ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING AND STRENGTHENING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS OF UNDOCUMENTED LATINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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This paper explores the perceived challenges of undocumented Latino high school students in relation to their career and college expectations. It does this by focusing on social capital, college knowledge, and legal context. By exploring social capital we are able to gain insight into the types of relationships and knowledge that benefit undocumented Latino students in navigating through their college process. In addition, we form a better understanding of their college and career expectations. This study was conducted using an intervention with the intention to add to undocumented youths’ social networks and knowledge pertaining to college and their legal status.
UNDERSTANDING AND STRENGTHENING THE EDUCATION EXPECTATIONS OF
UNDOCUMENTED LATINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

BY

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This study was impossible without the support and feedback from my thesis committee, professors, family and friends. My special thanks to Dr. Cynthia Taines, my primary advisor and committee chair, who patiently advised me through every aspect of this thesis, I am indebted to her guidance and and as a result, strive to be a better scholar and writer. I would also like to thank my committee, Dr. Lee Shumow and Dr. Laura Ruth Johnson, for their commitment and support through the course of this study. I am grateful to the students who participated in this study. It is only through their stories and experiences that we can glean insight into policy and social changes.

A special appreciation to my husband for his patience, to my mother for her love, to my sister for her motivation and strength, to my brother for his curiosity, and to my father for his love of education.
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Throughout the history of the United States, an influx of immigrants has continuously changed the demographic characteristics of the nation. Early on, Europeans comprised much of the immigrant population. Currently, Latino and Asian immigrants contribute to the majority of immigrants living in the U.S. (Lopez, Taylor, Funk, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013; Passel, 2011). Immigrants add diversity to American culture and social climate (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011). Latino families are migrating to areas unfamiliar to this population who are not necessarily equipped to support their educational needs (Gonzales, 2010; Garcia & Tierney, 2011).

Along with American-born children of immigrants, the undocumented children of immigrants are also present in United States schools. Immigrants of any ethnic background can be undocumented. An undocumented immigrant is someone who: (1) was brought into the United States by their parents as a minor without having proper documentation to enter and stay in the country, (2) has proper documentation (i.e., a visa) but either overstayed their visit or never renewed their visa, or (3) knowingly immigrated to the United States without proper documentation (Passel & Cohn, 2010). The terms undocumented and illegal are often used synonymously. This study, however, will use undocumented because, like other scholars, I believe that illegal is dehumanizing (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009).
Undocumented youth have a higher chance of living in a low-income household, residing in impoverished neighborhoods, and attending schools with minimal resources (Gonzales, 2011; Passel & Cohn, 2006; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Undocumented children often cross borders into the United States with their parents and are subjected to legal ramifications, such as deportation, but also consequences that affect their educational future, such as not qualifying to receive financial aid for their college education (Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2010). The educational consequences of their legal status often go unrealized until later, frequently during adolescence, when the students begin to make plans for their future. However, there can be positive outcomes when undocumented students speak out about their legal status. Some organizations offer undocumented students specialized support to access college education, and many universities accept self-identified undocumented students (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2007).

Undocumented Youth

Since the undocumented population is subject to deportation, there is no accurate way to determine the exact number of undocumented people living in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2009, 2011). As of 2013, an estimated 11.3 million undocumented people live in the U.S., with 81% from Mexico and Central and South America (Passel et. al, 2014; Department of Homeland Security, 2012; Passel & Cohn, 2011). According to United We Dream, approximately 2.5 million undocumented youth live in the United States (2014). It is estimated that between 425,000 and 540,000 undocumented people reside in Illinois since 2012 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012; Passel & Cohn, 2014). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 12.5% of students in elementary through high school were foreign born, meaning that most of these
students were not U.S. citizens at the time of their birth. This immigrant population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees, and undocumented immigrants. This statistic does not give a full picture of the number of undocumented students in the school system because *Plyler v Doe (1982)* does not allow K-12 schools to ask for legal status. The figures on undocumented students point to a need in providing resources for this population for the purpose of helping them prepare for the future.

**Educational Outcomes**

In the public school system, undocumented Latino students have lower academic achievement than their U.S.-born peers. 65,000 undocumented youth graduate from high school every year (*United We Dream, 2014*). Each year, 5 to 10 percent of undocumented students enroll in college, and only 1 to 3 percent graduate (*United We Dream, 2014*). In comparison, approximately 66% of legal immigrants and U.S.-born students attend college and 80% graduate with a degree ("The Condition of Education," 2014). Undocumented children who immigrated before 14 years of age have a greater chance of completing high school than undocumented children who immigrated after that age (Passel & Cohen, 2009).

This sparks the question as to why so many undocumented immigrants do not graduate from high school, and what influences their college attendance and attainment. There are numerous explanations for this discrepancy, including immigration policy, access to resources, socioeconomic status, academic engagement, financial barriers, and academic English proficiency (e.g., Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2007; 2010; Hanson, 1994; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010).
Teachers and counselors are vital in facilitating opportunities for undocumented students (Gonzales, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010; Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2012). However, they may not be aware of recent immigration or education legislation that could benefit undocumented students (e.g. Gonzales, 2010; Suarez-Orozco, 1990). Higher education institutions also have varying policies for admitting undocumented students. Understanding educational policy, as it applies to undocumented students, is important for providing accurate information about what is required for college attendance.

Allocating appropriate resources to assist undocumented students is often a learning process for both students and school personnel (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The change of legislation and university policies make it difficult for educators to assist students, when taking into consideration their legal status (Cabrera & Padilla, 2007; Garcia & Tierney, 2011). When educational leaders are not aware that students can be undocumented, the students face complications as they pursue a degree after high school. However, familiarity of students’ legal status is more complicated than simply asking (Contreras, 2009; Drachman, 2006). Teachers, counselors, and students face sensitivities in communication but the exchange of information is vital.

Only students can make the decision to talk about their status or seek help from trusted individuals. Unfortunately, students are hesitant to reveal their documentation status because they worry about the response, and may feel ashamed (e.g. Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Suarez-Orozco, 1990). All students look to school professionals who they can confide in, and
undocumented students require an even stronger sense of trust (e.g., Enriquez 2011; Gonzalez, 2010). Students, in general, may feel discomfort when asking for help because of previously humiliating or painful experiences (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Undocumented students’ unwillingness to share their documentation status is often a barrier to receiving information about their college options. Students risk bypassing appropriate resources and scholarship information when they do not disclose their status. However, building relationships with teachers and educational leaders is crucial because they have access to networks and resources that can help students (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Contreras, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

There are three strategies teachers and counselors can use to build relationships with students: develop an informal mentorship, adopt a problem-solving approach, and show evidence of past support (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Consistently demonstrating these behaviors to a student shows them to be a reliable and comfortable source of support, which enables educators and students to achieve mutual respect (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). While previous findings articulate that some Latino students feel more comfortable with Spanish-speaking professionals, the three previously mentioned qualities are more influential in building a relationship (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to understand how undocumented Latino high school students perceive the possibilities and challenges of attaining a college degree. In addition, this study is an attempt to add to undocumented Latino high school students’ resources by expanding their relationships and their knowledge for college attendance.
Research Questions

The presence of undocumented immigrant Latino students in public schools, and the resources they require to achieve their educational goals, lead to the four research questions guiding this study. The first question is: What are the current educational expectations of undocumented immigrant Latino high school students? This first question provides a baseline measure of how students view their career and college expectations and what they perceive they may need to fulfill them.

The second question is: How do undocumented immigrant Latino students perceive their school staff, teachers, and professionals working in community organizations? This question seeks to understand the students’ existing relationships and connections. Students may have questions about their college options and legal rights that may be easier to speak about if they know that their inquiries are welcomed.

The third research question is: What relationships and information do undocumented Latino students need for the purpose of overcoming the perceived constraints of their legal status? Undocumented students understand their legal status and constraints differently. Knowing the relationships and information undocumented students find necessary will help identify key experts that undocumented students should consult to advise them regarding their legal status.

The fourth research question is: What relationships and information do undocumented Latino students need to achieve their educational expectations? This final question seeks to understand the relationships and information undocumented Latino high school students perceive
they need for college access. The third and fourth research questions relate to the intervention undertaken in this study.

Methodology Summary

This study includes an intervention inspired by youth participatory action research (YPAR), where the goal is to empower youth to be agents of change (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2006). I help students contact school staff and community leaders with expertise on college and citizenship status after asking students about their legal and college information needs. In addition, I help students arrange to meet with these legal and college experts. Then, in a follow-up interview, I ask them about their experiences and knowledge they gained. The goal of having understanding students’ participate in the intervention is to build undocumented Latino high school students’ social networks and supply them with the knowledge necessary to accomplish their educational goals.

In this study, the goal is not to have students reveal their documentation status to anyone. Instead, the purpose is to have students seek and build meaningful relationships to pursue their goals. More specifically, this study intends to foster a dynamic in which students’ pursuit of their goals bring them closer to their hopes of receiving a college degree. By focusing on the students’ goals for a college education while accounting for their legal status, I hope to develop an intervention that can be useful to other students.

In the next chapter, I will first discuss the legal and legislative contexts that affect undocumented students, including *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and Senate Bill 744. *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) is a federal court case that allows
undocumented students to attend school from kindergarten through 12th grade. DACA gives undocumented immigrants the opportunity to work for two years while attending college and prevents deportation for two years. Current Illinois policies provide undocumented students with access to in-state tuition at a public university.

Additionally, I review the legislation influencing college access for undocumented Latino students, as well as legal barriers that they face as they make the decision to pursue a college education. I then explain the theoretical frameworks that guide this study, including the concepts of goals, aspirations, expectations, and social capital. Through the use of literature about undocumented students, I discuss the importance of differentiating between goals, aspirations, and expectations. Then, I define social capital, using Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) perspective, and the different considerations in building undocumented students’ social networks.

Lastly, I integrate material from this literature and theoretical concepts into an analysis that leads to a better understanding of undocumented Latino students’ experiences. I conclude with a description of the intervention using the theoretical framework. Additionally, I explain how the intervention answers the call of previous studies to assist undocumented students in building their social capital and achieving their educational expectations.

Validity Threats

This study is an account of the experiences of three undocumented Latino high school students. The small sample size is not sufficient for generalizable results, but it is a proactive methodological decision. The students and I had in-depth conversations about their educational experiences, relationships with teachers and counselors, and the intervention. Working with three
students allowed for fuller interviews, adding richness that may not have been possible with
more students in the study. With a small number of students, I was more hands-on preparing
students to meet with teachers, counselors, professors, or undocumented college students during
the intervention.

The interviews are limited to the students’ perspectives, and their experiences in the
intervention are self-reported. Emphasizing the student experience was a deliberate attempt to
understand their goals and relationships with their teachers and counselors from their frame of
reference. Understanding the intervention from the student’s experiences provide insight into
how each student approached meeting with teachers, counselors, college faculty and staff, and
current undocumented college students. The students’ interactions help in understanding
information they find important, and how they assess the intervention. This is therefore a key
methodological decision and helps both the students, in their interactions with experts, and the
researcher, in understanding the intervention from the students’ point of view. After the
intervention was completed, I asked detailed questions about the students’ experience and any
changes they saw can be made to the intervention.

I did not directly observe the intervention in this study. If I were to observe students’
meetings with college experts and legal advisors, it is possible the adults would have referred to
me instead of the students. My absence may have encouraged the students to create new
interactions with experts in their school, community, and future college who can provide helpful
resources and information regarding citizenship status. After all, helping students develop the
skills to form these networks on their own was one of the intentions of the intervention.
The intervention itself is student-driven, which can limit its depth. To minimize this possibility, I provide guidance to each student before they met with a teacher, college faculty or staff member, counselor, or undocumented college student. I help each student develop a plan on how to contact at least two of these experts. In addition, we will draft questions together and role-play the conversation. I will follow up with each student to answer additional questions and to talk about additional experts they might consider meeting. The students have the freedom to communicate with me about challenges they encounter while contacting and meeting with these experts. With these safeguards in place, the students have the flexibility to approach the intervention as they wished. They have the opportunity to problem-solve, plan, and develop relationships with teachers, counselors, college faculty and staff, and current undocumented college students.

I have a personal investment in the success of the intervention. I want students to have an experience where they gain strategies they can apply to other settings and relationships. However, I am open to students’ critiques and suggestions for improving the intervention in order to assure the validity of this study. During the final interview, students were asked to describe the challenges and successes of the intervention, what they would do differently, and what role they wanted me to play. These questions help assure that the findings are gathered and are presented in a balanced way.

Operational Definitions

Aspiration—something a person wants to achieve that is not limited by any perceived or actual constraints.
**Backward-moving shift**— describes students’ expectation when they expect a lower level of education, less prestigious college choice, or a career offering less transferable skills and pay after participating in the intervention.

**Career knowledge**—a category of college knowledge that includes the work environment of a career, the certification or licensure, and the education requirements.

**College education**—any additional education after high school, including but not limited to trade school, community college, or a four-year university.

**College knowledge**—Understanding of the procedures for applying to college, accessing financial aid, and understanding the informational resources necessary to obtain a college education. College knowledge has a sub category, legal college knowledge.

**College searching**— a category of specific college knowledge that involves understanding the college selection process, the college admissions requirements, and other factors.

**Coming out**—when students disclose their legal status to others.

**DACA-mented**— the way undocumented students with DACA approval refer to their DACA status.

**Expectation**—something a person wants to achieve that takes into consideration perceived and actual constraints that are present in a person’s life.

**Forward-moving shift**—describes students’ expectation when they expect a higher level of education, more prestigious college choice, or a career offering more transferable skills and pay after participating in the intervention.

**Goal**—an objective that a person sets and plans to achieve in the future. In this study, goals are related specifically to college and career.
High-status institutional agents—people working in schools, colleges, universities, and communities who have information about documentation status and college.

Intervention—In general, an intervention is an action or process used to improve a situation. In this study it is when a researcher is intentionally trying to change the outcomes of a group of people by having the participants actively participate in a project or activity. The intervention in this study is an effort to increase undocumented students’ social capital and college knowledge.

Latino—A term used to describe people of Latin American descent. The students in this study use “Latino” to describe their ethnicity and their country of origin, Mexico.

Legal Consciousness—knowledge of laws and rights pertaining to legal status. In this study legal consciousness includes knowledge of DACA, the application and requirements to apply for DACA, the renewal requirements for DACA, the benefits of DACA, and the process of finding employment with DACA.

Legal college knowledge— the category of college knowledge that takes into consideration aspects of the college process that are can be complicated due to a students’ legal status. The categories in specific college knowledge include the understanding the processes of college searching and applying to college, eligibility of financial aid, and career knowledge.

No shift—describes students’ expectation that did not change in level of education, prestige of college choice, or a career offering more transferable skills and pay after participating in the intervention.
**Social capital**—a social network a student acquires with experts and professionals having college knowledge and resources about undocumented legal status. This also includes the students’ confidence and skill necessary to increase their social network.

**Undocumented**—describes someone who: (1) was brought into the United States by their parents as a minor without having proper documentation to enter and stay in the country; (2) has proper documentation (i.e., a visa) but overstayed their visit or never renewed their visa; or (3) knowingly immigrated to the United States without proper documentation.

**Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)**—has two components: YPAR as action, and YPAR as methodology.

**YPAR as action**—when participants of a research study actively participate in a project to change or improve their circumstances. In this study, the action refers to an effort to collaborate with undocumented Latino high school students to take part in a plan to help understand and to accomplish their college and career expectations. YPAR as action also includes the process of having students plan and meet with college experts and citizenship advisors to increase their knowledge of the college process and their undocumented status.

**YPAR as methodology**—the shared investigation of an issue in a community with researchers and people in the community. In addition, this means that the students design a research questions, collect data, and analyze their findings. In this study, YPAR as methodology is a collaborative effort between the students and researcher. However, this study is not a true YPAR methodology.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research reviewed here discusses the legal and legislative contexts that pertain to undocumented students, the scholarly literature that focuses on their educational experiences, and the theoretical frameworks used for this study.

Legal Context for Undocumented Students

There is little public knowledge about how legal status influences undocumented students as they pursue higher education. Therefore, I consider pertinent federal and state legislation affecting the lives and educational goals of undocumented students. Understanding this legislation gives insight into constraints on their pursuit of a college education as well as the legal obstacles these students and their families face.

The Plyler v. Doe (1982) decision “barred public schools from excluding undocumented children, thereby granting them legal access to public education through high school” (Abrego, 2011, p. 343). This decision entitled every child to an education regardless of citizenship status. The reasoning for the decision was that denying anyone a K-12 education would “perpetuate the formation of an underclass of citizens” (Russell, 2011, p. 2), with a large number of undocumented people living in low-income households. Another feature of Plyler v. Doe (1982)
is that it kept immigration enforcement officials from targeting undocumented students on school grounds (Abrego, 2011; Drachman, 2006; Gonzales, 2010).

