements directly impacted students' ability to access education and employment opportunities. Overall, external socio-political forces impact funding, access to education, safety, security, and how people in power respond to advocacy efforts. The dehumanizing messaging that Trump was putting out threatened the physical and psychological safety of undocumented people and permitted people to be racist-- reinforcing systems of oppression in the name of the United States of America. Perpetuating negative stereotypes and inciting violence and hate crimes across the U.S. against immigrants have further divided our nation and our ability to be humane and work across differences. In the following sections, I discuss more in-depth how USRCs benefit higher education and how the political context of the U.S. influences and shapes access to higher education.

The U.S.'s political environment heavily influences how education and immigration policy is created. A major political factor for education policy is the allocation of funds and how it impacts the development of programs and policies implemented in the PK-20 education pipeline. The decision-making process in K-12 for school choice, the equitable fundings of districts, standardized testing, and teacher evaluations heavily influence how policies are

implemented and assessed. Teachers and staff must adhere to state and federal standards and policy procedures. In the same way, leaders, staff, and faculty must follow university protocol in hiring or sponsoring international employees. The state's political environment for higher education also influences educational funding, financial aid, and college admissions. In other words, the sociopolitical climate significantly shapes the creation of access to resources and the allocation of funds for USRCs--making their creation on college campuses a political issue.

Using the analytical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Race Theory (Alemán, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 07; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Trucios-Haynes, n.d.) LatCrit educational leadership (Aleman, 2009) and LatCrit consciousness (Valdes, 1998) informed my thinking and understanding of how I saw and analyzed my participants' legal stories in the case study. The research question I answer in this chapter is:

"What socio-political forces external to the university influenced the USRC's creation and development?" Followed by a discussion of how the socio-political climate influenced the development process of the USRC and impacted its development timeline at Mountain West University (MWU). Then, I discuss my findings, contributions to the field, recommendations for practice in higher education, conclusion, and an epilogue.

USRCs as Spaces for Critical Consciousness

USRCs represent possibility. Creating a USRC at college and university campuses has five key institutional benefits. First, these centers can offer research opportunities on topics related to undocumented students and mixed-status families and offer a glance at how they experience higher education at the local and state level. Second, it allows universities to analyze policies at the university and state levels to advance advocacy efforts strengthening their connections to communities. Third, USRCs serve as spaces of transformation by cultivating high community engagement and local activism to support undocumented students. Collaborating across the state, K-12 level, and with local communities extending community outreach initiatives. Third, the symbolic impact of having a USRC represents a commitment to social justice. The Undocumented resource centers create sustainable systems of support for undocumented students. One of the USRC directors stated,

It takes a community to run a resource center, and we cannot have one person in charge of it all, especially someone like myself who does not identify as undocumented. I'm coming in with citizenship privilege, born and raised here, and understand the language. I'm a son of immigrants.

Gonzalo highlights an essential component in creating institutional capacity for undocumented students. Operating within power structures, a person's identity, positionality, privilege, and power within an institution influence how they humanize the experiences of undocumented students. When SOMOS Dreamers began institutional conversations about the needs of undocumented students, they sought support from key leaders. They reminded them of

the barriers associated with a lack of legal status. Access to education depends upon an undocumented person's state and location of residence. Only some undocumented students have access to a driver's license, work permit, healthcare, federal social services, and financial aid, so location is another factor. All these elements impact the college-going journey and how students seek support services—the lack of inclusion at the national level calls for states to provide access to equitable post-secondary education.

The centers are sometimes called "hubs," "dream centers," and "undocumented student programs." Many factors contributed to the development of USRC at MWU. SOMOS Dreamers envisioned the following for the USRC:

- 1 Director/Program manager
- 1 Program Coordinator
- 1 Future-students and families liaison
- 2 Graduate Assistants
- 1 Partnership mental health professional for undocumented students
- 1 Partnership academic advisors
- 1 Financial aid counselor
- 1 Partnership with career services specialist (part-time or shared with career services—Funding wise)
- Robust pro bono legal aid partnerships and programming

The proposal that students turned in to their V.P. was a group effort. One of the students, Benjamin, states,

> Everyone provided some feedback when he came to MEChA because we, MEChA, and SOMOS shared so many members. We were at that MEChA meeting and asked her for a dream center to be added to that list because, initially, it wasn't on that list and wasn't a priority. And so I don't know. Maybe [Dr. Infante] managed to get it in there because it worked out and was part of the initiative. After that, things started getting blurry because I needed to figure out why they asked us for a proposal if they accepted our initiative.

Often students have to justify their immediate needs behind formal protocols like setting up a meeting to meet with the V.P. of Equity & Diversity, creating a proposal for a student group, and a proposal to establish an undocumented resource center. These types of responses create extra barriers for students. Given this dilemma, according to Tapia-Fuselier (2022, more research is required to understand better how higher education professionals can collaborate across state contexts. Researchers continue to assert that institutions have not done enough to institutionalize resources for undocumented students on college campuses, but it is a start.

Most USRCs operate and function with the "leadership of one full-time coordinator, program manager while others utilize one or two part-time positions to fulfill certain support responsibilities (p.607; Cisneros, Valdivia, Reyna Rivarola & Russel, 2021)." In essence, no USRC is created equal. In 2015, the first undocumented program was initiated at UCLA and then at UC Berkeley (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015), making education less of a traumatic experience. The UC Berkeley institutional team joined with UCLA and facilitated an UndocuAlly Training Program across the U.C. System. That is an example of the institutional power agents, faculty, staff, and student affairs professionals have. Suppose higher education institutions are serious about building equitable support services. In that case, every post-secondary institution within the State of Utah must build interstate coalitions and strategize how to support undocumented people once they graduate. USRCs are starting points, not endpoints. Conversations must continue until immigration status is no longer a legal issue. USRC practitioners and campus leaders must perceive their work as influential because they can impact the lives of undocumented people. Acting as validating institutional agents and practitioners creates a welcoming atmosphere for undocumented students. My case study further demonstrated that student activism benefits institutions of higher education. It allows university leaders,

stakeholders, and students to collaborate to develop support services for underserved student populations.