*Plyler v. Doe* (1982) allowed for all students to have an education and an opportunity to receive a high school diploma. Access to a college education remained restricted because *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) did not address college access. Current federal legislation more directly affects the legal status of undocumented students, and ultimately, their educational pursuits.

**Legislative Context for Undocumented Students**

Recently, the federal government has made attempts to address immigration reform. In this section, I describe federal legislation pertaining to undocumented students. An executive order, referred to as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), is in effect. While this executive order affects undocumented students on a national level, on the state level, Illinois allows post-secondary institutions to accept undocumented students.

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**

Immigration reform through DACA, the federal executive order, passed in June 2012, and has prompted many students to go public about their legal status (Abrego, 2011; Consideration of DACA, 2014). DACA is a temporary immigration measure that allows undocumented immigrants two years’ eligibility for work authorization and defers removal action, or deportation (Consideration of Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals [DACA], 2014; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013). DACA applies to undocumented youth who immigrated to the United States prior to their 16th birthday but were not older than 31 years of
age on June 2012 at the time they applied for deferred action (Consideration of DACA, 2014; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013). As a result of this executive order, many adolescents have applied for DACA as a way to work and pay for their college education (Teranishi et. al, 2015). However, DACA does not confer lawful status and it not a pathway toward citizenship (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013).

Illinois Policy

Federal and state financial aid make higher education more affordable, but undocumented students are ineligible (Abrego, 2006; Teranishi et. al, 2015). The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (1996) section 505 prohibits undocumented students from receiving any federal or state government aid. If undocumented students are admitted to a university, they may be asked to pay out-of-state tuition. Illinois policies on the cost of post-secondary education to undocumented students are an interpretation of federal legislation. Several states, including Illinois, allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition if they have lived in the state for a minimum number of years (3 years in Illinois), graduated from an in-state high school or attained a G.E.D. in the state, and signed an affidavit pledging to apply for permanent residency (Drachman, 2006; Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights [ICIRR], 2011). California was the first state to allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at any public university or college, and Illinois followed suit. In 2003, Illinois House Bill 60 allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public universities and colleges (In-state Tuition in the State of Illinois, 2009; H.B. 0060, 2003; [ICIRR], 2011).
Although undocumented students can be admitted to college as in-state residents, they still do not qualify for state and federal financial aid. Instead, undocumented students must seek private scholarship funds that do not specify the citizenship status of the recipient. To address this, in August 2011, Illinois became the first state to offer a private scholarship fund for undocumented students through the Illinois DREAM Act (Senate Bill, SB 2185). The Illinois DREAM Act has three stipulations:

1. Anyone with a taxpayer number, including undocumented students, can participate in the State Treasurer’s College Savings Pool and the Illinois Prepaid Tuition Plan. These programs give students and their families the ability to invest and save for undocumented students.
2. High school college counselors are required to be better trained and prepared to know what college options are available for undocumented students and children of immigrants.
3. The IL DREAM Fund Commission established scholarships for qualified undocumented students funded entirely by private donors (“Illinois DREAM Act,” n.d., para. 2; S. B. 2185, [Ill. 2011]).

Eligible undocumented students must: reside with their parents or guardian while attending high school in Illinois; attend high school in Illinois for at least 3 years; and have at least one parent who immigrated to the United States (“Illinois DREAM Act,” n.d., para. 2; S. B. 2185, [Ill. 2011]). The Illinois DREAM Act offers additional opportunities for undocumented students to receive information about college options, and to invest and save for a college education.

Illinois and several other states are working to change admissions policies for undocumented students at state universities. DACA has allowed for undocumented youth to have two years of deferred action and two years of work. The Illinois DREAM Act gives
undocumented students the opportunity for a privately funded scholarship (S. 744, 2013). Although DACA, House Bill 60, and the Illinois DREAM Act create more opportunities for undocumented students, these are fragile policies and are frequently under attack. Knowledge of current legislation, at the state and federal level, is critical for undocumented students in understanding all of their options for attending college and financing their education.

Legal Barriers to College Access

A student’s knowledge of the law and his/her rights, specifically pertaining to undocumented immigrants, is called legal consciousness (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). In some cases, legal consciousness has played a role in acts of civil disobedience, with undocumented youth organizing to pass comprehensive immigration reform (Abrego, 2011). Yet, awareness of legal barriers can also reduce the educational goals of undocumented students and their chances of achieving them (Abrego, 2006). Legal barriers can include failing to qualify for financial aid and deportation. Many undocumented Latino high school students say they are discouraged from applying to universities because of their legal status, and fear the financial burden and tuition costs will be too high (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010). Even those who do apply and are accepted often do not enroll because of these concerns. Instead, they attend community college in hopes of one day transferring to a university (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010).

Some studies portray first-generation students as living in fear, concerned with finances, and in need of support, particularly regarding the immigration laws that affect undocumented status and their education (Abrego, 2006; Contreras, 2009; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales 2010, 2011). First-generation undocumented Latino students are often so fearful of deportation that
they avoid interactions with any official (Abrego, 2011, 2006). Undocumented Latino students from the 1.5-generation, who immigrated at an older age, are typically not as frightened, but they feel shame about their status (Abrego, 2011). The social stigma leads undocumented students to avoid speaking about their undocumented status, preventing them from seeking assistance from counselors or teachers and abandon their dreams (Abrego, 2011).

There is a discrepancy between what undocumented Latino students want to accomplish and what they are legally able to achieve. At the K-12 level, there is no need to be open about their legal status, and they are safe from any legal consequences (Plyler v Doe, 1982). When they decide to continue to college, however, students who disclose their status may receive accurate information about their options (Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2010).

Immigrant policy and legislation affect the education and career goals that undocumented students can attain. Federal and state policies changed to allow undocumented students to achieve a college education (H.B. 0060, 2003; S.B. 2185). Further, there is an opportunity for undocumented students to receive a college education and apply for DACA (Consideration of DACA, 2014). Students cannot control these policies or any that are passed in the future (Contreras, 2009; Enriquez, 2011). Although these policies create opportunities and possibilities of undocumented students to earn a college education they still face obstacles in creating well-thought-out and grounded goals.

**Goals, Aspirations, and Expectations**

The goals that undocumented students set for themselves are not created in a vacuum. Undocumented students’ goals are influenced by structures and policies, which they cannot
directly control (Lent & Brown, 1996). In this section I describe goals by differentiating between aspirations and expectations. Furthermore, I describe how social contexts and legal constraints create expectations that do not mirror aspirations, creating a gap.

Contextual influences encompass different social structures, including family, school, and government, and can contribute to the types of goals students construct (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Students interact with their family, school, and peer groups on a regular basis influencing the career and educational goals a student forms (Brofenbrenner, 1994; Lent et al, 2000; McWhirter, Valdez, & Caban, 2013). The high school structure and resources as well as the laws and policies concerning college education and immigration impact the goals that undocumented students create (Brofenbrenner, 1994; Lent, et al., 2000; Gonzales, 2007; McWhirter et al., 2013).

Often, we talk about goals as what an individual wants to accomplish without taking into consideration their social and structural contexts. To consider these contexts, we need to change the conversation we have about goals. One way is to differentiate goals as aspirations and expectations.

When goals do not consider the social environment and the students’ everyday barriers and circumstances, they are aspirations. Aspirations describe, “what a student dreams or envisions given ideal conditions” (Carter, 2005, p. 41). There are no set parameters, and the responses are infinite. The majority of students have an aspiration to receive a college education; however, only a small percentage attend (Carter, 2004; Glick & White, 1994; Gonzales, 2010). Aspirations show that students have high ambitions that they want to accomplish. However, the danger is that students find themselves facing barriers they did not foresee, such as financial
challenges. Aspirations are often not grounded in realistic circumstances (Carter, 2004). For example, students may not be aware of what is required for acceptance to specific universities and programs or how much a college degree will cost. Therefore, including the social environment and contextual influences that students encounter is important because it is often these factors that can change students’ goals (Carter, 2004).

Holding aspirations can encourage academically focused behaviors that promote academic success, but are not always guaranteed due to several factors, including school structures and future job opportunities (Mickelson, 1990). Grand ambitions can prompt students to invest in their achievement and create relationships with school and community personnel that can assist their educational pursuits (Glick & White, 1994; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2011). Behaviors associated with aspirations can result in accomplishing short-term goals such as academic success in high school (Glick & White, 1994). In the long term, these behaviors can result in a college education, career, and social mobility.

Goals that incorporate potential challenges and obstacles are expectations. Expectations “take into account the student’s reality, and his or her actual material, familial, or academic circumstances which may or may not support one’s aspirations” (Carter, 2005, p. 41). Expectations may be more difficult for undocumented students to determine unless they have a thorough understanding of what is required to continue their education after high school.

It is important for undocumented students to consider their social and legal constraints. However, the risk that can occur is overestimating the impact of barriers or not seeing a way to navigate around obstacle. For instance, students can have expectations where they perceive constraints, having a low grade point average; having a sense of not being able to succeed;
having financial, and social constraints, that in reality can be overcome, or at least partially overcome (Carter, 2005). Due to the lack of information, resources, and uncertainties associated with legal status, “some students give up their studies altogether” (Chavez et al., 2007, p. 259). In addition, placing importance on obstacles that can be overcome lead students to push their ideal aspirations to the background.

“Dreaming big,” with ambitions aspirations is ingrained in our culture, influencing most students to aspire and expect a college education (Carter, 2006; Glick & White, 1994; Hanson, 1994; McWhirter, Hackett, & Bandalos, 1998). This is often the mindset of people living in the United States and encompasses the definition of “The American Dream.” The ideal situation is for students to have expectations that are similar to their aspirations. When students do not see how to navigate around obstacles or over emphasize challenges, their expectations are not reflective of their aspirations. Thus, the difference between students’ aspirations and expectations are known as a gap. This study is investigating a technique to close this gap.

The distance between students’ aspirations and expectations is greater when students are undocumented (McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013). Since the environment influences goals, we can infer that there is a wide distance between what they dream of accomplishing and what they see as realistically achieving. Undocumented students carry the uncertainty of their legal status and limited opportunities for financial support (Chavez et al., 2007; Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2011). There is a wider gap when undocumented students see legal difficulties and limited information regarding higher education options (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2011; McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013).
The school structures that a student experiences, and the perceived available job opportunities, influence students’ expectations (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Mickelson, 1990). Acknowledging these structures is important because “without fundamental change in the larger opportunity structure, the underachievement of minority and working-class students is likely to persist even in the face of the best-designed and most lavishly funded education reforms” (Mickelson, 1990, p. 60). When students identify school-based barriers such as the lack of resources, they develop a more pessimistic view about their education and career (McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013; McWhirter, Valdes, & Caban, 2013). In contrast, when students experience supportive social environments, they have a more optimistic outcome regarding their education and occupation that reflects their goals (McWhirter, Valdez, Caban, 2013; Kenny et al., 2003; Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Lent et al., 2000).

Students need to see that they have opportunities post-college in order to persist in higher education. School structures including track level, student-to-counselor ratio, teacher and counselor roles can widen the gap between aspirations and expectations (Gonzales, 2010; Hansen, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Students placed in higher-level courses have more opportunities to access institutional supports, due to smaller class sizes and teachers who encourage challenging work (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010). Similarly, the caseload of a counselor can influence how much he or she can assist students in their educational and career plans (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

An advanced degree does not provide the same opportunities for low-income and minority adults as it does for upper-income and white adults (Mickelson, 1990). Many low-income students see family members struggle with employment and are uncertain about the
opportunities that they face after college (Carter, 2006; Gonzales, 2010; Mickelson, 1990). In Mickelson (1990), students agreed that education is necessary for social mobility but were less inclined to have high expectations due to their view of their future career opportunities. Although Mickelson study focused on White and Black students, undocumented students face uncertainty of their employment due to their legal status (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2011).

In contrast, college and legal resources can provide undocumented Latino students with an understanding of potential barriers — and the pathways around those barriers (Carter, 2006; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales 2010). Social networks, and assistance connecting to educational opportunities elevate undocumented students’ expectations for a college degree to closely match their aspirations. Undocumented students need relationships with experts and resources that expose constraints and challenges to decrease the gap between their aspirations and expectations, but also to maintain well-grounded expectations they can accomplish.

**Social Capital**

Social capital can be simplified as the networks with resources and information that a person has access to. Coleman examines social capital in the domains of family and community (1988). Bourdieu explains the concept of social capital through an economic perspective, specifically within elites (1986). Although both of these perspectives have developed the framework of social capital, Stanton-Salazar’s framework is the most fitting for this study.

Coleman investigates social capital in community and familial contexts (1988). The relationships in social capital are useful in three contexts: obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures; information channels; norms and effective sanctions (Coleman,
1988). Obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness “depends on two elements: trustworthiness of the social environment, which means that obligations will be repaid, and the actual extend of obligations held” (Coleman, p. 102, 1988). Information channels cut the time in acquiring information by using relations with those who are more knowledgeable (Coleman, 1988). Norms and effective sanctions describe sanctioned standards that are internalized or rewarded (Coleman, 1988). In addition Coleman describes closure of social networks to establish norms and trustworthiness (1988). However, in the discussion of education, Coleman uses the community and family social capital as indicators in dropping out or graduating of African American high school students (1988). Although the contexts of family and community are important in the social capital of undocumented students, the challenges they face in college access is best addressed by institutionally based professionals knowledgeable about undocumented issues.

Bourdieu’s discussion of social capital is unique in that he sought to understand the perpetual class of the elites, and how they maintain their middle and high socioeconomic status (1986). Through this framework, elites have access to resources and information that are not available to everyone; you have to be part of the “club.” Access to membership is acquired through an ongoing attempt, as individuals and as a group, to gain new and maintain the relationships already present (Bourdieu, 1986). Further, the exclusive participation is designed for the purpose of maintaining any resource or information within the middle and upper classes (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, low-income individuals have little social capital, which creates a social-class division and does not allow for social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). Although Bourdieu addresses the social capital of low-income population, he does not consider a persons’ ethnicity and race, or ways in which a person can build their social capital.
Stanton-Salazar explains the importance of social capital during adolescence, specifically for low-income Mexican youth residing in the U.S. (2010; 2001; 1997). He proposes that people in any social environment that interact with an adolescent have the ability to influence that adolescent (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; 2010). Stanton-Salazar also investigates the way in which schools can intervene by examining the relationships low-income and ethnic minority, low-status youth, specifically Latino students, have with educational leaders (2010; 2001; 1997). His work focuses on the potential social capital students can build in high school as a tool for empowerment (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; 2001; 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Although Stanton-Salazar does not write about undocumented students, his discussion of Mexican youth best compliments the student population of this study. Many undocumented students share some of the economic hardships of Latino U.S. citizens, and have difficulty accessing resources through trusted individuals (Gonzales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010).

This theoretical section helps make the connection between how undocumented students create meaningful relationships and how they access resources for the achievement of their educational pursuits. Building relationships with teachers, counselors, and community organizations is an important skill that can affect students’ educational futures. The information and resources these agents provide is influential for undocumented Latino high school students’ success in pursuing higher education (Abrego, 2011; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Gonzales, 2010).

Social capital is defined as relationships with high-status institutional agents who are capable of providing the institutional resources that enable individuals to accomplish their goals
High-status institutional agents, help-seeking orientation, and institutional resources are key features in the creation of social capital.

Undocumented students are involved in many networks such as family, peer, and school (Gonzales, 2010). Family and peers give emotional support but frequently are unfamiliar with the institutional resources necessary for a college education, such as what is required for a college application and eligibility for financial aid. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of institutionally-based networks and the resources they provide (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

High-status institutional agents are individuals with positions and authority who have access to resources and information in institutional contexts (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; 2001). Creating long-lasting, meaningful relationships with high-status institutional agents is key in accessing resources and information about higher education for undocumented students. Undocumented students are often from low-income households and do not have access to the resources and information available to individuals from more affluent families (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010). In school, teachers and counselors have a higher socioeconomic status: they are college-educated and understand the college process. In addition, they are typically of a different social class, ethnicity, and legal status. They are also embedded in the school system and have knowledge and networks within the organization. However, relationships with institutional agents are often rare because of potential barriers that can arise (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; 2001). Crossing this social barrier is necessary for undocumented students but requires confidence and skill from the student (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).
Another potential barrier to forming relationships with institutional agents is language. Some Latino students need or prefer to seek help from Spanish-speaking school agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In schools where the majority of the school agents are non-Spanish-speaking, building a trusting rapport with immigrant students can be challenging (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Additionally, high-status institutional agents have the task of balancing multiple roles and functions within the school and find it difficult to manage all of the roles they are asked to play (i.e., teacher, mentor, advocate, coach) (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Bridging social boundaries, language preference, and these different roles can make interactions with high-status institutional agents difficult.

Access to high-status institutional agents is a very hectic task, often requiring the negotiation of many diverse (and sometimes conflicting) social relationships and personalities. The way in which students interact with institutional agents is important in determining relationships and the amount of support the student will receive (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Having the ability to form a social network with high-status institutional agents requires a help-seeking orientation from the undocumented students (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). A help-seeking orientation is the act of actively asking for assistance from others (Stanton-Salazar, p. 25, 2001). The social-psychological framework of the adolescent influences one’s help-seeking orientation, including the student’s confidence; comfort in crossing racial and ethnic lines; feelings of distrust, fear, and anxiety; and institutional structures, including track level and the school’s counselor/student ratio (Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The ability to seek help is dependent upon the factors mentioned above, but also on legal status.
Students who are distrustful of their teachers, for example, are less likely to seek help from them (Gonzales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). For undocumented students, distrust and anxiety with teachers and counselors can stem from two sources: having to cross class and racial lines, and fear of revealing or talking about legal status. For example, as a result of discussing their legal status, undocumented students can experience fear for themselves and their families. When students do trust their teachers, they seek help more frequently and find more options regarding college (Gonzales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

When undocumented students trust and develop relationships with institutional agents, they gain access to institutional resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, 2001; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch, 1995). Institutional resources can include materials and supplies, supportive academic programs, helpful teachers and counselors, and college knowledge (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This study focuses on college knowledge and the networking skills needed to obtain that knowledge.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) describes institutionally-based funds of knowledge relevant to this study. Knowledge of labor and education is the understanding of “job and educational opportunities; knowledge of how to fulfill requisites and how to overcome barriers” (269). When education and labor knowledge is separated we gain a better understanding of college and career knowledge that undocumented students need. College knowledge is an understanding of how the education system works. A few examples of college knowledge include the college application process, the financial resources, the familiarity with the general requirements needed for a college application, and understanding the general organization of a university. In addition to college knowledge, undocumented students also need to be familiar with the legal procedures for
applying to colleges given their status, as well as funding options and the opportunities for obtaining legal status (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010). It is also important for undocumented students to know that colleges and universities will accept undocumented students and specific procedures when applying, such as providing an affidavit (Drachman, 2006; ICIRR, 2011). Furthermore, finding scholarships that do not require U.S. citizenship is crucial for financing an undocumented student’s education. For example, undocumented students need to know and understand that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) provides recipients permission to work and attend college but does not make them eligible for financial aid (S. B. 2185, [Ill. 2011]; ICIRR, 2011). By having this added college knowledge, undocumented students can have a better understanding of the barriers associated with their legal status and ways to work around those challenges.

Bridging and role modeling are necessary to connect with new institutional agents and access resources like college knowledge. Bridging creates opportunities to network with others, offering a “bridge” from students to institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, p. 268, 2001). Students benefit from people who bridge but, also from institutional agents who role-model. Role-modeling is the demonstration of effective strategies for interacting with institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, p. 268, 2001). Undocumented Latino students require institutional agents who engage in bridging and role-modeling.

Undocumented Latino students need social capital and college knowledge to support their educational goals. Researchers who focused on undocumented Latino youth make suggestions for future studies to strengthen students’ social capital. For instance, Garcia and Tierney (2011) assert that “efforts need to be placed on how to build and strengthen networks and create social
bonds” (p. 2769). It would benefit undocumented students to know how to build social capital for the purpose of their educational trajectory and navigating the college system.

Researchers suggest that it is important for undocumented students to have college knowledge specifically related to their undocumented status and college pursuits. These studies discuss the importance of the relationships in school for students, especially undocumented students, explaining that “the development of these relationships is critical to gaining guidance and support” (Abrego, 2006; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010, p. 483). In addition, existing literature argue that resources and strong, trusting relationships are needed to achieve educational expectations, and there is still more to learn about how undocumented students build social capital (Abrego, 2006; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010, 2011).

Additionally, information regarding financial challenges that undocumented students can face also need to be addressed, “practices must be implemented to inform [undocumented students] of their eligibility for in-state tuition as well as policies to provide them with financial aid” (Chavez et al., 2007, p. 261). These studies suggest what is needed for students: social capital and college knowledge. However, do not make suggestions and do not offer strategies as to how to equip students to gain social capital and college knowledge as they prepare for college I take their recommendations and design an intervention to investigate if and how this methodology helps build undocumented students social capital as a way to gain college knowledge and legal consciousness.

Intention of the Intervention

The intervention in this study requires students to set short-term goals to seek out high-status institutional agents for the purpose of obtaining resources and information that parallels
their long-term educational goals. This intervention directly creates “bridges” to high-status institutional agents that can provide institutional supports and resources that the student may otherwise not have access to. Each student and I role-played, and designed a strategy, where the student was able to ask questions before a meeting with a high-status institutional agent.

Through this intervention, students practice their help-seeking skills. In addition, the students have the opportunity to increase their social capital by contacting high-status institutional agents who have experience working with undocumented students and who are familiar with the resources, college structures, and legal information they need. These high-status institutional agents were a financial aid counselor at a university, college faculty and staff, current undocumented university students, and citizenship advisors. Through this intervention, the desire was for the participants to get more information about how to address challenges, find a pathway around their barriers, and understand their college and career options.

This intervention was designed with the principles of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in mind. YPAR is divided into two categories, action and methodology. However, this study focuses on students’ participation of the intervention, where YPAR includes youth in the process of designing a study, research questions, and data analysis.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Action

In YPAR, the study participants conduct research that contributes to community or social change (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The main principles of YPAR are a shared investigation, an understanding of a problem, and an effort to address the problem (McIntyre, 2000). These principles ask academic researchers and local groups to work together, resulting in the
development of interventions based on the experiences of people living in the community (McIntyre, 2000; Morrell, 2006). YPAR projects are often guided with disadvantaged groups with the goal of understanding and resolving the social problems they face, such as educational equity and social justice (Morrell, 2006).

YPAR involves youth as empowered agents of change who can identify the larger issues in their lives and create actions to remedy those issues (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2006). The design of YPAR allows for youth to explore systematic and institutional injustices and offers a way in which initial questions are answered for the purpose of creating social change (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). The participation of youth gives them a voice in the research process and the interventions that come from the research (McIntyre, 2000; Morrell, 2006).

In this study, the youth participants take action by contacting high-status institutional agents for the purpose of collecting information about their college and legal options. They use the knowledge they gain from this investigation to create meaningful relationships and locate the resources they need to pursue a college education. Ultimately, The undocumented students guide the direction of the intervention. The action in this study is to improve students’ personal lives. Because the action in this study is not activism in the broader sense of improving the lives of the undocumented student population, this study is not YPAR action (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2006). However, outcomes of this study can have broader social action components. First, other undocumented students can hear about the assistance the three students received as a result of participating in this study, providing a model for how they too can take action. Second, I hope that the intervention provides a learning experience for the agents so they gain additional insight into how to support undocumented students in the future. Last, it is my intention to
present my results and the intervention as a way for future studies to have a model for having students take action to give them strategies to empower them to seek relationships and resources.

**Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Research Methodology**

YPAR is collaborative in nature, where the researcher is not looking at an issue solely from the outside (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; McIntyre, 2000; Morrell, 2006). Instead, the researcher seeks to understand an issue from the perspective of the participants in the study (McIntyre, 2000; Morrell, 2006). Traditional YPAR methodology does not have formulated research questions based on the interests of the researcher. Instead, the youth participants undertake the research design, form the research questions, collect data, and analyze their findings (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). This form of methodology allows youth to become change agents (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010). This study is collaborative in nature because in addition, I am adjusting my research protocols based on their individual circumstances as a way to support their success in meeting with institutional agents. However, this is not enough to be considered YPAR methodology. Unlike traditional YPAR, the students participating in this study are not involved in the design, data collection, or data analysis. Therefore, this study does not use YPAR methodology.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the purpose of having undocumented students participate in the intervention is to help understand their social networks, college knowledge, legal consciousness and career and college expectations. This chapter presents the design of the intervention and the study’s procedures. This chapter begins with the context of this study, including information about the community and school, and the profile of the three students who participate in the intervention as part of this study. Throughout the remainder of the chapters, all names of cities, schools, students, and high-status institutional agents are pseudonyms.

To review, the research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the current educational goals of undocumented immigrant Latino high school students?
2. How do undocumented immigrant Latino students perceive their school staff, teachers, and community organizations?
3. What relationships and information do undocumented Latino students need for the purpose of overcoming the perceived constraints of their legal status?
4. What relationships and information do undocumented Latino students need to achieve their educational expectations?
Context

City and Community Context

This study takes place in the city of Condwell, a community where all the participants live. Condwell is a city located in northern Illinois surrounded by cornfields. The small downtown has several small shops, restaurants, and bars with vacant building spaces, evidence of closed businesses. There are big-box stores on the northeast side of this city and a variety of restaurants along the main roads. When the local university is on a seasonal holiday, Condwell was quiet. However, during the school season there is a lot of foot traffic, cars, and school and university buses along main streets and around the university. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Condwell has a population of roughly 43,000 people, with 12.5% of those identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 74% as White, 12.8% as Black, and 4.1% as Asian. Ten percent of the population is foreign-born and 16.3% speak a language other than English at home (U.S. 2010 Census). Ninety-one percent of adults graduated from high school and 33.9% had completed a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. 2010 Census). The median household income for this community from 2007-2011 was $40,000 and 28.6% of the community live below the poverty rate (U.S. 2010 Census).

School Context

This study includes undocumented Latino students from Condwell High School, which is located on the north side of the city. The new, two-story building opened for the 2011-2012 school year, housed students in grades 9-12, and is located within five minutes of a four-year public university. This is the only high school in the school district, and is where all three
students attended high school. Upon entering the main lobby, the main office is on the right. A bilingual secretary usually greets visitors. However, when she is not there, a visitor might wait for several minutes unless he/she looks for someone in the office for assistance. Condwell High School has several tall windows and skylights that allowed natural light to enter the building.

Along with standard classrooms, Condwell High has a few lecture-style rooms similar to those seen at colleges and universities, and every classroom and lecture room was equipped with Smart Board technology. The athletic department had the latest equipment and the performing arts center was highly regarded. Condwell High School offers 35 clubs and several athletic teams.

Condwell has five counselors that serve the student population, one being assigned to all native Spanish-speaking students. According to the Illinois Interactive Report Card, in 2012 the teaching and administrative workforce for is 91.9% White, 2.9% Black, and 4.6% Hispanic.

The high school has a student enrollment of approximately 1,800. The percentage of students living in a low-income household is 44.5%. The student body is 64.1% White, 11.5% Black, 18.3% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian, and 3.4% Multiracial. Condwell graduates 83% of its students, and in 2012 graduated 77% of its Hispanic students (“Illinois Interactive Report Card,” 2015.). Students who are English learners make up 3.1% of the student population (“Illinois Interactive Report Card,” 2015). The undocumented population is not easily determined, since asking for a student’s legal status is prohibited in a K-12 educational building (Plyler v Doe). An English as a Second Language teacher at Condwell estimates there are about 25 students with undocumented status in the high school’s English language-learning program in 2012.

In addition to Condwell High School, Lincoln State University is located in Condwell. Lincoln State is a four-year public university. Lincoln State offers undergraduate, graduate, and
law degrees. There is a total enrollment of 21,138 students with 15,814 undergraduate students. Lincoln State University has student to instructor ratio of 18 to one providing small class sizes. The ethnic/racial composition of the undergraduate students are 60% White, 17% Black, 13.2% Hispanic/Latino, 4.9% Asian, and 3% two or more. In addition, there are international students representing 122 countries. Lincoln State University is well known, however, not a selective in their admission criteria.

Student Sample

Three undocumented students, one in tenth grade and two in twelfth grade, were asked to participate in this study. The small sample size provided the researcher an opportunity to speak to the undocumented students in depth and to gather specific information about their experiences.

I met two of the students, Oscar and Karelia, in an afterschool program where I was a volunteer tutor. I had no intention of engaging either student in this study until I learned about their experiences. During a presentation about their family background, Oscar and Karelia revealed their legal status. After I worked individually with Oscar and Karelia, they also shared their experiences in school and their future plans. Both students were open with me about being undocumented and had a comfort level that allowed them to speak freely about their legal situation. I became curious about their goals and whether their legal situation was affecting what they wanted to accomplish. I asked Oscar and Karelia individually about the possibility of participating in this study, and both agreed.

I met the third student, Ana, through a classmate of mine who taught at Condwell High School. She and I spoke after school about the possibility of participating in this study, and she agreed.
Student Profiles

Oscar was 17 years old and a senior in the 2013-2014 school year. He participated in several clubs, school events, rallies, and protests on immigration reform. At Condwell High School, he was president of a Latino student group. He was also a member of various clubs, including the Outdoor Adventure Club, Reality Illinois, Art Club, Interact Club, Spanish Club, Future Educators Club, Gay Straight Alliance, Students Making A Change (for anti-bullying), the Diversity Awareness Committee, and Project Breakthrough. Oscar was an artist, and often worked on sketches during the Latino student group. He was interested in engineering and took high-level math courses that reflected this interest. I tutored him primarily in Pre-Calculus. He said that some concepts were difficult because the teacher explained them very quickly or he would fall asleep due to boredom. He was from Mexico and had lived in Condwell for 11 years. He lived with his parents and sister, Karelia, who was also participating in this study, on the south side of town.

Oscar was accepted by the one university to which he applied, Lincoln State University, and was excited to begin in the fall. Lincoln State is a large, four-year public university located in Condwell. Oscar had existing knowledge about college because of his experiences with the college application process and applying for financial aid. Oscar was involved with College Bridge, a summer program through Lincoln State University. Through College Bridge, students participate in a college readiness summer program during the summers after their junior and senior years. In addition they take college courses the summer of their senior year at no cost. Oscar communicated with his counselor and knew some university staff.
Oscar decided to work at a factory after school to help his family financially because his mom was not employed. Oscar was open about his undocumented legal status with me, and shared that he had received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) approval. Oscar participated in events geared toward undocumented students and educating the community and local colleges about issues pertaining to the undocumented student population.

Oscar had substantial college knowledge as well as existing relationships with faculty and staff at the university he was going to attend; a teacher and counselor at his high school; and the facilitator of the Latino student group. The diversity of Oscar’s social network may make it appear that he would not benefit from the intervention, but we still needed to investigate the depth of his relationships. Furthermore, there was information he knew he needed to better understand his college course requirements, his financial aid options, and his constraints of legal status that can affect his life after college. These were reasons to include him in the intervention.

Oscar’s sister, Karelia, also participated in this study. Karelia was 15 years old and a sophomore. She participated in and was involved in organizing fundraisers for the Latino student group. Karelia also attended immigration rallies and protests. She rarely had homework to work on during the study period after the Latino student group. She enjoyed science classes and writing. She too was from Mexico, and was living with her parents and brother, Oscar.

Karelia had not thought about college or the process of applying. Although her brother had applied to college, she did not know where to begin. She had a social network including faculty and staff at her high school and Lincoln State University, and had recently received DACA approval as well. She was open with me about her legal status, but throughout our
conversations, it was evident that she did not disclose her status with everyone. Karelia shared with me that she was pregnant during the time of this study.

Karelia’s social network included experts who had knowledge about undocumented students. In addition, she knew these persons for a long time and she felt she would not be judged for her legal status. Nonetheless, Karelia did not have in-depth conversations with anyone in her social network about planning for college, career exploration, or her undocumented status. Thus, she wanted to learn more about the college process and potential careers. Therefore, expanding her social network, college knowledge, and legal status knowledge were reasons to include her in the intervention.

At the time of this study, Ana was an 18-year-old and senior who was part of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Condwell High School. She participated in the Latino student group until her junior year. She stopped attending after giving birth to her son because she depended on the school bus to get home to take care of her child. She hoped to one day own her own business and have her own salon.

Ana had finished her coursework in January, at the beginning of this study, but was to receive her diploma in June along with her graduating class. She utilized the time until graduation to focus on being a stay-at-home mom for her infant child. She did not apply to college and did not know how to begin the college application process. Ana explained that she and her family originally arrived to the U.S. from Mexico on a tourist visa, and they overstayed the end date of their authorized stay. Although hesitant to speak about her legal status, she shared that she recently applied for DACA, but was waiting to receive approval. She lived with her son and her boyfriend’s family.
Ana had a few professionals in her social network. However, her social network did not include an expert with whom to speak about the specifics of being undocumented, about DACA, or what her legal status meant for her future. Although Ana named a few individuals as trustworthy, she did not initiate conversations with them about college or her legal status, which showed in her not having information about where to apply for college. She made an attempt to learn about the college process with her counselor, but did not turn to others for answers or help. Ana had a basic understanding about college applications and financial aid, but needed to build her relationships by having conversations about the college and how her legal status would affect her successfully applying to college.

Intervention Design

The intervention used in this study has three stages. First, the intervention develops a baseline to inquire and understand the educational expectations and legal status difficulties undocumented Latino high school students face. Second, I provide the students with a list of experts to expand their social capital. These experts include institutional agents in community organizations and colleges that work with undocumented students and/or were familiar with the college system and legal issues. Third, after the students meet with their experts, I interview them to learn about their meetings with an institutional agent. These experiences provide insight into whether the intervention affects their educational expectations, social capital, and college knowledge.