People who work in these roles bring unique expertise, ideas, and creative solutions. These specialized practitioners understand how the social and historical context shape education and work opportunities; their political consciousness promotes empathy and understanding, which humanize and validate students' experiences. USRC practitioners understand institutional, local, state, and federal processes that determine what services are available to students. In addition, they simultaneously foster social justice and equity practices at an institutional level. These professionals help universities accomplish their mission of equity and inclusion at the campus level. Lastly, practitioners that support and operate USRCs have the gift of building coalitions across campus and local communities, bridging diverse experiences and perspectives. The way these individuals are compensated and recognized matters. Students and administrators spoke different policy language in those conversations because students had a race and political consciousness that stakeholders needed to have.

UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF USRCs

The creation of USRCs has brought a lot of controversy to college and university campuses because this issue is also tied to immigration policy. In a campus-wide email in 2017, Francisco stated, " This year, we are following very closely the political decisions that affect undocumented students in Utah and the United States." A year earlier, in 2016, Trump had announced that he was running for U.S. president, promising the removal of immigrants to return

to the good ol days[3]. Referring to Trump's announcement that he was running for president and acknowledging that he posed a threat to immigrants, Francisco was preparing MWU to prepare for the worst at the university level. He also affirmed students on campus by stating, "As these decisions unfold, we stand with undocumented students and will communicate any efforts in which we will support our students on campus." The way USRCs began was as a result of political violence.

The politics surrounding whether undocumented students deserve the right to access financial aid in higher education and employment opportunities is, in fact, political and violent. There are two reasons why politicians oppose a path to citizenship: (a) some people sincerely believe that undocumented people do not deserve access to an education or work opportunities, (b) people's thoughts are tied to the belief that if undocumented people are granted the citizenship that U.S citizens will not have jobs and that governmental resources will run out. Although most people do not lead with these dehumanizing thoughts, people in power refuse to create solutions that benefit everyone. As a country, we pride ourselves in being a nation full of opportunities and a place to make our personal and career dreams come true. But negate them to undocumented people who want to contribute to the greater good. Our education system in the U.S. is discriminatory and racist, making the path to higher education only available to some. Anti-immigrant groups claim that developing USRCs encourages illegal immigration and that support services should only be available to U.S. citizens and legal residents. However, those are myths. People with those views believe undocumented immigrants are a burden to society, but they are not; undocumented immigrants contribute $405 billion to the U. S economy by funding social programs for U.S. citizens (Migration Policy Report, 2017). Twelve percent is taken out

[3] This phrase indicates the desire to go back to a time in America of enslaving Black people and oppressing other People of Color.

of salaried workers' paychecks, which is split between employer and employee and goes into funding the U.S Social Security system regardless (ssa.gov, 2023; Roberts, 2019). Providing a pathway to citizenship would continue to fund the social security system; this social system is tied to increasing population and is inexorably linked to immigration growth.

At the university level, similar opinions may exist due to administrators' staff, stakeholders, and faculty perspectives. USRCs face more challenges and opposition than other college campus support centers. These centers create the opportunity on college campuses to access resources and support services students need to succeed. American history has always made education political for undocumented students. Plyer v. Doe passed in 1982, forty-one years ago, a federal policy said that the "state cannot prevent children from undocumented immigrants from attending public school unless substantial state interest is involved (Plyer v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982)." One of Bell's most significant contributions to the field of CRT was the concept of "interest convergence" in his definition of race, he added that racial equality is through the promotion of racial equality by expanding economic growth or preserving national security (cite) reminding us that in a racist society; it is shaped by power, history, and politics (cite). This is why I argue the importance of having a Latcrit political consciousness-- to see how ingrained racism is in U.S. society, our legal and education system.

Utah's economic interests inform how public and private education is practiced in the state. The growing workforce and culture of start-up companies declare economic interests in Utah's policies. Workforce development, STEM education, private-public partnerships, and career and technical education. America's approach to education is more "entrepreneurial," preparing students for specific occupations and socializing them to serve the U.S. economy without obtaining any benefits unless labor is exchanged if they are undocumented. Complex

governmental structures control educational leaders' decision-making (Scribner, Alemán, and Maxcy, 2003); there are high political efforts to eliminate the limited policy access for undocumented people.

Creating a thriving undocumented center involves working alongside students. Finding other avenues to generate support and partnerships in the community is the only way these centers will thrive. Influencing the streamline of services for USRCs is necessary. As a nation, we saw what the Muslim Ban did to universities and our international population, and it hindered students' and faculty's ability to come into the U.S. legally. Ultimately, the political environment influences hiring high-skilled international workers and impacts intellectual diversity on college campuses. Education and immigration policy intersect in political settings, affecting how access and opportunities are shaped. Political leaders in the U.S. have racist views toward border security issues, the admission of refugees, and family-based immigration leading to policy differences and the enactment of laws that separate families. Creating laws and policies is filtered by people's consciousness and belief systems. This case study illuminated how building access and opportunities for undocumented people will vary depending on the location, power, funding, commitment, political landscape, and identity of people servicing students.

SOMOS Dreamers sought to create support services with one goal in mind… holding the institution accountable. All the leaders participating in this critical case study credited and acknowledged the expansion of support services to SOMOS Dreamers and students. The development process begins with disrupting traditional and deficit ways of thinking. Research shows that campus leaders fail to account for how minoritized students experience and navigate oppression (Aleman, n.d.; Huber, 2009; Linder, Quaye, Stewart, et al., 2019; Stovall, 2006). MWU began with an open racial dialogue, task forces, committees, and the formation of new

student groups. All those efforts contributed to creating an undocu-program, then a resource center. The sociopolitical realities from 2014-2017 created an urgency for students to leverage their citizenship privilege and center their experiences to make their voices heard. Often "undergraduate and graduate student activists perform the emotional, physical, mental, and social labor to address oppression on their campuses (Green, 2016; Renschler, 2008); this job, arguably, student affairs educators should hold (Linder, Quaye, Lange, et al., 2019)."