The goals of this intervention were inspired by youth participatory action research (YPAR), as this intervention aims to assist undocumented Latino high school students expand
their resources and knowledge about college and legal status. Where YPAR has students design the research, pose research questions, collect and analyze data, this study focused on students’ participation in the intervention. Thus, the intervention does not use YPAR methodology; rather, this study uses qualitative methods.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research seeks to understand research participants in their own settings and often utilizes interviews. Interviewing allows for the respondents to speak about their experiences, and their perceptions about their experiences, in detail (Weiss, 1994). Interviews are valuable because they give insight into the emotions and thoughts experienced by the people being interviewed (Weiss, 1994). Semi-structured interviews contain a set of questions, a protocol, created by the researcher, but also include the flexibility to ask additional questions based upon the responses from the interviewee (Maxwell, 2005). Having the freedom to ask questions outside of the protocol is beneficial because the respondents can add information the researcher did not anticipate. Engaging students in semi-structured interviews gives focus to questions in the protocol, allowing students to be descriptive in their responses and providing grounded examples based upon their interactions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Procedures

Data Collection

The data in this study consists of nine interviews, three interview from each student, and an intervention. Students were encouraged to collect paper information, such as scholarship
applications, course requirements, and undergraduate programs. These materials were used to prompt discussion about the topics discussed in their meetings and were not recognized as part of the data.

**Interviews**

This study consisted of three interviews with each participant, spread out over a two-month period, and an intervention. Each participant was asked to complete a small research project, an intervention, with my assistance. As stated previously, the intervention asked students to seek out high-status institutional agents for the purpose of obtaining resources and information to inform their educational goals.

The first interview gathered basic information from the participant (Appendix A). The purpose of the first interview was to better understand the students’ educational goals, perceived challenges, current college knowledge, and existing relationships. Questions included: “What are your goals after high school? What colleges are you interested in attending? Do you have a relationship with someone with whom you can speak about college, or legal information?” The answers to these questions provided a foundation for the intervention.

Based on the students’ responses in the first interview, I composed a list of relevant high-status institutional agents in their local community (Appendix B). These high-status institutional agents included college staff, and organization staff. In addition, the list of agents included current undocumented college students who were open about their status and who were knowledgeable about the college process and who worked with undocumented students. Some of these institutional agents were on the lists of all three students, and some were tailored for the
students based on their intended major and college interest. I presented the names and contact information for these agents during the second interview.

In the second interview, I shared the personalized list of institutional agents. I described who each agent was and their area of their expertise. We also added high-status institutional agents not already listed whom the students wanted to include. Then, we discussed which high-status institutional agents the student wanted to contact and why. The goal was to have each student contact at least two institutional agents: one with expertise in legal matters and one with college knowledge. Questions during this interview included: “Who do you most want to contact about college and about legal assistance? Tell me about what you want to learn from this person? What are some questions that you want to ask?” (Appendix C).

After the student selected with whom to meet, we brainstormed questions, set a plan, and prepared for the meetings. A sample plan looked like this:

1. Email Mrs. A to make an appointment about the classes I need to meet the requirements for (UIC).
2. Write the day and time in a place where I will remember.
3. Take a pen, notebook, and questions to the meeting.
4. Remember to bring the list of questions to each meeting.
5. Ask the questions and write the answers in my notebook.
6. Write any questions that come up and make sure to ask them.
7. Thank Mrs. A for meeting with me and ask if I can contact her with any other questions that I might have in the future.

Next, we role-played a conversation with an institutional agent. In addition, I gave each student a folder to hold any materials, such as brochures, scholarship information, and college requirements they collected during their meetings with their high-status institutional agents. I also asked them to bring anything they collected to our final interview. Any materials they collected were used to prompt discussion about their meetings. I offered to go with the students
to their meetings with their institutional agent, but none asked that I accompany them. I also encouraged each student to contact me if they encountered any challenges or had any questions. At the conclusion of this interview, we scheduled a tentative date for the last interview in two weeks’ time.

During the two weeks between the second and the third interviews, the students met with the institutional agents. None of the students contacted me with any questions or to troubleshoot any barriers they encountered. Three days before, I confirmed the last interview. All three students asked to reschedule, to give them an additional week to meet with their agents.

The purpose of the third interview was for undocumented students to reflect on their meetings with their high-status institutional agents, and assess the success and challenges of the intervention (Appendix D). This interview was used to understand students’ experiences of their meetings and examine the information they received. In addition we discuss students’ expectations, and discuss what students would do differently to change the intervention. Questions from this interview included: “How did this plan work for you? What were some of the successes? What were some of the challenges? What are your current educational goals and how have they changed?”

Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted using the language that the participant felt most comfortable using, primarily in English with some Spanish. I am a Spanish speaker and translated the interview questions and the transcripts when needed. Based on the students’ preferences and their parents’ consent, the interviews were conducted in their homes. The progression of the study for the researcher is shown in Figure 1 and the progression of the study for each student is shown in Figure 2.
My Role as a Researcher

I am an educated, Spanish-speaking Latina and U.S. citizen with experiences that position me as both an insider and an outsider to the students participating in this study. I am an outsider because I am not undocumented and do not personally know the experiences of an undocumented student. I do, however, have family and friends who are undocumented. They have shared their struggles with me in terms of their education, future goals, and documentation status. As a result, I have learned to be sensitive and understanding when, if, and how undocumented individuals choose to discuss their experiences.

I am privileged to be a college-educated U.S. citizen, and consider myself to be middle-class. The students know some details of my life, such as the area where I live. A Google search
can tell the students in this study some demographic information about my lifestyle, and gather that I am of a higher socioeconomic status than their families. This, coupled with being college-educated and working on a master’s degree, puts me in a position of privilege which may influence students’ responses. However, I tried to use my privilege as a way to assist students with their educational goals.

It was my hope that being Latina and a Spanish speaker allows the students to trust me enough to share their experiences. I often use the Spanish pronunciation of a word intentionally when talking about *la cultura*, the Latino culture. It was my way to let the students know that I was open to speaking Spanish throughout the interviews. The ability to speak Spanish helped in communication with the students, building rapport, based on a shared cultural and linguistic experience. The students felt comfortable using their home language to articulate what they could express in English.

I had a personal investment in making the interventions in this study successful. However, I was open to any challenges, weaknesses, or alternative outcomes that I did not anticipate. I included questions in the interview protocols that would counterbalance my investment in a positive intervention outcome. Specifically, I asked each student to describe the challenges as well as the successes of the intervention.

Data Coding and Analysis

In analyzing the data, I sought to understand undocumented Latino students’ college and career expectations, social capital, college knowledge, and legal consciousness. First, I looked for what undocumented students’ college career and college expectations were before and after
having met with high-status institutional agents. Second, I searched for an understanding of what students knew regarding the college process and their legal status. Third, I identified the perceived challenges the undocumented students saw in accessing a college education before and after participating in the intervention. Finally, I investigated who was in the students’ existing networks before and after the intervention along with their experience in participating in the intervention.

I analyzed a total of nine interviews: three interviews from each student. I recorded each interview using a digital voice recorder and saved them in a password-protected digital file. I transcribed the interviews and coded them in HyperRESEARCH.

I transcribed each interview within a day or two of when the interview took place. Next, I coded each interview using selective coding. Selective codes focused on larger topics related to the research questions and the theoretical framework including codes such as *expectation*, *aspiration*, *existing relationships*, *college knowledge*, *undocumented college knowledge*, *meeting preparation*, and *intervention experience*. Next, emotion coding was used to identify undocumented students’ affects associated with speaking about their legal status, and explaining their experience in participating in the intervention and study. Emotion codes included *embarrassed*, *judged*, and *comfortable*. Selective and emotion coding incorporated In Vivo coding, where students’ direct words from the passage of data being coded (Saladaña, 2009). This was important in highlighting the experiences of the undocumented students using their own words.

The three students and the nine total interviews resulted in three rich cases. This allowed me the opportunity to compare themes within each undocumented student’s interviews and
across student cases. The intervention offers a pre and post analysis where we can examine a change in students’ expectations, college knowledge, and social networks.

Summary

Existing research focuses on undocumented college students examining the precarious legal climate and their educational outcomes. This study centers on the educational expectations of undocumented Latino high school students. Doing so allows for insight into their institutionally-based relationships and the college knowledge they need to successfully apply to college. The intervention used in this study is inspired by YPAR as a way to empower students by meeting with institutional agents. Undocumented students’ experiences provide insight into whom they choose to meet and the type of college knowledge they find important. In addition, we gain an understanding for the complications undocumented students face in adding to their social capital and knowledge.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

This study explores the possibilities and challenges undocumented Latino/a students face in accessing a college education. It examines their college and career expectations, college knowledge, and relationships. Furthermore, this study seeks to deepen the knowledge that undocumented Latino students have for college acceptance. In order to add to undocumented students’ college knowledge, I use an intervention to build their social networks. The intervention asks the students to meet with two institutional agents to gain college. By using an intervention, I investigate what undocumented students learn and with whom they meet.

The findings are divided into two chapters. The first chapter, the pre-intervention, provides a baseline for understanding undocumented students’ college and career expectations, existing knowledge, and social networks. The second chapter is divided into two sections: the intervention experience, and post-intervention.

The data are presented at each stage of the study in three narrative vignettes that highlight the experiences of the students: Oscar, Karelia, and Ana. The vignettes provide an overview of each student’s college and career expectations, college knowledge and social networks. A cross-case analysis concludes each section and chapter.
Pre-Intervention

In this section, the focus is on Oscar, Karelia, and Ana’s college and career aspirations and expectations; college knowledge; and social networks prior to the intervention. We learn where the intervention can fill in gaps in college knowledge and how it can lead to relationships that may be helpful for transmitting the resources and information undocumented students need. This chapter provides a baseline from which to compare to post-intervention results.

Career and College Aspirations and Expectations

The following section describes each student’s college and career aspirations and expectations based on their interests and their sense of limitation. The undocumented students described their ideal career and college choices by answering questions such as, “If you could be or do anything you wanted as a career, what would you do?” Also, “If you could go to any college or university, anywhere you wanted, where would you go?” The undocumented students were asked to describe their “real world” career and college choice by answer questions such as, “Now let’s talk about in the real world; what do you want to do when you grow up?” In addition, “Which college or university do you actually think you are going to attend after high school?” The purpose of having the two sets of questions is to see whether a gap exists between students’ ideal and actual career and college goals. Students also discussed the challenges they might encounter as reasons for seeing a discrepancy between their aspirations and expectations. Comparing students’ ideal and expected career and college choices provide a baseline upon which to compare their expected career and college choices after participating in the intervention.
Oscar’s career and college aspirations and expectations. Prior to the intervention, Oscar wanted to be a mechanical engineer. He said, “I really like math … It always sounded interesting … Ever since 5th grade, I remember I was going to be an engineer.” Studying engineering was a goal from a young age. However, when asked about what career he was expecting after high school, he answered by saying, “I’m still, in a way, deciding. Sometimes I have a doubt.” Oscar had doubts about pursuing mechanical engineering because “the classes look like they are going to get hard.” Then Oscar said, “Sometimes I want to be a teacher.” Two experiences sparked Oscar’s interest in teaching. In a course he took in his junior year of high school, “we got to teach little 5-year-olds … like pre-K.” Oscar experienced what it would be like to be a teacher and he also learned about “the percentage of Latinos that are teachers in Illinois and in Condwell. I kind of want to be one of those Latinos that will try to make an impact on the Latino students—any student, but mostly Latinos.” Oscar wanted to give back to the Latino community by being an influential teacher. In thinking about teaching, Oscar said, “I hear it’s harder, at least that one test [is].” Oscar was referring to the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) needed for teaching certification. The doubts Oscar experienced in pursuing engineering were due to the rigor and interest in other careers. Oscar considered the possibilities as well as the difficulties he would encounter pursuing both careers. Ultimately, he explained, “I’m set for mechanical engineering.” Mechanical engineering and teaching were both expectations, but Oscar made a decision to pursue mechanical engineering.

Prior to this study and intervention, Oscar had already been accepted at Lincoln State University and had decided to attend. When given the opportunity to choose an ideal university, he still chose Lincoln State. He reasoned, “I think because I’m so close to Lincoln State, for the
past four years now…and the whole Latino Center.” Oscar participated in various events on Lincoln State’s campus, especially through the Latino Center, and became familiar with the university. His familiarity with the university was one reason for choosing Lincoln State, but so was the presence of a Latino Center. The Latino Center hosted workshops and events about Latino culture. In addition, it housed a student group designed to increase awareness of the undocumented student population and developed a guide for professionals working with undocumented students. The Latino Center provided a place where Oscar could ask for assistance and be open about being undocumented.

Oscar was enrolled in honors math, participated in a variety of extracurricular activities in high school, and participated in College Bridge through Lincoln State University. His academic profile made him a good applicant for more prestigious universities. However, he said, “Honestly, I didn’t really look at any other college.” He did not research universities that might be a good fit, or apply elsewhere, thus missing opportunities for attendance at other universities. Cost was one reason. Oscar was looking for employment to “help me pay most of what I would have to pay for college.” Staying local would decrease the cost of attendance by living at home and commuting to Lincoln State, alleviating some of his financial burden.

Oscar expected a career in mechanical engineering. He chose to pursue a professional career in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field that required an advanced degree and provided job security. Although he expected this career, he had doubts (thus creating uncertainty) about pursuing mechanical engineering. His apprehension was due to the following social contexts: his awareness of how rigorous the mechanical engineering courses would be, contrasted with having experienced what it would be like to teach coupled with his
awareness of the need for Latino teachers. We can see that having an aspiration does not mean having it as an expectation. Instead, he was contemplating whether mechanical engineering was a definite decision. Although Oscar experienced hesitancy due to social context, he did not change his career expectation.

Oscar did not consider other universities besides Lincoln State and did not know of other college options available to him. The financial context of his home helps explain why Oscar may not have researched other universities where he might have applied and been accepted: cost of attending college and financial responsibility to his family. Living at home would have lower room and board as well as fewer transportation expenses. Also, some of the money he would make while working would go to help his family, whereas if he went away to school, any money he earned would most likely have to cover his own expenses. But, the two local college options do not provide the range in options in selectivity, colleges that have differing better academic and social supports, and colleges that can offer more financial aid assistance.

Karelia’s career and college aspirations and expectations. Karelia’s ideal choices of careers were journalism or marine biology. She wanted to pursue journalism, because she enjoyed her English classes in high school. Karelia also had an interest in marine biology because she “always had a passion for animals.” However, Karelia felt “my grades…my science classes are not enough for me to be a scientist or something like that.” Karelia explained, “I see myself doing it, definitely, but I don’t see myself being able to get to that point.” Karelia had an aspiration of pursuing marine biology, which required an advanced degree and provided economic security and stability. However, self-doubts about achievement prevented her from pursuing a degree in science, her ideal career.
In pondering the career she expected to pursue after high school, Karelia said she was “undecided, since I know I don’t have many options.” She thought she would “do cosmetology, but I know I don’t want to do that for the rest of my life.” Karelia felt that being undocumented “narrows a lot of things,” limiting what she could have as a career. However, to Karelia, cosmetology was a career that felt possible for her as an undocumented student. She explained, “I think being a cosmetologist is way more realistic than being a marine biologist.” Karelia did not consider marine biology as a “realistic” career, because “I feel like I’ve set a goal for me that I don’t think I can accomplish.” She lowered her aspiration to a career she thought she could achieve, cosmetology. Compared to marine biology, cosmetology consisted of a vocational certificate with few transferable skills and less pay.

Ideally, Karelia wanted to attend college internationally or out of state. She said, “I want to go to a foreign country” because she wanted to “travel the world.” The University of Minnesota interested her because “those mailing cards come in…it seemed pretty.” Karelia was interested in colleges outside of Condwell, her hometown, because “I want to get away from here. Try something new.” The flyers from different universities exposed Karelia to college options aside from Lincoln State University and Riverdale Community College. However, “I haven’t really, like, I haven’t researched much of what they’re good in and stuff.” Karelia explained that “money” and her parents’ perceptions about college were influencing her hesitancy. A college education is a large financial investment in which money is often a determining factor in choosing which college to attend. Although she had not discussed the topic with her parents, she felt that “they’ll be like, ‘Why don’t you stay here? Why do you want to go away? You can just study here.” Karelia was a young Latina where a close-knit family can lead
students to “prioritize the needs of the family over individual desires related to education” (McWhirter, p. 137, 1997).

Karelia explained, “I wish I could go to any college that I wanted. You know, not just Lincoln State or Riverdale… but I can’t because I’m not from here.” Karelia perceived that her legal status limited other college options. The cost of attending college, local college options, her parents’ lack of support, and her legal status were all obstacles Karelia saw in choosing a college. Therefore, she expected to attend “Riverdale Community College first and then go to Lincoln State University, maybe… depending on what I decide to do.” Karelia was certain about attending community college, but based on the career she decided to pursue, she was uncertain where she would transfer. Riverdale offered low cost and open admissions, but students can earn no more than an associate’s degree. Lincoln State is a four-year public university offering a low cost, and a “lower selective” option, where students can earn a bachelor’s degree, a graduate degree, and a few professional degrees.

Karelia’s aspirations to pursue marine biology or journalism—a career in a STEM field or a professional career—contrasted with her expectation to seek a vocational career. Studying marine biology requires an advanced degree, and journalism requires at least a bachelor’s degree; both fields offer a higher salary and provide skills that can be applied in other career fields. Cosmetology requires only a vocational degree, and is typically a program lasting less than two years, with uncertain job placement or financial security. Karelia’s undocumented status and her perceptions of her abilities seemed to be obstacles too high to allow the pursuit of marine biology or journalism, and so she turned to cosmetology. Karelia also wanted to study abroad or attend an out-of-state, “more selective,” four-year university, but she saw legal status, cost of college,
and familial context as limiting her college options. Thus, she expected to attend the local community college, which had open enrollment. Karelia was hesitant about transferring to the local, “less selective,” four-year university, but this depended on the career she wanted to pursue, aside from cosmetology. Karelia had lofty career and college aspirations. However, she perceived her academic, legal, and familial contexts so great that her career and college expectations did not reflect her ideal ambitions.

Ana’s career and college aspirations and expectations. Ana explained that if she could choose any career, she wanted to be a doctor, “because I always wanted to.” Ana aspired to an economically stable, white-collar profession. However, she thought a medical degree was not an option because “people always told me that…since I’m not legal here, I can’t study what I want, so to be a doctor would be hard in my situation.” Being undocumented was a challenge, because she needed to have a social security number, which she did not have, to complete a medical residency and meet the state licensing requirements. In addition, Ana said, “To be a doctor, it’s just so hard…I don’t think I can do it.” Compared to a medical degree, cosmetology is simple. “Business is hard but I don’t think it can be as difficult as being a doctor.” Ana doubted her ability to pursue a medical degree, which influenced her decision to pursue a career path she felt she could accomplish.

Ana said, about the “big difference in how long you have to go to school for a doctor … it’s just more hard.” Pursuing a medical degree often takes eight years to complete, with a bachelor’s degree and medical school combined, where medical school is highly competitive (Occupational Outlook Handbook). Time as an obstacle can prevent students from investing years in pursuing a medical degree, but Ana did not consider other medical careers with less time
commitment. Instead, she expected to study cosmetology and business, because “I want to have my own beauty salon and have my own stores.” She expressed, “I was just planning on going [into] cosmetology, but then I was like, if I want to open my own business I have to learn about it and have a degree. So that’s why I’m doing both.” Ana expected to eventually own her own salon by combining programs studying cosmetology—a vocational degree with little economic stability—and business—leading to a bachelor’s degree with more job security and transferable skills.

When we spoke about college, Ana explained, she wanted to study in Spain. She explained, “I don’t know why, but I always wanted to.” However, her legal status prevented Ana from traveling, including participating in study-abroad opportunities, because she could not apply for a passport. In addition to studying in Spain, she also wanted to attend “the one in Chicago… UIC.” However, she explained, “I don’t think we can afford to move to Chicago…I don’t want to also be struggling with with the drive over there and taking the baby to the babysitter.” The cost of attending a university and the responsibility of having a child resulted in her decision to attend college locally, because “closer to home is better, I guess.” Therefore, Ana, like Karelia, expected to attend the two local college options, Riverdale Community College and transfer to Lincoln State University. Being the primary caregiver of a child influenced Ana’s decision to attend college locally. In addition, starting at the community college reduces the cost and is therefore considered more economical than attending a 4-year university immediately after high school, an issue of particular importance for undocumented students who do not qualify for federal financial aid.
Ana aspired to be a doctor—a professional, white-collar career with economic security—but had the obstacles of legal status, rigor of study program, and time commitment in pursuing a medical degree. Therefore, she expected to pursue cosmetology and business—for which she perceived her legal status was not a challenge. In addition, her expectation required less time and was considered less difficult. Cosmetology is a vocational career with uncertain employment and stability but business required a four-year degree with good pay and she expected to attend college locally. Ana’s college aspirations were to study abroad or at UIC. After considering the cost of moving to study far from Condwell and her responsibility to take care of her son, Ana determined that these barriers prevented her from reaching for her ideal aspirations. Instead, she expected to attend college locally.

Cross-Student Analysis

STEM careers versus vocational careers. All three students aspired to careers in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field. These were prestigious, white-collar careers that required advanced degrees. Oscar also a STEM career path as an expectation, but Karelia and Ana did not. Instead, the two women expected a vocational career to be the most attainable. Karelia and Ana perceived that their legal status eliminated the STEM field as a career option, and they doubted their ability to pursue these careers. Perceiving barriers of legal status and academic ability created a gap between Karelia and Ana’s career aspirations and expectations. We also see a gender difference here, in that these are perceived barriers for Ana and Karelia but not for Oscar. This reflects studies of teen females not pursuing STEM as a career as often as teen males do (Sadler, Sonnert, Hazari, & Tai, 2012).
Staying local. Although Karelia and Ana aspired to study abroad, their legal status was a barrier in doing so. While DACA-approved students can ask for permission to travel for educational purposes, it is a lengthy, costly, and risky process. Until immigration policy changes, undocumented students cannot participate in the study-abroad experience.

Oscar, Karelia, and Ana expected to attend college locally: either Riverdale Community College, or the local four-year university, Lincoln State University. All described the cost of college as a reason to stay local. Undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid, increasing their cost of college attendance compared to students who qualify. Helping undocumented students understand their financial options that are available can help decrease the cost of college, but more importantly, widen their college options. The college options for all three students were quickly limited to two institutions. Thus, additional options can result in students expecting to attend a selective college with greater academic and social supports, and more social capital within the university and among alumni.

Existing College Knowledge

The following section describes Oscar’s, Karelia’s, and Ana’s existing college knowledge. College knowledge consists of understanding procedures and requirements for applying to college (such as admission requirements), and accessing financial aid information. When the students spoke about their existing college knowledge and what they wanted to learn, a sub-category of college knowledge emerged: legal college knowledge. Legal college knowledge addresses legal considerations of college knowledge that is crucial for undocumented students.
Prior to the intervention, the participants identified college topics they wanted to learn more about. Understanding students’ existing college knowledge helps explain their career and college expectations. In addition, their existing knowledge helped to identify topics important to address during the intervention. Students’ existing knowledge also provides a baseline comparison to post-intervention knowledge, and any growth or topics needing further exploration.

**Oscar’s existing college knowledge.** When Oscar applied to Lincoln State University, he experienced the difficulty of completing the online college application. He explained, “The only uncertainty is always the whole citizenship thing … I felt a little bit weird answering that. I couldn’t complete it.” At the time Oscar applied to college, he was unfamiliar with information he needed to answer questions about his legal status, and was not prepared to complete them. Oscar eventually figured out how to fill out the forms, with some help. However, for other undocumented youth, encountering questions about their legal status can discourage them from applying for fear of disclosing their status or because they do not know who to ask for help regarding accurate procedures.

As an undocumented student, Oscar knew how important it was to apply for scholarships. He explained, “I can’t get financial aid through the state and I know I can’t get FAFSA. So right now, I’m trying to get as [many] scholarships that I can and the rest I’m going to have to work to pay...off.” Oscar knew he was not eligible to apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) because he was undocumented. Therefore, he was not eligible to receive state or federal student aid, two of the largest monetary sources of financial assistance. He described his frustration in applying to several scholarships: “I spent five hours trying to do the general
questions… I got help to make them sound professional. Out of the 19, 20 scholarships, only, like, three of them counted.” The challenge he faced was that “it wasn’t until I was going to turn them in that I realized that you need to turn [in] this FAFSA form; otherwise you couldn’t apply.” Oscar was unable to secure scholarship money to help offset the cost of college. Therefore, Oscar wanted to learn of “scholarship opportunities that I can qualify [for].” Without scholarship opportunities or alternate financial assistance, Oscar would have to rely on working to pay for his college costs.

Oscar knew he needed additional college knowledge. He explained he wanted “a schedule or something like that … steps that I need to take in order to successfully graduate and resources for future help.” He wanted to learn what was required for coursework to graduate to plan his courses for each semester. In addition, Oscar knew the rigor of his major and wanted to extend his social network at Lincoln State University. This meant being in contact with professors, and directors of student support centers where he can ask for assistance and guidance.

Oscar had an existing network at the university and sought to expand that network to access additional institutional resources as he transitioned from high school to college.

Oscar had already decided to attend Lincoln State University, but he did not know how to search for colleges before applying. Oscar applied to only one university, when guidance suggests students apply to between five and seven universities, with varying admission selectivity, to maximize opportunities of acceptance (National Association for College Admission Counseling [NACAC], 2014). By not researching different universities where he could apply, Oscar narrowed his options to the local college and university.
Through DACA, Oscar received a social security number for work purposes only. However, Oscar wanted to learn “how would I be able to apply the degree and how can I apply for jobs?” He was unsure of how DACA affected his employment and education. Oscar explained the importance of finding a job with his new work permit, “it would help me be stable because right now, only my dad is working.” As previously mentioned, Oscar was influenced by the financial flux of his home and felt a responsibility to contribute to his family by seeking employment to help pay for the cost of college. Therefore, Oscar needed additional guidance in learning about and licensures or certifications needed for mechanical engineering and additional financial assistance.

Looking ahead, Oscar needed college knowledge pertaining to his transition from high school to Lincoln State after graduation. This knowledge included course requirements for his major, how to schedule courses, where and how to register, annual cost of tuition and fees, payment options, and how to make payments to the bursar. In the high school to college transition students are moving from one educational institution to another, and they need to learn how to navigate new systems.

Karelia’s existing college knowledge. Prior to the intervention, Karelia was aware of some information related to scholarships and knew topics of career and college knowledge she needed. Karelia said, “I’ve gone to those workshops at Lincoln State where they talk about how you can apply for scholarships, and what type of scholarships they have. I know the high school offers a few.” Karelia knew of workshops and presentations related to scholarships, but did not research or ask how to apply for scholarships as an undocumented student.
Karelia wanted to learn how to pursue journalism and marine biology as her ideal career paths. She said, “I would like to learn a lot more. What special classes do I need at high school to be able to get into journalism? What skills I need, any other colleges that offer it.” For marine biology, she wanted to learn, “how I can become one, you know.” Karelia did not know how to prepare to pursue journalism or marine biology. In addition, she was not familiar with the work environment, or educational requirements to attain a degree in journalism and marine biology. However, Karelia knew she could take courses in high school to prepare her for college. If Karelia were to take courses related to journalism or marine biology she could have a better understanding of the careers, but also academically prepare for her college major.

Karelia wanted to learn “the requirements I need right now in high school to be able to get into a good college [and] what I should look for in a college or in a university.” Karelia knew a college search was important for selecting colleges. She emphasized wanting to learn “requirements to apply specifically for undocumented students … how I can get into different colleges with not having a social security [number] … I know I can get into Lincoln State, ... and I would definitely like to explore different colleges that accept undocumented people.” She understood that being undocumented complicated the college admission process and necessitated a broader list of colleges where she would apply. Gaining college knowledge about the college search process and application process for undocumented students, Karelia could broaden her college choices.

She wanted to know, “if I go to Riverdale Community College, can I still keep applying for DACA or does it have to be a university for it to count?” She wanted to know if DACA status or these guidelines did not dictate where a student can attend college. She needed additional
knowledge clarifying that she can attend any college or university and that DACA status does or doesn’t influence her choice.

Karelia generally knew where she could find scholarships, which is a small piece of having college knowledge. She knew that being undocumented could affect many processes in acquiring college knowledge and wanted to learn more legal college knowledge, including which colleges accept undocumented students, how to apply to college as an undocumented student, career knowledge, and her options for financial aid. The scope of college knowledge has the potential to open a wider range of college and career options, in addition to easing the process of searching and applying to college and financial aid.

**Ana’s existing college knowledge.** Ana’s existing college knowledge included the coursework for cosmetology and financial aid options. Ana said, “You just go apply, you start school, and they’ll teach you what you need to learn.” Typically, vocational programs such as cosmetology have standard coursework without much choice or flexibility. Ana understood that she only needed to register; however, she did not know where or how to apply. She also explained, “I don’t know the classes that I’m going to need and everything in general to take business classes.” Ana was familiar with the process of applying to the career path with a fixed course structure—cosmetology—but needed additional knowledge for business, which required more education and more flexibility in courses to fulfill the degree.

As she thought about applying for community college, she said, “I don’t know much about it … I’m guessing if I go to Riverdale Community College they’ll give me the information that I need and how to transfer also. I don’t think I have to go to Lincoln State University for
that.” Ana admitted not knowing how to apply or transfer, but she expected others to give her the information instead of searching for or asking about the procedures herself.

Ana described her understanding of scholarships and FAFSA. She explained, “For most scholarships you have to have good grades. For some it doesn’t really matter.” She knew of different scholarship options available to students, but not where to find scholarships or how to apply. Ana had minimal legal college knowledge about scholarships and knew about her eligibility for FAFSA. Ana added, “I was going to apply for FAFSA, but since I applied for deferred action, I guess you can’t apply for FAFSA if you did that.” She added, “I have to look at more options … ones where I can actually apply.” Ana knew FAFSA was connected to financial aid and knew that she could not apply because of her legal status. However, she could not apply for FAFSA, with or without DACA. Undocumented status, and movement to DACA approval, added to the complexity of understanding financial aid options and challenges in applying for FAFSA and scholarships.

Ana was familiar with the structure of the cosmetology program and with eligibility for financial aid as an undocumented student. She did not have college search, transition from high school, or career knowledge. A college search could give Ana alternate college options in starting, or transferring, to earn a business degree. She needed career knowledge to understand the process of owning a salon, the workload involved, and the required education. She also required specific college knowledge for undocumented students regarding applying for financial aid, and a better understanding of financial aid overall. Ana was transitioning from undocumented status and DACA approval, which complicated what she knew about financial aid: specifically, why she could not apply for FAFSA. Gaining college knowledge could help
Ana better understand what is required from the career she wants to pursue and the complications that can arise in applying for college admission, transferring, and financial aid. Furthermore, adding to Ana’s college knowledge could gain to her career and college options.

**Cross-Student Analysis**

**College knowledge.** The three participants in this study lacked college knowledge. Although Oscar had more existing knowledge than Karelia and Ana, they all needed additional guidance to attain college knowledge. Undocumented students with college knowledge can better comprehend their college options, which include applying to more than one university, and career options, by knowing the educational requirements. However, this college knowledge does not address the complications of undocumented legal status and DACA approval.

**Legal college knowledge.** Legal college knowledge leads to better understanding the challenges that can arise in applying to college and in receiving financial aid. The three students had some legal college knowledge, specifically about scholarships. Undocumented students are not eligible to receive federal or state aid, making scholarships the primary source for such students to receive financial assistance. However, not all knew the added layer of complexity their legal status created in searching for scholarships for which they could apply. In addition, adding to their financial aid options could open other methods for lowering the cost of college, such as tuition installment plans. Furthermore, Ana and Karelia needed additional legal college knowledge regarding applying to college as undocumented students. Since Oscar had already applied, he knew the challenges associated with applying to college, whereas Ana and Karelia did not.
Existing Relationships

In the following section I describe Oscar, Karelia, and Ana’s existing social networks. Ideally, social networks have breadth, including a diversity of teachers, counselors, staff and college faculty, and staff at community centers who can help students obtain college knowledge. In addition, social networks should have depth, meaning relationships where students can have comprehensive discussions on college planning, career exploration, and legal status. Knowing the existing social networks of these students provides insight into how their relationships changed after they participated in the intervention. This section helps us understand the breadth and depth of undocumented students’ existing social networks.

Oscar’s existing relationships. Oscar had existing relationships with several faculty and staff in his high school and at the university he was planning to attend. Oscar knew Andrea and Sandra, faculty in a university resource center. He explained that the center is “usually where I’m at for, like, the organizations that they have, their meetings.” Oscar was already participating in some of the student organizations at the university and met Sandra and Andrea through his involvement.

Oscar developed a relationship with Andres and Evelyn. They were the facilitators of the Latino student group at the high school, and college students attending Lincoln State University. He had known Andres and Evelyn for three years and during that time, he told them he was undocumented. When he was filling out his college application he asked for help from “mostly the leaders, Andres and Evelyn, they helped me.” Since Andres and Evelyn attend Lincoln State, they knew how to navigate the application process, having applied and been accepted
themselves. Evelyn also understood how to apply as an undocumented student, since she is one herself.