In praxis, democratizing forms of knowledge that foster academic opportunities within an institution translates into employing individuals in student affairs, administrators, and faculty. Educational practitioners should see student activism as an opportunity to communicate and co-collaborate. Traditionally, the design of support services does not consider nor center the students' voice in the creation process. The way students brought attention to issues of immigration at the MWU campus meant that some leaders did not like how students approached initial conversations. Students' frustration led them to express their concerns in ways that could come off as disrespectful. With a race-conscious lens, one could see and understand students' behavior. Activism can take many forms on a college campus, from protests to sit-ins and walkouts. However, that emotional labor can affect students' well-being and academic success. An example of this occurrence is Alicia's experience. She states, "I at least burned every bridge on my way out of MWU, and my grades dropped." institutions. Students at MWU organized on campus to push for the creation of support services for undocumented students; however, that came with a high price. People with minoritized identities often feel this is their responsibility, but it is not. It is the social responsibility of the institution. SOMOS Dreamers accomplished a lot as a student group. As a result, MWU established a scholarship fund, created a university-based student group, and drafted the USRC proposal with the assistance of other supporters.

Ultimately, all student actions led to the creation of the USRC and the opening of a new college on campus, the School for Social Cultural Transformation.

MOVING TOWARD A LATCRIT LEADERSHIP FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Building the capacity to serve undocumented students and their nuanced identities requires a CRT frame of thinking and a leadership that is critically conscious and understands how people of color are disadvantaged and systems are designed to do so. Engaging in critical self-reflection, building relationships with undocumented students, and utilizing intentional action leads to becoming a race-conscious human. The U.S. has the world's highest population of immigrants. USRCs can be one policy tool, and the physical space can be a programmatic strategy for l humanizing the experiences of undocumented students and people. USRCs provide institutions of higher education the ability to advocate and influence policy change while simultaneously challenging stereotypes and misconceptions of undocumented people by putting a human face to this historical issue. A welcoming environment cultivates trust between communities, students, and higher education institutions. Applying a LatCrit political consciousness to leadership and decision-making allows people to recognize the unique experiences and struggles of Latinx communities from a humanizing perspective. Understanding how race, law, and power shape how undocumented people experience systems of oppression is a starting point. This term was born from the CRT movement in the 1980s and 1990s to describe the intersections of race, law, and power. Heavily influenced by Rudy Acuna, who used the term in his book “Occupied America: A History of Chicanos,” arguing how a Chicano political consciousness emerged from a long history of oppression. A Puerto Rican scholar named Juan

Flores argued that a Latino political consciousness is shaped by numerous factors like race, ethnicity, class, and gender--including the historical experiences of different Latinx communities (cite). A LatCrit political consciousness evolves as a society's understanding of race shifts and as politicians take office. Politics influence how policies are enforced and implemented. Given the historical constructs of illegality, leaders and stakeholders need to develop a LatCrit political consciousness-- a LatCrit leadership. The racial and ethnic identities of the leaders in my study varied. Some leaders identified as Latinx, White, Asian American, and Black. These institutional agents played a critical role in engaging and influencing the rest of the campus on how to support undocumented students. Possessing some awareness of the experiences of undocumented people, leaders began task forces and committees to engage in conversation with the rest of campus. The Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and the Vice President of Student Development pushed institutional conversations forward in Board of Regents meetings. In those cabinet meetings, the Vice President for Governor Relations also attends. To advocate for legislative change, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies sought university legal counsel, and conversations began in those spaces. Using and leveraging their campus connections, they advocated for undocumented students in rooms of power. Another major factor was institutional collaboration. Other campus entities began to communicate with each other. The Office of Admissions, The Scholarship and Financial Aid Office, The Office of Orientation, Undergraduate Studies, the Transfer Student Office, and the Division of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion were spaces where conversations were initiated. Later, once the USRC opened its directors, they also brought their direct connection within the local and university community. Bridging their cultural, social, and professional networks, USRC directors and staff members cultivated university and community partnerships, ultimately benefiting MWU. This case study

also highlighted how USRCs protect students' identities and data. One of the stakeholders in my research mentioned how USRCs " don't keep [personal] information provided but must adhere to FERPA and HIPAA. Like any other students under our purview, they're protected by those federal laws." Stakeholders in this study mentioned how, sometimes,

> We are chastised for not giving information but always about protecting. When people provide information to us, they do so with a sense of privacy, so people self-identify. So if somebody gets a request, it's going to raise a lot of suspicions. And my job is not to create suspicion.

Limiting access to sensitive data is critical for USRCs. Although the focus of my study is not protecting student data, having a USRC on campus requires that colleges and universities secure their data storage (including flash drives, hard drives, etc.) regularly. Consistently audit access to prevent unauthorized access, the university must also examine current policies and procedures for handling data from undocumented students. In addition, universities and colleges should consult with immigration attorneys to review compliance with handling undocumented student data at the local and federal levels. As you can see, leaders need to critically engage with the legal doctrine in institutions to radically change how we educate and serve undocumented students in the U.S. Educational leaders, stakeholders, and policymakers need to understand and grapple with the mechanisms of race and its politics. That is only possible if the person can see how systems of oppression operate for racialized people. Borrowing from legal studies and critical race scholar's methodologies (Aleman, n.d.; Alemán, 2009; Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 07; Haney López, 1996; Ledesma & Calderón, n.d.; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Trucios-Haynes, n.d.) I argue that leaders must have a political consciousness that is informed by social and legal understandings of the U.S. and its history (Valdes (1998). My

critical case study documented how students used their personal, student, and professional experiences to engage politically on campus, complicating the narrative of what it means to serve undocumented and Latinx students in higher education. Valdes (1998) reminds us that "Latcrit consciousness, community, and theory are manifestations of Latina/o oppression and resilience (p.55). Education is political, and there are systems of belief out there that there are not enough resources for everyone-- when there are. People in power do not want to share.