Oscar’s high school counselor, whom he had known for four years, was also part of his network. He explained, “I would just stop by and say ‘hello,’ like, every morning. I like to bug him. Or if not just in the hallway, say ‘hey.’” Oscar described a time when he visited his counselor about applying for a college summer program:

I went up to him because the whole citizenship thing, I was like, ‘I’m not a citizen. What should I put here, will this affect me even getting this?’ He had to ask other counselors while I was in there … it was obvious that he didn’t have much experience with undocumented students.”

Oscar’s counselor was willing to seek out the answers to Oscar’s questions, even though he was not familiar with the procedures. Oscar was open about his legal status because “we kind of built a friendship and stuff, so I felt pretty comfortable with him.” Although Oscar perceived his counselor as being inexperienced with undocumented students, he felt he could ask questions about his legal status. In addition, the counselor was open to receiving these questions. However, Oscar did not ask his counselor to guide him with searching or applying to college or scholarships, and did not turn to him to help work through challenges. Nor did Oscar’s counselor advise him, knowing he was a senior.

Oscar's Spanish teacher was also part of his social network. Oscar said, “I’ve had her for three years now so we’re pretty close.” He described a conversation when his teacher was planning a student trip to Costa Rica. The teacher asked Oscar why he did not intend to go. He responded, “‘I don’t have papers, teacher.’ All funny about it and she’s like ‘Oh, I’ve had a couple other students that tell me that they really want to go but they can’t.’” Here, Oscar hinted
at being undocumented. Her response signaled that she understood. However, there were no conversations about his concerns or questions regarding his legal status or how being undocumented could affect his educational future.

Oscar also described an experience where his openness in speaking about being undocumented was not well received. During his freshman or sophomore year, Oscar met with a social worker. He specifically remembered telling her about being undocumented. “When I came out to her, she not only gave me the ‘weird’ look but she sort of attacked me. I felt like I was attacked with questions … she pretty much asked if I was a criminal.” Oscar trusted his social worker enough to tell her about his status. But this interaction demonstrated to him that not everyone he encountered was receptive. Oscar disclosed his legal status to someone he thought he could trust. However, her response showed that she was not aware or knowledgeable about challenges undocumented students face and the openness needed to build a relationship.

Oscar described his experiences in disclosing his status. “Before, I would only come out to Latinos and they would come out too. They’ll be like, ‘oh, it’s the same thing.’” Oscar uses the term “come out” here to explain telling others he is undocumented. Oscar found shared experiences in disclosing his status. Oscar also described his reasoning for being open about being undocumented. He said,

Recently I’ve kind of had the attitude of just like, whatever … I’m kind of tired of just, just trying to hide it. But I still try to only come out to the close people that I talk to.

Oscar felt that his legal status should not be hidden. However, he did not “come out” to everyone he encountered. There was a paradox with wanting to be open and speak about being
undocumented, but needing to know a person in order to have conversations with them about his legal status.

Although Oscar knew many experts working in his high school and future college, it was not enough to have the breadth. He only utilized his existing relationships with Andres and Evelyn, the Latino group facilitators and students at Lincoln State University, when he applied to Lincoln State. Although they helped Oscar with his college application, he needed additional expert guidance to help him navigate the college process as an undocumented student. Oscar needed to add depth of conversations to fully understand his college options, career choices, and legal status. He did not have in-depth conversations with Andres and Evelyn about being undocumented or the intricacies of navigating through the college process as an undocumented student. In addition, he needed to add depth to his relationship with the college faculty and staff about the college process and what to expect at Lincoln State University.

Karelia’s existing relationships. Karelia described having a social network, which included Latino student group facilitators and college faculty. The relationships she had for learning about the college process were “Evelyn and Andres,” the facilitators of the after-school Latino student group at her high school. She also knew Sandra, a staff member of the Latino Center at Lincoln State University, and Samantha, an advisor at the same university. Karelia explained her connections with Sandra and Samantha, saying, “They do the seminars at Lincoln State University; they have pretty much answered a lot of my questions, especially with DACA and college.” By attending these workshops, Karelia knew Samantha and Sandra were knowledgeable about DACA and college but did not have conversations with them about either topic beyond the presentation.
Karelia also had a network of people with whom she could discuss her legal status. Karelia had her brother, Oscar, Andres, and Evelyn to speak with about being undocumented. She said, “I’ve talked to them a lot more. People I’m comfortable with that show that they care.” She spoke with Andres and Evelyn about her status because they “know how hard it is and they know more resources and I know that they won’t judge.” She was confident in their abilities to empathize, she felt “comfortable,” knowing they had resources for undocumented students. Although Karelia confided in these individuals, they were not legal experts. However, Andres and Evelyn knew how undocumented students can navigate the college process.

Karelia explained that she did not openly speak to her teachers about the college process because “I don’t know how I would start it off, you know, that talk.” In addition, she reasoned, “they’re supposed to be there to help me,” but “I don’t think it is something that they’re used to. I believe that teachers should know what they are doing to give us the right information. And sometimes they just don’t know.” Karelia never had a conversation with her teachers outside of class. She believed they were not aware of or familiar with the resources undocumented students needed for college. However, Karelia did not recognize the resources teachers have at the institutional level and did not realize they can refer students to experts they know who can help. In addition, the overlap Karelia saw of disclosing legal status and college knowledge prevented her from asking her teachers questions about college. Furthermore, Karelia’s perception of teachers’ knowledge of undocumented student issues pertaining to college was a barrier in initiating conversations about college, career, and her legal status.

Karelia did not have a relationship with her high school counselor. She explained, “I am as educated as they are in it [DACA; undocumented students]. It’s kind of scary … especially
counselors … I think that they should be number one within the school to know.” Karelia needed to perceive her counselors as knowledgeable about how legal status affects aspects of college knowledge to commence the process of building a relationship. Yet, Karelia was underestimating the knowledge and resources of counselors. Although some may not know the specific procedures undocumented students must follow, they are familiar with the process of searching for and applying to colleges, and have access to resources to help guide these students.

Karelia did not have a close relationship with any of her teachers, but she wished she had a stronger relationship with her Spanish and science teachers. Like Oscar, Karelia hinted to her Spanish teacher about being undocumented. She said, in response to participating in trips out of the country, “If I go, then I’m not coming back.” In addition, Karelia knew the teacher’s husband was from Spain, “so she knows the processing of citizenship and stuff, so I know she has knowledge [of] it.” Karelia did not explicitly disclose her legal status, but she felt that by building this relationship she could better learn about her legal options. She wanted a better relationship with her science teacher because “she knows science and she would be able to help me with what I would need to do to become a marine biologist.” However, in Karelia’s perspective, “I’ve only had her one year. So there’s still not that relationship that I would need for myself to feel comfortable to open up to her.” By initiating a conversation about her interest in the science field, Karelia can have the opportunity to learn about a career she wanted to pursue from a teacher with direct knowledge.

Karelia had relationships with a few professionals in her social network. Yet she did not have conversations with anyone about the college or the career she wanted to pursue. As previously mentioned, Karelia felt that asking for information about college and careers meant
having to disclose her legal status, which created a barrier in building relationships with her teachers and counselors. In addition, she perceived that her teachers and counselor could not help her because she was undocumented, thus creating a complication in breadth and depth. However, these were the types of institutional agents Karelia needed to help her prepare to apply to college and to inform her about the career she wanted to pursue. The persons Karelia disclosed her legal status to would understand the complications created in applying to college and financial aid, but she did not initiate this conversation. Karelia did not have breadth in her relationships and needed to create depth by having conversations about college to clarify her college and career possibilities.

Ana’s existing relationships. Ana had an existing relationship with one of her teachers, Mrs. Zee, a relationship with her middle school teacher, and interacted with the facilitators of the Latino student group. Ana described Mrs. Zee as “the only teacher that I’m close to. And she seems to know everything. I actually did have her for all four years of high school.” Although Ana saw Mrs. Zee as a trusted teacher, she never spoke with her about college or about being undocumented. She explained that she and Mrs. Zee had “one [or] two words about it [legal status]… not like a whole entire conversation.” Although Ana trusted Mrs. Zee, she may not have known how to extend the conversations or ask questions about college or her legal status. This prevented Ana and Mrs. Zee’s relationship from developing to in-depth discussions.

Ana remembered her middle school teacher, whom she had for two years and described him as being similar to Mrs. Zee. She said, “He would help you in anything. You can ask him whatever and he’d always help you.” Although Ana did not communicate with him, he left a
lasting impression. Ana felt she could speak with Mrs. Zee and her middle school teacher about being undocumented, she did not converse with them.

Ana participated in the Latino student group, which was the after-school program Andres and Evelyn facilitated. She remembered, “They’re really good people, and I just love how they got other people involved in it [the Latino student group] and they got them so interested in the community.” She knew they helped her classmates with their college applications, and knew they could help her, too. She was aware that they had resources to help her plan for college. She thought about visiting the Latino student group and speaking with Andres or Evelyn, but she hesitated. She said, “I don’t want him to be like, ‘why is she coming back?’” She worried about the negative response Andre would have if she were to visit. Without consistent communication, experts would forget who she is, making her hesitant to re-connect.

Ana had a conversation with her counselor about college, but it did not go the way she planned. Ana explained, “I went to him because I wanted to talk about college and see how I can sign up and choices that I have. I remember him saying, ‘You can come back later, almost when you are finished with high school, so we can talk about college.’” Ana was prepared to ask her counselor about college but was turned away. This experience is troubling because waiting until the end of her senior year means missing critical deadlines for college applications and financial assistance. When Ana spoke him closer to the time she finished the first semester of senior year, “He didn’t give me any type of information. He had told me that he would help me with the school and how to get scholarships and everything. He ended up not helping me.” She did not speak with him again. Instead of turning to someone else, Ana decided it was best to go to the college she planned to attend for information, once she was ready to begin college. Ana’s
experience with her counselor steered her away from speaking with anyone else, creating an obstacle to having in-depth discussions and gaining valuable college knowledge.

Ana was hesitant about sharing her legal status with others. She said, “I’ve never really talked to anybody about it. If I do talk about it, it’s just my mom.” Her mother was her trusted source, but she did not know all the complexities of being an undocumented student pursuing a college education. Although Ana had teachers she felt she could speak with about being undocumented, she did not initiate these conversations. Therefore, Ana needed a trusted expert to explain and to lead her through the college process as an undocumented student.

Although Ana felt she could speak about her legal status with trusted experts, she had reservations about having conversations. She explained, “I get kind of embarrassed.” She said she thought people were “judgmental about it ‘cause, you know, people are always going to say something. And so, I was always afraid of their reaction.” Ana was unaccustomed to speaking about her legal status, based on fear of receiving negative reactions. She described a meeting with her social worker, who asked for Ana’s social security number. Ana remembered, “I got so embarrassed because I didn’t know what to say.” Ana told her social worker that she did not have a social security number because she thought she could trust her. “[She didn’t] give me, like, a weird look or anything, you know. Just ‘oh, that’s okay.’” The social worker reacted “normally” at hearing Ana’s response. It was more important for Ana not to receive “weird looks” or a “judgmental” response. Ana knew not everyone she encountered was going to react negatively. Furthermore, this experience suggests that if Ana were asked about her legal status, she would disclose indirectly.
Ana had little breadth and depth of institutionally based professionals in her social network. Ana only spoke with immediate family about being undocumented. However, her family was not equipped with the resources and information to comprehend the intricacies of pursuing a college education as an undocumented student. Although she had one discussion about college with a college expert, it resulted in a postponed meeting with no assistance. Thus, Ana needed supportive institutional agents to help her understand the college system. There was the possibility of having discussions about college and undocumented status with multiple people in her existing network of professionals. But Ana required guidance to foster the skills necessary to seek information.

Cross-Student Analysis

Breadth of social networks. The existing relationships of the students in this study can be described as small social networks where they named between five and six professionals. Many of the experts in students’ social networks were high school teachers. However, if we consider the amount of schooling these students have and the educational leaders, teachers and counselors, they had in the past, their social networks can be even more diverse. Two students, Oscar and Karelia, had relationships with university staff and faculty because they attended workshops at Lincoln State University. Having these professionals in their network meant direct access to institutional resources to navigate the college system. These university faculty and staff have expertise with procedures for undocumented students to successfully apply to college and access financial aid. In addition, they have the knowledge and skills to connect students with other experts or community organizations to help them better understand their legal status and
challenges that could arise. However, experts within their high school are also important. They can assist students by preparing for college by ensuring they are meeting admission requirements and by providing guidance through college applications.

**Depth of social networks.** Although students’ social networks included professionals, they needed depth by utilizing their resources and expertise. One complication involves students’ comfort in disclosing their status. However, when undocumented students are not open about their status, experts do not know whether a student is undocumented. This results in undocumented students receiving incomplete or irrelevant college information—for example, the need to sign an affidavit with their college application. In addition, students knew their teachers and counselors for longer than a year, yet did not take the step of initiating discussions about college or career before easing into the more difficult topic of their undocumented status.

Undocumented students missed opportunities to learn crucial college knowledge. Thus, undocumented students need guidance to develop the skills to initiate conversations to utilize the experience and resources of their social networks.

**Pre-Intervention Analysis**

The undocumented students had little range of professionals in their relationship. In addition, the three students had limited depth of conversations about college knowledge and challenges in navigating the college system. This minimal college knowledge reflected in their college expectations. They quickly eliminated every college except for the local community college and university. For the students, perceptions of their academics, legal status, and family contexts were keeping them focused on attending college locally. However, they eliminated
options to apply to mid to highly selective universities with greater academic and student supports, higher job placement after graduation, higher financial assistance, and greater social capital within the university.

A similar comparison can be made with students’ career expectation. Students’ limited breadth and depth in their relationships and minimal college knowledge resulted in career expectations that do not reflect their aspirations. Furthermore, when two students (Karelia and Ana) did not have enough knowledge to see past their challenges, they expected vocational expectations with low job security, low pay, and long work hours. However, when one student (Oscar) saw past obstacles, his career expectation was a professional career with high pay and job security.

The undocumented students did not have breadth or depth in their existing relationship. In addition, their college knowledge was minimal. Therefore, there is a need to broaden the diversity of students’ social networks and add depth to conversations about college. Doing so could expand the diversity of professionals in students’ social networks and add to their existing college knowledge. Furthermore, undocumented students can consult with multiple professionals about their own experience about the college process. By gaining college knowledge, undocumented students can better navigate through the college system and the challenges they can face. Thus, undocumented students would increase and strengthen their social capital.
CHAPTER 5

INTERVENTION EXPERIENCE AND POST-INTERVENTION

The following chapter is divided into two sections: the intervention experience and the post-intervention. The intervention experience provides details about experts with whom each student met, and each student’s experiences in the meetings. The second section, post-intervention, describes each student’s expectations and knowledge after participating in the intervention. Comparing the students’ pre- and post- helps determine the effectiveness of the intervention and any modifications for future studies.

Through the intervention of this study, I asked undocumented students to meet with university staff and faculty, undocumented college students, legal experts, and other institutional agents for the purpose of enhancing their social networks and increasing their college knowledge. I worked with students to prepare by: generating a script prior to contact, helping them prepare questions to ask, and discussing items to take to the meetings. Furthermore, the students and I role-played the conversation, and I encouraged them to contact me to in order to troubleshoot any challenges they encountered. I use an intervention to gain insight regarding the experts with whom undocumented students chose to meet with and the college knowledge they gained as a result. In this section I describe students’ experience making contact, their experiences in the meetings, and the topics they discussed.
Generating a List of College Experts

Prior to speaking with Oscar, Karelia, and Ana, I developed a general list of staff and faculty at Lincoln State University. These were experts who knew how to navigate various aspects of the college process, and who had experience working with undocumented students. This list also included a community organization that did workshops on DACA, and a Latino student group at Condwell High School. The facilitators of this group were current college students and had experience working with undocumented students. I also included admissions contacts at the universities they mentioned an interest in, such as UIC and the University of Minnesota. I did not include anyone from the students’ high school on this initial list. After my first interview with the students, I added college advisors familiar with each student’s career choice. For example, Ana’s list included the phone number and email address for the undergraduate advisor for business at Lincoln State and UIC. Ultimately, I provided each student with a tailored list of college and legal experts to help answer their questions about college and their legal status.

We reviewed the tailored lists together, and Oscar, Karelia, and Ana each added experts with whom they wanted to speak. Then, each student chose two professionals to contact and meet, one for college information and one for DACA or undocumented policies.

Researcher’s Role in Meetings

My role was to help connect Oscar, Ana, and Karelia to university faculty, staff, and undocumented college students who had college knowledge. I assisted each student in drafting a script to use when contacting the experts to plan a meeting. We also brainstormed questions to
ask and chose materials for them to take to their meetings, such as a notebook and pen for notes. I was available for the students to contact if they encountered challenges or if they had questions about their meetings. In addition, the students knew that in our final interview they would describe their experiences. Therefore, I checked in with each of them to see if they had met with an expert before scheduling our final interview.

**Oscar’s Meetings**

**Planning meetings.** Oscar chose to meet with Lupe, Megan, and Jessica. Lupe was an alumna of the local university and worked for a community organization that offered DACA workshops. Megan was a professor of engineering. He explained he wanted to “get into more of what I want to do and kind of like the steps and the actual requirements in the type of class that I should take.” He was also hoping to meet with Jessica, a financial aid advisor, for information on “more financial aid, more scholarships, more stuff like that.” However, Oscar ultimately did not meet with any of these experts. Instead, Oscar scheduled a meeting with Samantha, an advisor at Lincoln State University. Oscar had not initially planned to meet with Samantha when we prepared for his meetings together. As a result, he felt challenged by asking “good questions” during the meeting.

**Making contact and meeting experience.** Oscar made initial contact with Jessica the day prior to our last interview. He explained, “Yesterday I sent an email to Jessica. I think it might have gone into her spam or something, [as] she hasn’t replied.” Oscar attributed the lack of response from Jessica as a technological glitch, and not personal. At the time, Oscar thought a day was enough time to schedule and meet with Jessica. It was not until after the intervention
where he recognized needing to “get on it a little bit sooner.” Ultimately, Oscar did not meet with Jessica. During the intervention, I did not address the mechanics of planning and scheduling meetings days in advance. This is a skill that needs to be explicitly taught by planning the day when he would contact the agent and timeframe to use to schedule a meeting.

Oscar met with Samantha, a student advisor at Lincoln State University, where he would attend in the fall. He was giving his sister a ride to meet with Samantha and decided to schedule a meeting with her on the same day. Oscar said, “I think it went really good … she took me through the process of an actual schedule. She’s just really easy to talk to.” Oscar and Samantha planned Oscar’s summer courses through a College Bridge program, as well as his fall courses. College Bridge was a summer program offered through Lincoln State University. Students in this program take college courses the summer after their senior year of high school; in addition, they attend presentations about financial aid and preparing for college. Oscar explained, “She started to go through the ideal schedule for me and then [tried] to fit in with College Bridge.”

The focus of Oscar’s meeting was in transitioning to college, which helped Oscar plan the courses for each semester to align with the requirements of the mechanical engineering program. Afterwards they had a friendly conversation. Oscar described, “She was giving life lessons—just talking and catching up.” Meeting with Samantha included learning about the transition process specific to Oscar’s coursework for mechanical engineering and a non-academic, personal conversation.

Plans for future meetings. After meeting with Samantha, Oscar described being at ease meeting with more university staff and faculty. He explained,
Since we already went to her office, more school official. I just feel like her good vibes just kind of—maybe not everybody is, you know, awful. I can probably talk to someone else.

By “awful” he clarified by saying, “I mean, I see some people just got that look like ‘Don’t talk to me. I’m here but don’t talk to me.’” Prior to the intervention, Oscar had the impression that experts were unapproachable in a professional setting. Meeting with Samantha in her office changed Oscar’s perspective in approaching university staff with questions and assistance. Oscar explained, “The next person I’m going to try to get in contact with is [the] lady from Engineering … to see if she can help me with engineering scholarships and actual classes that I need.” He had the assurance that he could meet with a professor to gain knowledge about college and financial aid.

Oscar originally planned to meet with experts he did not know at Lincoln State University and a community organization. Instead, he met with a student advisor he knew at Lincoln State University. Oscar recognized that he needed more time to make contact and schedule a meeting, after reflecting on his experience and noting that he did not plan questions before meeting with Samantha. Oscar focused on two aspects: requirements for his major and planning a course schedule, which were addressed in this meeting. In thinking about starting college, there were additional components to add in the transition such as time frame to register for courses, how to register, when payments are due, and the options for making payments. By understanding these additional elements, Oscar could better plan and prepare for his first year of college.
Karelia’s Meetings

Planning meetings. For the intervention, Karelia contacted Andres, Evelyn, and Samantha. Evelyn and Andres were the after-school program facilitators for the Latino student group at the high school. “I’ve known them longer, I feel comfortable with them … They’re just so friendly” and “because they work with the DREAM Act.” Karelia conversed with Samantha, a student advisor at Lincoln State University. Samantha was the same advisor with whom Oscar met. Karelia said, “I’ve seen how Samantha works…. I would feel comfortable going to her.” Karelia attended workshops where Samantha presented and saw how she interacted with students.

Making contact and meeting experience. Karelia contacted both Andres and Evelyn via text messages about meeting with each of them individually. Evelyn was undocumented and Andres was familiar with the application process for undocumented students. They planned to meet with her; however, they both cancelled. Karelia attempted to reschedule, but could not because Evelyn and Andres were out of town. This was a missed opportunity to learn about navigating the college process as an undocumented student.

Karelia then emailed Samantha, an advisor at Lincoln State University, to ask for a meeting. Karelia said, “I was scared to send that email, but once I did it was super fast.” She was afraid because “I’ve never talked to somebody about something like this.” Karelia never spoke about college planning, even with those whom she knew. Samantha’s quick response allowed for Karelia to easily schedule a meeting with her in her office. The process of contacting Samantha gave Karelia practice initiating, and having the conversation about college. Karelia described the meeting as “pretty laid back … it was really comfortable … She just talked and
talked.” Karelia had a list of questions prepared, but she did not need to reference them. She explained, “I went through a few of these [questions] but she just answered them without asking.” Although Karelia felt “comfortable,” learning how to work through the discomfort of asking questions is an important learning experience.

At the meeting with Karelia, Samantha discussed how to choose a college by considering college characteristics such as the cost and the size of the school. Karelia did not disclose her legal status in this meeting. However, Karelia knew Samantha was aware of her legal status because she assisted in a DACA workshop at Lincoln State University. Samantha told Karelia “any school in Illinois accepted undocumented students.” Karelia elaborated, “I can definitely look at more options.” As an undocumented student, Karelia thought her legal status limited her college choices. Knowing that various colleges accept undocumented students provided greater possibilities.

Samantha also reviewed the undergraduate programs offered at Lincoln State University, in case Karelia chose to attend Lincoln State. She presented the list of programs and crossed out the ones Karelia said she was not interested in studying. Afterwards, Samantha suggested Karelia research careers using the online guide, Occupational Outlook Handbook, on her own. Karelia explained, “She said that I can look into a career further and deeper.” The handbook is published by the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics and lists various occupations along with facts associated with each career. The resource provides details about any career, including the entry-level education requirements, median pay, and description of the work environment. This is a resource for career exploration and researching different career options.
In the meeting, Karelia said she felt overwhelmed by the amount of information she received “It was so much! Like just throwing.” The speed in which this material was delivered made it difficult for Karelia to take her own notes. Instead, Karelia elaborated “she [Samantha] took a few notes for me.” From this experience, Karelia wanted to record future meetings because “some of these things I’m thinking, ‘crap; what did she [Samantha] say about it?’ It’d be much easier and I could just listen to it again.” In this meeting, Samantha provided Karelia with college knowledge and she had experience interacting with undocumented students. Furthermore, Karelia added depth to her existing relationship with Samantha. However, Karelia was unable to practice asking questions or writing her own notes, skills that are important in meeting with institutional agents. When students do not practice asking questions, they can become accustomed to having information given to them.

**Plans for future meetings.** After meeting with Samantha, Karelia had a plan for how to get help in the future. She explained, “[I will] go out of my way to look for resources and people that I can contact … Set up an email, kind of see what I would say, and set up a date with them.” Karelia intended to use the planning process from the intervention in preparing future meetings.

Karelia planned to meet with professionals she knew. She encountered a scheduling barrier with two experts. However, she contacted, scheduled, and met with Samantha, a student advisor she knew from Lincoln State University. Karelia added depth by meeting with an expert she already knew. Adding depth creates a stronger relationship and possibility of discussing sensitive issues, such as legal status. Yet, Karelia was sacrificing breadth, limiting the knowledge she could gain.
Although she expanded knowledge about college searching and career exploration, Karelia was not able to apply the skills of asking questions and taking notes. She was given information instead of inquiring and asking for clarification. Furthermore, note taking is a skill in which students learn to identify key facts in a conversation that are important to remember. This meeting was Karelia’s first experience meeting with an expert and having a conversation about college. Therefore, additional guidance, coaching, and practice could help Karelia develop the skills of being an active participant in the discussion.

Ana’s Meetings

Planning meetings. Ana decided to meet with Andres and Evelyn, college students and the facilitators of the Latino student group, who were knowledgeable about the procedures for undocumented students applying to college. Ana wanted to meet with Andres because “A lot of students would go to him [Andres] for advice or about school and he seemed very helpful.” Knowing her classmates had good experiences interacting with Andres assured Ana that he could help her. Ana remembered interacting with Evelyn, but was not aware she was knowledgeable about DACA until I described her expertise. Therefore, to learn about DACA, Ana decided, “I would go to her [Evelyn] and learn more about it.” Ana knew Andres and Evelyn because she participated in the Latino student group they facilitated.

Meeting experience. Ana contacted Evelyn through email. Ana explained, “I emailed Evelyn and she emailed me back and I emailed her again but she didn’t respond to me anymore.” Ana did not follow up because she thought it would be bothersome to Evelyn: “I don’t want to be bugging people.” She worried, “I just feel weird. I was, like, she’s not going to respond to me,
maybe she doesn’t have time.” Ana perceived asking for help as an inconvenience to others, creating an obstacle in maintaining contact. Ana needed reassurance that lack of an immediate response was not a sign of rejection. Ana’s interpretation broke communication, creating a missed opportunity to speak with Evelyn about DACA, and learn about considerations about college as an undocumented student.

Ana also emailed Andres asking to meet with him to discuss “how I can sign up for scholarships.” She requested an in-person meeting, but “he sent me links … [and] told me to sign up for FAFSA, and then we can meet up.” Ana knew she was ineligible for FAFSA but in the initial email, Andres was not aware of Ana’s legal status. However, in her response, Ana wrote, “I applied for DACA.” Andres was familiar with DACA and clarified why applying for DACA was beneficial, and why students described their status as “DACA-mented.” Ana indirectly told Andres she was undocumented. Ana explained, “I didn’t want to be like, um, ‘no, I want to meet up with you first.’” She did not insist on meeting with him, missing the chance to have a face-to-face conversation. In addition, “he also told me that there was a plan, a financial help program… plan for, um, payments.” Since Andres knew Ana was undocumented, he shared with her the tuition installment payment plan offered at Lincoln State University and Riverdale Community College. Participating in the installment plan would spread the cost of tuition and fees over a few months instead of having to pay one large sum.

At first, Ana did not share her legal status with Andres, complicating the process of receiving accurate financial aid guidance. After Ana disclosed she had applied for DACA, Andres provided information about a tuition installment plan. The anonymity of an email exchange may have helped in implicitly sharing her undocumented legal status; however, the
purpose was to meet face-to-face. Ana had mixed feelings about their interaction, because “I was not able to meet with Andres,” but “he gave me all of the information.” In Ana’s perspective, Andres provided the information she wanted. However, there was additional information she needed about college searching.

Next, Ana’s boyfriend introduced her to Mario, a salon owner. She met with Mario while he cut her boyfriend’s hair. Mario was a “self-made” business owner without a business degree. Ana explained, “He’s got a really good business so I asked him about the business.” She decided, on her own, to learn about being a salon owner from someone doing exactly what she wanted to do as a career.

When Ana met with Mario, he explained, “you don’t really have to go to business school.” In addition, Mario described his path in opening his salon and its influence on his personal life. “You have to, like, basically work in a salon for, like, the whole day… get a lot of experience and get your own customers.” Ana did not expect the long workdays and losing time with her son. Meeting with Mario gave Ana a new outlook on owning a business and a salon.

After speaking with Mario, Ana said, “I just have to think about it really good.” Additional information about owning a salon and challenges she could face created doubt about realistically pursing owning a salon. Furthermore, she thought, “If I don’t have to go to business school, then I shouldn’t go, but if I do go, maybe it can open up other doors for me.” Ana expanded, “I don’t think I should have asked him anything.” She felt the meeting did not help because she felt his advice contradicted what she thought could benefit her career. However, she learned the educational requirement of owning a salon, the benefits, and the challenges she could face.
Lastly, Ana met with Chris, a student advisor at Riverdale Community College. Ana explained that she was still contemplating the business degree. “He told me I don’t have to go to a four-year college if I don’t want to … I could just take a few business courses to learn how the business world works first.” Although Ana knew it was not required to have a business degree, she was still interested in learning about the field. Chris also guided her on how to find and apply for scholarships through Riverdale Community College. However, he was unaware that Ana was undocumented. Ana was surprised to learn “I could just take a few business courses to learn how the business world works, first.” Speaking with Chris opened the option to take courses at Riverdale, where Ana could “graduate with an associate in arts,” which she also did not know was a possibility. After meeting with him, Ana felt, “I’m more sure of what I’m going to do.” Although not required, Ana still wanted to take business courses. Ana had the choice to earn her associate’s degree and then decide if she would continue at a four-year university after gaining college knowledge.

Plan for future meetings. After her interaction with Andres, Ana explained, “I should ask him if he knows any other people that I can talk to.” She elaborated, “He knows a lot of things; he can provide a lot of information.” Ana wanted to strengthen her relationship with Andres in hopes of learning more and getting referrals to other experts, thereby expanding her social network. In addition, she expressed wanting to find mentors in the beauty industry, because “they can be a lot of help and help guide me through the right path.” Ana did not confine herself to the contact list I provided. Instead, the list offered a starting point, and she continued seeking help by adding more experts to meet with.
Ana planned and met with experts she knew. Like Karelia, although she added depth in her existing relationships, she forewent breadth. In addition, she experienced challenges in communication and scheduling. Therefore, additional guidance in the mechanics of communicating with a professional is needed, including: following up after not receiving a response, not taking the absence of a response personally, and requesting a meeting. Further, Ana indirectly shared her status, which resulted in gaining additional insight about financial assistance relevant for undocumented students.

Cross-Student Analysis

Meeting with those you know. All three students met with professionals they knew, adding depth to their relationships not breadth. This was the first professional interaction with experts and it is possible that they felt more comfortable meeting the professionals they already knew. Meeting with someone in their existing social network could create a climate where they are more open in discussing their legal status and other confidential information as opposed to interacting with someone they did not already know. However, adding depth in these relationships is important in practicing their help-seeking skills. When undocumented students create depth, they maintain a small social network with minimal access to resources that could be present with broader, more diverse relationships.

Contacting professionals. All three students encountered challenges or barriers in contacting experts and scheduling meetings, which resulted in missed learning opportunities. These barriers were the lack of knowledge about the mechanics of contacting and following up with a professional. Often, these skills are not explicitly taught. For example, Ana did not receive
an immediate response from Evelyn and took it personally. In contrast, Oscar also did not receive a response from one expert and Karelia could not meet with her experts because they went out of town, but they did not take it personally. In addition, Oscar underestimated the time needed in contacting and scheduling a meeting. He did not realize until afterwards that he should reach out to a professional several days in advance when requesting a meeting, adding to the importance of learning the details of planning a meeting. Interpreting responses or lack of response personally resulted in a breakdown in communication. This also speaks to students needing to cross social, class, and ethnic boundaries to connect with institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This step requires students to have the confidence to reach out to others for the purpose of learning about the college system and careers. Extra attention to complications that can arise in contacting and scheduling a meeting must be highlighted in future interventions.

Comfort in discussing legal status. Comfort in discussing legal status meant disclosing being undocumented, whether implicitly or explicitly. When students disclose their legal status, conversations can include challenges, barriers, or considerations as undocumented students. For instance, Ana indirectly disclosed her status, and learned about the tuition installment plans, and benefits of applying to DACA, thus gaining some college knowledge for undocumented students. However, she did not disclose to everyone whom she contacted. When undocumented students are selective with whom they come out, they gain some insight into the complexities of their decision to disclose. Karelia learned about legal college knowledge, but relied on the prior knowledge of the expert; she did not clarify her status. Although Oscar did not disclose his status, course requirements and scheduling are the same regardless of legal status.
When students do not disclose their legal status, they risk receiving irrelevant or incomplete college knowledge, particularly when applying to college and finding financial assistance options. Implicitly disclosing one’s legal status suggests that there are a variety of ways in which undocumented students communicate their legal status, but also shows the delicate nature in disclosing. For example, Ana wrote to Andres, “I applied to DACA” as opposed to saying “I am undocumented.” Saying the latter illustrates explicitly disclosing having undocumented legal status. Indirectly disclosing undocumented status takes a variety of forms, including “I can not travel outside of the country,” “I am a DREAMER,” “I have DACA,” and “I am DACA-mented.”