Policy change for the undocumented is always dependent upon economic factors. Preparing students for high-demand, high-paying jobs in the future requires the creation of equitable education opportunities from the beginning of their educational journeys. If institutions of higher education want to survive and stay in the business of providing access to education, they will need to revisit their politics of education. The needs of college students will continue to shift as our political climate in the U.S. heads into its neoliberal fascist era. A significant challenge that USRCs encounter within higher education that limits the way they support undocumented students is the financial burdens students face. These specialized centers need more financial capacity and institutional commitment for continual sustainable support. Designed to address the factors that limit undocumented student success, like the reality that many undocumented people cannot work legally and obtain a work permit and fear the risk of deportation. Typically USRCs include services like Cisneros and Valdivia state (2017), "USRCs are not influential simply because they offer services and resources to undocumented students. Rather, they have a powerful positive impact on the lives of undocumented students and students of mixed-status families because their staff performs multi-sector work (p.7)." USRCs are a way to streamline services across the university, local, and state levels for undocumented students and their families. However, in this case, a leader highlights the difficulty of being inclusive. They

state: "Well, my opinion is just that it's hard to be inclusive when you're federally, locally, tied up at the institutional level." State governing agencies are potent forces in higher education, influencing how policy is enacted for undocumented resource centers and undocumented students. According to Rubin (2021), the "governance of the public higher education sector in the U.S. is highly decentralized compared to other countries (p. 3)." Accessing education is political, and funding undocumented resource centers in higher education has questioned how states and these state agencies advance and promote how it should be accessed. These entities have specific roles and ensure institutions comply with state and federal policies and guidelines.

Having a critical approach as to how institutions and the law intersect can empower stakeholders and leaders to make more informed decisions about meeting the needs of students while at the same time building intentional coalitions with students, the campus, and the local community. For example, the only way resource centers for undocumented people can survive is if it teaches their university faculty, staff, and campus community how to be better-informed advocates. Recognizing how systems of power create system barriers avoids the one-size fits all approach. When supporting undocumented students, outcomes look different, so higher education institutions need to find another way to measure academic success. Traditional systems of measuring success operate from a deficit lens. This population of students has unique needs, and migration stories are always different. That is why stakeholders and leaders must collaborate and involve undocumented students and students from mixed-status families in creating support services for them.

The forces shaping educational opportunities make education for undocumented people political and violent. Undocumented resource centers (USRCs) are rising in uncharted racist educational and political territories. Suppose campuses want to show with actions how they

acknowledge the experiences of undocumented students and must recognize the systems of power. Knowing how they work against students inserts the voices of undocumented students to design opportunities they can participate in. That demonstrates that USRCs know university, local, state, and federal power dynamics. The rise of xenophobic policies at the border, mass shootings toward Latiné/x people based on ethnicity and legal status, and the continual failure to pass a federal solution to remedy the legal situation of undocumented individuals render the need for every college campus to develop an undocumented resource center. We cannot see a person's legal status but systems of power and oppression trick us into believing that physical and personal characteristics reveal that part of a person's identity. This constructed social condition manifests in the lives of real people by further excluding them, in essence saying that they do not belong in the U.S. Policies have real impacts on people's lives.

As leaders, we need to be more aware of how social and political paradigms influence people's quality of life and the ability to participate fully in society, making USRCs political higher education. It takes consistent self-reflection, ongoing learning, and making the conscious choice to want to learn both historical and new information. Define race consciousness as (a) knowing how race operates in social and political systems of oppression and (b) having the inherent understanding of how a racialized person's quality of life is shaped and controlled by these systems, and (c) recognizing that race is not the only factor People of Color have to contend with; there is also class, gender, sexuality, and legal status (Crenshaw, 1991).

With the impact of local and federal immigration laws on education policies, Garcia (1995) emphasizes the importance of using CRT to see "the importance of viewing laws and lawmaking within the proper historical context, to deconstruct their racialized content (p. 123)." In a time of endless anti-immigrant rhetoric, USRCs provide "an at-a-glance" as to what issues

students face and will continue to meet outside and within academic structures. Cisneros, Valdivia, Reyna Rivarola, and Russel, 2012) shared perspectives on evidence-based practices to further the development of support services for undocumented people. Best practices consist of

USRCs are physical reminders of how excluded undocumented people are in society. Given the challenges associated with accessing an Equitable education in the U.S., campus leaders and stakeholders have just scratched the surface of how they can begin supporting undocumented people on college campuses. Being consistently reminded of one's exclusion through denying access to opportunities and resources is no longer a question of access; it is about human rights.

Conclusion

Creating a USRC has many components, like any other support program that supports all students. However, what is unique about undocumented resource centers is how external political forces influence how it operates and is funded. There needs to be a system or leader at a higher ed level telling us how resource centers for undocumented resource centers should be funded and staffed. There are also no established guidelines or centralized system to start a USRC. SOMOS Dreamers initiated all support strategies for undocumented and mixed-status families on campus. They advocated for a student population that needs to be more noticed and supported. SOMOS Dreamers set an example of how to train our students, leaders, and stakeholders at the campus level, and that showed how important politics are on a college campus. This group of students taught people on campus how to think about inclusivity and equity. However, it is not the student's responsibility to teach us or to make them do the work to open up a center. The university is responsible for educating itself and everyone else who works for it on equitably

supporting students. A LatCrit leadership will help colleges and universities support students in a time when we have heightened anti-immigrant rhetoric directed toward Latinx people. Trump ``strategically shap[ing] the master narrative of undocumented Latinx immigrants, framing them as "criminals" and "invaders' ' in the U.S. (p. 140; Gòmez, Vigil, Pérez Huber & Munoz, 2021). A LatCrit leadership perspective allows people to see how language, ethnicity and culture, and immigration status positively impact students beyond university walls. This way of thinking keeps the conversation going. What does it mean to have politics at the campus level? A LatCrit leadership in higher education humanizes people and their stories. Cultivating an environment for leaders to consciously create educational and career opportunities for undocumented students from all walks of life (high school, transfer, undergraduate, graduate school, or professional licenses) is the purpose of a USRC (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020). Building the capacity to serve undocumented students and their nuanced identities requires a CRT way of thinking—a building of consciousness to understand how people and our systems were programmed. Engaging in critical self-reflection, self-education, and building relationships with undocumented students and the community with intentional action--leads to becoming a more race-conscious human. A qualitative study by Manolo-Pedro (2017) highlighted how institutional agents are crucial in advancing equity for undocumented students. Faculty, staff, university leaders, and students are institutional agents and require us to provide them with the adequate support and resources to carry the university mission through. His study also demonstrated how the result of a USRC in the California University System (CSU) California State University encouraged more students to pursue higher education when they knew there was support and a USRC. However, he used the analytical tools of interest convergence to highlight the importance of working collaboratively to achieve equity. Yosso and Benavides Lopez (2010)

state that "building a community of resistance" on the margin may require courage, vigilance, and diligence (p. 94)." Building consciousness disrupts systemic racism. The presence of a USRC on a university campus signals that there is an institutional commitment to serving undocumented students. At MWU, their undocumented resource center first began as an undocumented student program, and then it became a center within months. Francisco, the previous USRC director, remembers it like this,

> Francisco sipped his coffee and reminisced. I started working for the Office of Student Engagement at my former university, specifically the Dream Program. Right? So it wasn't a center, and it was just a program. Within a couple of months of being in it and after talking to students, especially student leaders who had drafted proposals for becoming a center, and then after doing more than just a program, not just meeting with students or not just supporting the school with presentations, it was those two things and all of the-- it was all of the above and more.

Francisco, the first USRC director, quickly served more than just the students. Within the first month, he created and led workshops on local and federal policies that created barriers for undocumented students. In that role, both directors entered powerful spaces. They did workshops for the board of regents, office of admissions, financial aid, LGBT, women’s resource center, Utah System of Higher Education, local consulates, and more. In addition, they trained committee members who were part of social justice initiatives like the Anti-racist Taskforce, attended community events, and presented at local community colleges-- ultimately bringing knowledge and resources to MWU. Although the USRC did not have a whole staff in its nascent stages, both directors sought to build partnerships between departments and people in academic advising, counseling, financial aid, and career counseling, beginning a lending library to help

offset the cost of college with books and technology. This included student transfer services, legal services within the local community and university, build a funding structure for emergency grants, scholarships, work-study, internships, and mentorship. The responsibilities of institutionalizing a center consisted of advising and building new systems and processes while simultaneously overseeing a USRC. With most energy concentrated on creating and cultivating those connections, it allowed the USRC to function as an as-needed service hub.

However, relying on strategic partnerships within the local university, state, and national organizations helped the USRC its mission which was to facilitate access and build broad alliances and trust in the community. While USRC practitioners serve as primary experts on the needs of undocumented students and tend to become the first responders with higher education, they are still limited by state and federal restrictions on the use of public funds. Defined by state policy and federal regulations, most assistance relates to building students' awareness of what funding and career opportunities are available. Institutional commitment is what makes a center. A physical space within the university symbolizes support and communicates that undocumented people are welcome on campus; USRCs signal access to paid internships at the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Ultimately opening possibilities for all students and community-oriented people. USRCs can advance educational equity (Manalo-Pedro, 2018) if the people operating it understand the political structures.

One of the directors mentioned a similar challenge in the interview,

> The previous president knew who we were. And so that felt supportive, too. Right? So the new person, not knowing there was some convincing needed that undocumented students matter. Again, not because this person was negative, but just because they simply had never been exposed to [those lived experiences] or even thought about it. But

then that took our time away from getting more support because now we had to transition to teaching mode, teaching fundamental things.

Teaching leaders these "basic things" needs to be further examined. Not only are we Students and professionals of color often engage in this type of labor, but those that attend or work at a predominately white institution benefit from their presence on campus (Patton, 2010). Ahmed (2012) says, "Diversity has become about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations (p.34)." Within the first three years of the USRC opening, it created a club/task force/committee to discuss what local university barriers exist and then assess what is specific to the needs and issues of undocumented people. It is a step in the right direction, providing a space for students' voices to feel heard while giving guidance. The Undocumented Student Support Task Force addresses institutional and programming barriers while the USRC Coordinator operationalizes the day-to-day support and case management. Having a center incentivizes undocumented students to finish high school and provides a path to what someone can look forward to.

Implications of USCRs in Higher Education

As I read about creating support services on college campuses, I saw the connection between student leadership and empowerment, education, and immigration policy. A key theme in the literature review is how the development of USRCs results from student mobilizing on college campuses--driven by advocacy efforts and activism with undocumented students and allies. Another theme is how USRCs mission and goals range from providing legal and financial support and cultivating a community of belonging to consistently advocating for institutional policy changes that support undocumented students. Ultimately, these efforts led to establishing

policies and procedures for undocumented students at the post-secondary level. Thus, increasing training for supervisors, staff, and students to understand better student policies updates on immigration policies. Tracing the origins of USRCs begins with the development of support services during one of America's pivotal historical moments-- The Civil Rights Movement (1951-1964) (Patton, 2010). This growing movement reflects the importance of recognizing undocumented students' systemic challenges and barriers within a historical context.

The Black student movement of the 1960s and 1970s catalyzed the creation of cultural centers and cultivated a positive institutional student-environment interaction. Shedding light on what coalitions must be bridged--during this era of rapid socio-political shift, colleges and universities implemented various support services designed to meet the needs of students of color. Similar to the creation of cultural centers in the early 1960s and 1970s across the U.S., more undocumented resource centers developed after the passing of the California Dream Act of 2001. It can be assumed that that policy change led to the increased demand for more support services for undocumented people. Most of those programs created services tailored to first-generation students. They assisted students with academic support, tailored mentorship, and financial assistance, the most significant barriers to students of color at the time and still are. Although the first USRC began in 2014 at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), other universities like the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California San Diego, the University of Houston, and the University of Texas at San Antonio, among many others provide a range of services that assist students in navigating academic advising, legal support, financial assistance, mental health services, and community building opportunities.

Passing policies that promote the success of undocumented students also stems from prioritizing the needs and future of the state economy. Teranishi et al. (2017) found that students

seeking services at USRCs had higher academic engagement and persistence among undocumented students. Similarly, Rosas's (2017) case study research in California examined the role of USRCs in the college journey of undocumented students. Her findings also illustrated how USRCs help break down barriers by helping students overcome life obstacles such as discrimination, and financial challenges, helping alleviate some fear, informing students of multiple paths, and helping them build relationships with faculty, staff, and stakeholders.

A qualitative study by Manalo-Pedro (2018) demonstrated how the result of a USRC at California State University (CSU) was accomplished through interest convergence and highlighted the importance of working collaboratively to achieve equity. His study revealed the role of interest convergence also contributed to the expansion and creation of a USRC. More than ever, universities are expressing their commitment to equity and diversity to combat white supremacy on some college campuses. Doing so elevates institutional prestige, attracting more undocumented students and boosting their reputation. Equity is a business, too, and it matters who is at the decision-making table leading institutional efforts to shape policies and practices that suit the institution's self-interests.

Manalo-Pedro's (2018) dissertation study illuminated that stakeholders' interests were rewarded by making CSU the first university in California to open the first USRC stating CSU's commitment to undocumented students symbolically and then passing education policy helped elevate the institution's public image toward the community. Publicly saying that a university supports undocumented students and communities is convenient for the institution and another marketable enrollment strategy that still centers on the dominant culture, white citizens' interests. After Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed, colleges and universities were advertised as "open and democratic spaces where the marketplace of ideas allows for different and divergent

viewpoints.." (Ladson Billings & Patton, 2010) up to a certain point because students of color are not graduating or being retained at their white counterparts and let alone undocumented students. Cultural centers are considered safe havens for racial and ethnic minoritized students where they can seek support. Although [institutions] remain difficult places for students of color to negotiate [their identity]" (Ladson Billings & Patton, 2010), without student activism on college campuses, students would not have support services. The strategies used to initiate the USRC at MWU included pushing for social transformation and conscious building by raising awareness of undocumented students' issues on campus through fundraisers, galas, and social gatherings. SOMOS Dreamers was crucial to the creation of the USRC in 2017. SOMOS Dreamers first drew attention to undocumented issues on campus, pushing them to create a student group solely dedicated to matters related to immigration status, as mentioned above. After becoming a recognized student group by submitting a proposal to the Association of Student Organizations, students attended NCORE, a National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in Higher Education. There, they connected with other students and professionals trying to initiate an undocumented resource center on campus. Absorbing as much information as they could, ultimately, those connections led them to other people who had already developed an undocumented student resource center on campus. Students were excited to return to Utah and share with other members the knowledge they gained.

EPILOGUE

This critical case study is personal and political. Being an educated woman has allowed me to uncover my familial history by tracing immigration policies and labor programs. As a *Mexicana* with U.S. citizenship, growing up in a mixed-status family who the United States ``illegalized" (Sati, 2017) made me aware of the many struggles undocumented immigrants endure. I learned of America's racist views on immigration at an early age and continue to see how racism has evolved. CRT and LatCrit gifted me the awareness I needed to name different systemic oppressions and to understand the impact of racism on the human soul level. For decades, the immigration industrial complex (Golash-Boza, 2009) has impacted, shaped, and disrupted the lives of people who are forced to contend with their legal status.

My grandpa's family migrated from Delicias, Chihuahua, to Tepechitlán *(Tepechí)*, Zacatecas, around the 1930s to pursue more work opportunities. He met my grandma Cecilia from Tlaltenango, Zacatecas, who wanted to be a medical doctor but was not allowed to pursue higher education. They both settled with their five children in Tepechitlán. Facing many hardships, my grandpa Ismael left Zacatecas searching for the American Dream-- *"El Sueno Americano."* In search of work opportunities to better their family's quality of life, my great grandfathers and *abuelos* (grandfathers) from my maternal side picked cotton near the lower Rio Grande Valley in the early 1900s. My mother's father was also part of the Bracero Program in the late 50s and 60s. During his time as a migrant worker, he was also part of the deadliest automobile accident, according to the National Safety Council, and then was deported back to Zacatecas. The accident occurred outside Chualar near the Salinas Valley in California. A freight train crashed into the truck carrying about 58 migrant farmworkers in the back. My grandpa woke up and saw all his *compañeros* (companions) lying on the ground, dead with severed and

missing limbs. It traumatized him to the point that he became an alcoholic. He returned to Zacatecas after and lived until 1998. His name was Ismael Gonzalez Arteaga, and the U.S. never paid back his salary or gave him legal status for his time in the U.S. as a migrant worker.

Growing up, I would hear my grandma, mom, and *tíos* share these stories of how my grandpa was treated as a second-class Mexican citizen for lack of "legal status." My family's pursuit of the American Dream has been costly and taxing on the soul. When my family members were trying to pursue the American Dream, their applications were rejected after an expensive process. They were forced to decline work, career, scholarship, and educational opportunities because their legal status made it more challenging to achieve their dreams. When my mother and her brother were detained at the San Diego-Tijuana border as teenagers, they were treated like criminals. Then they were fingerprinted and told to return to Mexico. My mom could come with us, but that stayed in her record. With the federal government investing in more border control technology instead of finding a viable solution for all like a pathway to citizenship or overall seeing people as global citizens -- American laws continue to find ways to dehumanize people. How we treat people at our borders shows that we are not that welcoming. America is in the business of hatred and dehumanizing. Along the Southwest, specifically, Texas and Arizona borders have the most dehumanizing tactics. If you try to cross over to the U.S. from Mexico, you will most likely be chased by a drone or dogs or shot down and then put in the "hierla" (i.e., cooler, icebox at detention centers) to suffer freezing temperatures as you await trial. Our country does not know how to be inclusive or humane, we need an equitable foundation. Compassion. The way American laws show up in practice by continuing to exclude people who are not White, male, and straight reveals where our true values as a nation are. America is a nation of immigrants, and this country is racist towards immigrants of color.

One in twenty people across the U.S. is part of a mixed-status family. I vividly remember when my dad told me that ICE had taken my uncle. I was 17 years old. My father woke me up at 6:00 am, a cold January 2011. *"Brianda, se llevaron a tu tío,"* (they took your uncle). Hearing those words stopped my world for a minute. I could not fully grasp that it was happening to my family too. It was always in the back of our minds that it could happen, but I did not think it would happen to my family-- but it did, and it can happen to anyone, including White people. My dad told me that the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had picked up my *tío*. Seeing the look of concern on his face instilled even more fear and worry in me. It was my senior year of high school. Before my tío left for work, around 5:30 am, ICE arrested him in his pajamas and slippers. Earlier that week, we had seen a suspicious car outside his house but did not think much of it. Once he was apprehended and taken away, it all made sense to us all. We knew ICE had been outside his home, vigilant of his schedule. The officers did not allow my tío to say goodbye to my *tía* (aunt) and their 5-year-old son. My tía could not do anything to stop my *tío* from being taken because she, too, is undocumented. Of all of the adults in our family, my parents are the only ones with legal status, so my dad visited the county jail to visit my tío. We could not let my *tía* see her husband because she could risk getting deported too. As a family, we did not know how to explain to my sisters and cousin—my uncle's son—that my *tío* was gone. We lied and said he went on a work trip; however, keeping the reality away from them became increasingly difficult as time progressed. I am unsure if my tío knew his rights we have never discussed his experience openly. Despite our family's challenges, a month later, we managed to bail him out of jail for $12,000. He was forced to wear an ankle bracelet and required to check -in with ICE every Monday at 6:00 am before work for the following year. It took seven families to combine our resources to create that amount of bail money.

This legal journey has consisted of going to court, appealing decisions, writing letters of support, and experiencing a roller-coaster of emotions and fear. After ten years of court cases, my worst fears became a reality. Our family was torn apart and separated by laws and policies that do not acknowledge that "we, too," have dedicated our lives to working the American soil. We fought a long battle to keep my tío here in the United States; however, he was forced to leave via "voluntary departure" in February 2016, leaving his family and newborn behind. ICE greeted him at the airport with my dad, mom, and my tía. With one last goodbye in Salt Lake City, Utah, he was forced to "go back" to a country he had not visited or lived in since he was three. Forcibly removed from the United States at 31, like many others in the U.S., my family continues to receive racist immigration laws and policies. They said no other family members were allowed to say goodbye at the airport. It was just my aunt. It was the saddest and most challenging day of our lives. The reality that he would not be coming home and separated from his family for the foreseeable future did not sink in until we got home. Feeling numb, we could not find the words or express the emotions to console my *tía* or little *primitos* (cousins). We all returned to work and pretended it was okay for the children.

We felt so powerless. I knew that my family was never going to be the same. Half of us are in the U.S., and others in Mexico. There is constant grief, knowing we will never be in the same room again in Mexico or the U.S. unless we all go back. It is a traumatic experience that I do not wish upon anyone. Sadly, we faced court trials, fees, and even crooked attorneys for years. This was not the first deportation in my family, but I was old enough to see it unfold this time. Back then, we did not have an emergency plan. We did not like thinking that one of our family members might face detention or deportation. In my uncle's experience, forgetting to pay a fine became a warrant and a brutal removal process. From that day on, our lives changed

forever. We went from being a happy, united family to a sad, anxious, hyperaware state of living. I await an email or alert from a major news outlet to announce a pathway to citizenship or a new program allowing deported individuals to return and be reunited with their families. My commitment as an educator is to fight with my words and to keep sharing stories that are never told. This is why I argue that we need race-conscious leaders and advocates. Politicians and national leaders continue to pass laws and policies that separate and beat down immigrants and their families. I am one of 22 million people who live in a mixed-status family. If there had been a USRC in 2011 when I needed one, I probably could have been directed to services or people that could guide me and help me understand the immigration and deportation process in the U.S. USRCs represent possibility. So many immigrant families like mine remain hopeful that the federal government will pass laws that remove harsh reentry penalties so families can be reunited and that a path to citizenship is created that is inclusive and not discriminatory. Having a USRC provides people the chance, like me, to pursue their dreams and goals in a more accessible way.

While angered and saddened by the injustices that my family continues to struggle with, my project lies at the intersection of an immigration system that is designed to disadvantage and hurt young people and their families, institutions that do not align with the well-being of Latina/o/x communities, and the potential of understanding policies and programs – when crafted, developed and implemented critically – can influence and impact the trajectories of students and their families. The injustices that immigrant students and families continue to endure are real and present daily – just like in my family – so I seek to use this as motivation to complete this project. Designing a research project that will allow me to document the creation and development of an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC), a relatively new

phenomenon in higher education and student affairs work, will enable me to channel this energy and capture the processes, key players, strategies and leadership that it took to conceptualize and initiate and endeavor that specifically addresses the needs and experiences of undocumented college students.

This dissertation project is for those who struggle to survive in the face of such an anti-immigrant, anti-family, and anti-Latina/o/x community. It is in this spirit - a spirit of commitment to my community and to investigating and disrupting the racist nativist policies that continue to negatively impact these communities while also learning about how higher education leaders and program directors can utilize their expertise and resources to create spaces meant to serve students and families who struggle at the intersections of law, policy, education, and immigration. My family members have been incarcerated in detention centers and concentration camps in search of work opportunities. They continue to experience legal, physical, and psychological violence because of their legal status. The American Dream for my family and many others has been a nightmare. The social construction of legality in the U.S. has maintained systems of oppression and dehumanization. I have family members who have been undocumented for over 35 years--some nearly their whole lives waiting for laws and policies to include them in constitutional clauses to recognize their humanity. There is no comprehensive immigration system because it is a function of white supremacy. A social security number, a green card, or citizenship should not be the sole ticket to achieving El Sueño Americano (The American Dream). Having U.S. citizenship allows anyone to pursue any career and educational opportunity. According to my family, a social security number is one’s entry into the American economy which is the ticket to the American Dream. A social security number is an access to resources, goods, and services. Growing up in a mixed-status family, I internalized that my worth

was tied to my legal status. Yet, I find myself conflicted because the opportunities my family seeks and fights for are readily available to me as a U.S. citizen, and I do not take them for granted. My citizenship status has allowed me to access insurmountable resources (e.g., financial aid, scholarships, and unlimited career choices). Even though my family members' paths differed from their citizen counterparts, my family and parents persisted, resisted laws, and were not defined by their legal status. My family's story and the story of many immigrants and undocumented individuals begs the question, why does a nine-digit number have so much power over people's livelihoods? The answer lies in the construction of our laws and policies that have shaped, generation after generation, a social reality "where racism, racist nativism, and white supremacy is on full display, contesting the dignity and humanity of People of Color every day, all over the globe" (Pérez Huber, 2018, p. 3). The undocu-realities of my family and parents have shaped the way I question the role of race and legal status in educational access and opportunities for immigrant families and undocumented students.

APPENDIX

USRC Proposal by SOMOS Dreamers

Year One: 2017-2018
Positions: Program Coordinator, Two Graduate Assistants (campus/community educator, legal support project developer), Two Undergraduate Dream Ambassadors
Budget: TBD (*Salaries/Projects/Programs)*
Projects and Programs:

- Conduct baseline needs assessment
- Set priorities for upcoming agenda with student input
- Build undocu-friendly ally culture
- Expand Physical space: office space and lounge area.
- Develop budget for undocumented student center (Three Year Plan)
- Develop process for request and disbursement of Financial resources to students (modeled after Women's Resource Center emergency scholarships)
- Pro bono immigration legal aid availability in the office:
  - Set office hours
  - Events as requested by students and future students/families
- Explore Accreditation by Executive Office for Immigration Review's (EOIR) immigration courts and the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) for the center and staff

Needs:

- Funding for two graduate assistants
- Program base funding
- Additional space for Graduate Assistants, Dream Ambassadors, study and community building
- Relationships and MOUs with attorneys

Year Two: 2018-2019
Positions: Program Coordinator, Two Graduate Assistants, Two Undergraduate Dream Ambassadors
Budget: TBD (*Salaries/Projects/Programs)*
Projects and Programs:

- Establish relationship to enable shared Academic Advising 10-15hrs per week on site
- Establish relationship to enable shared Financial Aid Advising 10-15hrs per week on site
- Establish relationship to enable shared Mental health Services 10-15hrs per week on site

Needs:

- Commitment from academic advising, financial aid, and/or other partners (cesa, academic units, etc) to dedicate time of advisors to serve on site
- Ongoing funding for Graduate Assistants and Dream Ambassadors

Year Three: 2019-2020
Positions: Director/Program Manager, Program Coordinator, Two Graduate Assistants, Two Undergraduate Dream Ambassadors
Budget: TBD (*Salaries/Projects/Programs)*
Projects and Programs:

- Hire or promote Director/Program Manager

- Academic and Financial Aid advising consistent on site
- Establish relationship to enable shared Career advisor 10-15hrs per week on site
- Review need and determine effectiveness of partnership advisors. Determine whether to expand partnerships or hire dedicated advisors
- Review Legal support programming to determine need and cost analysis of Partnership vs. a staff attorney

Needs:

- Funding for Director/Program Manager salary
- Commitment from Career Services

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VITA

Brianda was born in Long Beach, California, and began her college career in Utah. Her parents left South Central Los Angeles, California, for better work opportunities and moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, in her teenage years. She graduated from Granger High School and then attended the University of Utah. There, she completed her Bachelor of Science in Sociology with a Minor in Ethnic Studies and a Master of Education in Education and Leadership and Policy. She later pursued her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her research interests center around studies on how immigration policy and political events impact the creation of support services for immigrant students and how policy shapes opportunities. Brianda is passionate about college access and advocating for the rights of immigrant students and their families. Throughout her graduate career journey, she has worked as a graduate assistant in the office and centers, such as -- the Career & Professional Development Center, Dream Center, and The Graduate School Diversity Office. During her time in San Antonio, Texas as a doctoral fellow, she had the opportunity to engage in advanced research in collaboration with other professors who conduct qualitative research. Brianda's future professional endeavors entail running for office and conducting case study research to advocate for a path toward citizenship.