Future meetings. After their participation in the intervention, two planned to contact an expert they met for a follow-up meeting. Oscar gained a new perspective of seeing professionals as approachable and Ana wanted to communicate with other salon owners, thus expanding their social network. Furthermore, Ana wanted to continue her interaction with Andres; creating depth with her existing relationship. Although Karelia did not express plans to meet with college or career experts at the time, she explained how she would plan and set up a meeting. Meeting with professionals gave study participants the opportunity to have discussions, an experience they saw themselves repeating in the future. In addition, all of the students were able to have their first meeting with an institutional agent. They learned how to plan and contact an institutional agent and were using what they learned to plan future meetings. Therefore, by participating in the intervention, students created depth in existing relationships and opened the possibility of expanding their social networks in the future and strengthening and expanding their social capital.
Post-Intervention

In this final section, I describe Oscar, Karelia, and Ana’s college knowledge gained and their career and college expectations after participating in the intervention. We gain insight into where the intervention added to students’ college knowledge and if gaining this knowledge changed their college and career expectations. The experiences of the undocumented students also provide implications for how the intervention can be modified in the future.

New College Knowledge

In the following section, I describe the college knowledge of Oscar, Karelia, and Ana after participating in the intervention. I compare students’ existing and new college knowledge, in addition to any college knowledge that is still needed. Any change in undocumented students’ college knowledge provides insight into how they reframe their college and career expectations after the intervention. College knowledge is the understanding of the college process, which includes, but is not limited, to knowing the cost of college, degree of selectivity, admission guidelines, and deadlines (NACAC, 2014). Furthermore, this includes the knowledge for transitioning from high school to college, comprehending the course requirements, scheduling and registering for courses, making payments, and participating in orientation (NACAC, 2014).

Undocumented students have the added obstacle of legal status. Therefore, legal college knowledge includes understanding the procedure for applying, such as answering questions about citizenship, entering a social security number, and signing an affidavit (ICIRR, 2014). As part of a career, undocumented students need to also be cognizant of any certification and licensures a career path requires (ICIRR, 2014). Furthermore, undocumented students need to be
mindful of their financial aid options and eligibility for applying for FAFSA and scholarships (ICIRR, 2014).

Oscar’s new college knowledge. Prior to the intervention, Oscar had college knowledge with regard to applying to college and ineligibility for FAFSA. After the intervention, Oscar learned the course requirements he needed to graduate from college, and he planned his summer and fall semesters to transition to college. Oscar explained, “What we were trying to go through was math … I’m going to take [Pre-Calculus] over the summer; that way I can start with Calculus I in the fall, and physics.” Using one of the College Bridge courses to take Pre-Calculus prepares him to begin his freshman year with Calculus, per the engineering course requirement, fulfilling the prerequisite to take Calculus. He explained further, “I think I’d do it on my own but still go back and then try to verify.” By reviewing the required courses for engineering and receiving assistance in planning his summer and fall courses, Oscar felt confident in planning the courses for subsequent semesters. The college knowledge Oscar gained focused on the course requirements for his intended major — mechanical engineering—and scheduling his courses.

Prior to the intervention, Oscar successfully applied to college, accepted admission, and made a decision about which major to study. In addition, he knew the importance of scholarships and being ineligible for FAFSA. After the intervention, gains in his college knowledge related to his transition from high school to college. Since Oscar accepted admission to Lincoln State, he did not learn about alternate college options. By participating in the intervention, Oscar learned details regarding the coursework required for mechanical engineering and how to schedule his courses. However, he needed additional knowledge pertaining to transiting from high school to college: for example, dates for orientation, registration deadlines, and assigned advisor.
Furthermore, there was legal college knowledge that Oscar needed regarding financial aid. Yet, Oscar did not speak with anyone about alternate options for financial aid, such as scholarships or tuition installment plans. Meeting with a financial aid expert could better guide him in understanding his financial aid options. Table 1 shows Oscar’s college knowledge in graph form.

**Karelia’s new college knowledge.** Prior to participating in the intervention, Karelia had some information about scholarships. She was missing every other aspect of college knowledge and considerations specific to undocumented students. She did not know the complexities associated with being undocumented and other types of financial assistance, such as installment plans. After participating in the intervention, Karelia gained information about that she could attend any university in Illinois. However, Karelia did not gain other legal college knowledge. Karelia learned “how much they cost, and the size of the school: do I want to go to a big school or little school?” These were university characteristics are important for finding a good academic and financial fit. In addition, Karelia was introduced to the college admission process at the community college and the university. She learned, “Going to community college, she said that they’ll take anybody and then for university, you have to be ‘accepted’ to it.” Karelia learned that there was a selection process for four-year universities, but did not learn the admission requirements of universities that could be her “safety,” “match,” or “reach” choices and that she should apply to universities with varying selectivity and to at least three universities. Karelia can have more decision-making power by applying to more than one college.

As previously mentioned, Karelia was surprised to learn that public universities in the state of Illinois accept undocumented students. Karelia added, “I can definitely look into not moving out of state.” Prior to the intervention she thought she was limited to Lincoln State
Table 1
Oscar’s College Knowledge

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University and Riverdale Community College, the two local colleges. Now, Karelia knows she has a diverse selection of colleges in Illinois she can consider. Being undocumented no longer means having only two college choices. She can further investigate universities using the college search knowledge she acquired.

Karelia gained career knowledge through different undergraduate majors offered at Lincoln State University and research exercises. Samantha suggested Karelia research careers on her own using “the Occupational Outlook Handbook, [so] I can look into a career further and deeper.” The handbook was a way to learn about any career without having to know or talk to someone in the field. Karelia did not have online access at home, and had yet to use the guide. Another suggestion was to ask “my counselor to allow me to shadow one of the special education classes.” Shadowing a career provides the opportunity to observe and experience the type of work environment and responsibilities in a given role.

Karelia added to her scholarship knowledge by learning how to be a competitive scholarship applicant: “The main thing that helps is community work around the community. They like to see how many clubs you’ve been in and if you are a good leader.” Samantha recommended Karelia participate in extracurricular activities to help diversify her skills, resulting in greater opportunities for scholarship eligibility. Scholarships are the one form of financial aid an undocumented student can receive. To help lower the cost of college, Karelia needed to build her resume and skills to increase her chances of obtaining scholarships. However, she needed additional guidance in searching and applying for scholarships for undocumented students.
Karelia also learned about the College Bridge program offered through Lincoln State University, which offers free college courses during the summer after her senior year of high school, lowering the cost of college. In addition, the program provides mentoring and helps students build their support networks. Participating in College Bridge is an opportunity for Karelia to practice her help-seeking skills, gain more college knowledge, add to her social network, and take college courses.

Prior to the intervention, Karelia started with very little college knowledge, but knew she could apply for scholarships. After her participation, Karelia gained college knowledge about considerations in selecting colleges to apply, such as cost and size, and the colleges that accept undocumented students. Karelia became aware of undergraduate programs offered at Lincoln State and ways to research careers. She also leaned about being a comparative scholarship applicant and attending a summer college program. She still needed additional college knowledge to better understand selecting colleges to apply to, and knowledge in transitioning from high school to college, such as the coursework required for her desired major, scheduling and registering for courses, and making payments. Karelia still needed to gain legal college knowledge for applying as an undocumented student, career knowledge, including any licensure or certifications associated with her career path, and financial aid, with respect to where to search for scholarships and understanding tuition installment plans. One meeting was not enough time for Karelia to learn about the various aspects of college knowledge she still needed. Table 2 shows Karelia’s college knowledge in graph form.

Ana’s new college knowledge. Ana’s existing college knowledge related to financial aid specific to undocumented students. After the intervention, she gained career knowledge, adding
### Table 2

Karelia’s College Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karelia’s College knowledge</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College admission guidelines</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College selectivity (safety, match, reach)</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>College cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>College application deadlines</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College application procedures</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship options</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installment plans</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational requirements for career</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College major course requirements</td>
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<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting/planning course</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registering for courses</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making payments to bursar</td>
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<tr>
<td>College orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Legal College Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Universities that accept undocumented students</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Answering legal status question on college application</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Answering SSN question on college application</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signing affidavit</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eligibility for FAFSA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarships for undocumented students</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal status on licensure/certification</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
to what she knew about financial assistance. Ana learned about the process of owning a salon: “They have to work a lot of hours, you have to wait ten years, get a lot of experience, and get your own customers.” Ana now had a sense of the workload and time commitment required to open a salon, which created doubt. Ana realized that working long hours could affect time with her family, especially her son. However, she learned what it was really like to own a business. In addition, Ana learned that a college degree was not required to open a business. If she wanted, she “could just take a few business courses to just learn how the business world works.” Although business school is beneficial, she was expecting to need more education than what was required.

Ana learned about tuition installment plans, an aspect of financial assistance, at Lincoln State University, where she could apply for “a financial help program, for payments.” This was an installment plan that spreads out the expenses of one semester over four months instead of paying one large sum, making the cost of a college education manageable. Although she learned about this plan at Lincoln State, she was not told that other universities and colleges have similar programs.

Prior to the intervention, Ana knew that scholarships were an option to fund her college education, but she was not familiar with the college process or her college options. After participating in the intervention, Ana gained career knowledge that provided insight about the work environment and education requirements for the career she expected to pursue. She also learned how to apply for scholarships at Riverdale Community College and tuition installment plans. However, there was college knowledge she still needed, including considerations in selecting a college, course work pertaining to her major, scheduling and registering for courses,
and making payments. In addition, she still needed legal college knowledge about knowing where undocumented students can be accepted for college admission and how to apply to college, and how to search for scholarships for undocumented students. Table 3 shows Ana’s college knowledge in graph form.

Change in College Knowledge

When every aspect of college knowledge is considered, there were micro gains in college knowledge. Oscar had already accepted admission and was beyond learning about searching for colleges such as considerations in selecting universities. But Ana and Karelia needed to learn about every aspect of college knowledge. In addition, each student did not discuss the same topics in their meetings, resulting in different knowledge gains. Oscar focused on his transition from high school to college. Karelia gained knowledge about preparing to select colleges to apply and explore career options. Ana expanded her knowledge about the career she wanted to pursue. However, all of the students needed additional college knowledge. One or two meetings were not enough to achieve overall gains of general college knowledge.

Career and College Expectations after the Intervention

In the following section I examine Oscar’s, Karelia’s, and Ana’s career and college expectations after participating in the intervention. In addition, I describe how students reflected on their expectations, and the challenges they perceive they still face. The change in students’ expectations provides insight into the impact of participating in the intervention. The purpose of the intervention was to describe students’ expectations as forward moving, backward moving,
### Table 3

Ana’s College Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ana’s College knowledge</th>
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<th>Post</th>
<th>Missing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College admission guidelines</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College selectivity (safety, match, reach)</td>
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<td>College cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate programs</td>
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<td>Scholarship options</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
or no shift. These terms do not place judgment on students’ expectations. Instead it is a way to describe the shift of college and career expectations after participating in the intervention. A forward moving shift is identified when post career expectations are higher paying, requiring more education, and professional compared to their pre-intervention career expectations. Forward moving college expectation is when a student expects to attend a more selective university compared to their pre-intervention college expectation. Students have a backward moving shift when their career expectation has lower pay, required less education, and less transferable skills than before participating in the intervention. In addition, a backward moving shift occurs when students expect to attend a less selective university. No shift means seeing no change in college or career expectations after the intervention in comparison to students’ pre-intervention college and career expectation. This is important in determining the effectiveness of the intervention, but also to suggest modifications to improve the outcomes next time.

Oscar’s career and college expectations after the intervention. Prior to the intervention, Oscar’s career expectation was mechanical engineering, (see Table 4). After the intervention, his expectation did not change. Oscar “decided to stick with engineering” and did not explore alternate career options. Although there was no apparent change in Oscar’s expectation, he was better prepared by knowing the course requirements for engineering and by planning two semesters of coursework. He said, “I would have just picked something random for College Bridge, but this kind of sets me back onto a path.” By meeting with Samantha, Oscar planned to take free courses that are required as part of the engineering program. This meant he was saving money, addressing prerequisites by taking required math courses required for mechanical engineering, and getting exposure to college-level courses.
Oscar accepted admission to Lincoln State University, the only university to which he applied, prior to this study. After the study, his college expectation did not change. A challenge to that still remained: “It’s always been financial … but at least now, I know what to spend my money on… not taking random classes that I don’t need.” Cost is a major barrier for undocumented students because they do not qualify for federal and state financial aid, the largest source of financial assistance for students.

Overall, there was no change in Oscar’s career and college expectations. He still expected to study mechanical engineering, a professional career in STEM, which was economically stable with job security. He still expected to study at Lincoln State University, the local four-year university that can be categorized as a “match” or “safety” school. Lincoln State can be a match or safety university because Oscar had a high chance of being admitted, based on his academic profile and participation in extracurricular activities. Therefore, there was also a good possibility of being considered at highly selective universities. Although there was no change in Oscar’s expectations and he did not find a solution to his financial concerns, he gained transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oscar</th>
<th>Pre-expectation 1</th>
<th>Pre-expectation 2</th>
<th>Post-expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Lincoln State University</td>
<td>Lincoln State University</td>
<td>Lincoln State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison: Career</td>
<td>STEM advanced professional degree</td>
<td>Professional degree</td>
<td>STEM advanced professional degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High pay</td>
<td>Economically stable</td>
<td>High pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>Need for male &amp; person’s of color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
knowledge to better prepare for the mechanical engineering program at Lincoln State University.

**Karelia’s career and college expectations after the intervention.** Before the intervention, Karelia expected to study cosmetology, a blue-collar career with little economic stability and job security. After the intervention, Karelia expressed new career interests: special education, school counseling, physical therapy, and rehabilitation, (see Table 5). She became interested in these careers because “we kind of went through this list about careers.” She was most interested in special education and school counseling because she wants to “help people.” These are professional careers requiring a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and provide job stability. She explained she was still exploring career options, because “I know if something doesn’t work out I could have a backup, but I haven’t thought of a backup yet.” Karelia was hesitant to commit to one career path, but did not explain why. A probable explanation is that the benefits of DACA approval can be taken away, jeopardizing the career that she chooses to study.

Karelia originally expected to attend Riverdale, the local community college, and transfer to Lincoln State University. After the intervention, Karelia’s college expectation did not change. She expressed, “Right now, I just really know that I want to do Riverdale. That’s what I really want to do in the beginning.” Karelia explained that attending community college first was a better option. She said, “I think I would like to get a taste of what it [college] would be like. I could get a head start and I could transfer those credits into my university and keep going.”

Community college has open admission where students can take courses and transfer to a four-year university. In addition, Karelia learned that four-year universities could “reject” students. Knowing this, she worried, “I apply for school and they just don’t want me.”
Understanding universities do not accept all applicants made community college more appealing because she would not have to face rejection.

Table 5
Karelia’s Pre- and Post- Career and College Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karelia</th>
<th>Pre-aspiration</th>
<th>Pre-expectation</th>
<th>Post-expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Journalism, Marine biology</td>
<td>Cosmetology</td>
<td>Unsure: spec. ed, school counseling, rehabilitation, physical therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Spain or Univ. of Minnesota</td>
<td>Riverdale Community College &amp; Lincoln State University</td>
<td>Riverdale Community College &amp; Lincoln State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Bachelor/advanced degree</td>
<td>Vocational career</td>
<td>Professional careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>&lt;2 year training, Low pay</td>
<td>“helping” sciences, advanced degrees, Low pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Abroad, out of state, Costly, four-year public institution, “selective”</td>
<td>Open admission, two-year institution</td>
<td>Open admission, two-year institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Four-year public institution, local, “less selective”</td>
<td>Four-year public institution, local, “less selective”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Karelia learned about additional options for four-year universities, Karelia decided she would transfer to Lincoln State University. She felt “knowing people now that go to Lincoln State and teachers and stuff, I think that would be—make me feel more comfortable.” As a result of participating in events and workshops at Lincoln State, she had an existing
network. Although Karelia learned during the intervention that she could apply to more universities, she chose to stay local. Meeting with Samantha and learning about all the majors offered at Lincoln State may have influenced her decision. Furthermore, although Karelia spoke about “feeling more comfortable,” expecting a child could have influenced her decision, since she would have additional familial support during and after this major life event.

Karelia changed her career expectations from a two-year vocational career to professional careers with job security. However, Karelia’s college expectations did not change as a result of participating in the intervention. She still expected to attend the local two-year community college with open enrollment and transfer to the local, “less selective,” four-year public university. Although the knowledge Karelia gained through the intervention broadened her career and college choices, she only changed her career expectations. Speaking with an advisor at Lincoln State and becoming pregnant may have influenced her college choices more than learning of additional college options available.

Ana’s career and college expectations after the intervention. Prior to the intervention, Ana expected to study cosmetology and business in hopes of owning her own salon. After the intervention, she still wanted to study cosmetology and take a few business courses to “become an entrepreneur, be my own boss, own my own businesses.” Although her career expectations did not change, she learned more about the work environment involved in owning her own salon. Ana’s career and college expectations prior to and after the intervention are shown in Table 6.

Before the intervention, Ana intended to study at Riverdale Community College and transfer to Lincoln State University. After the intervention, Ana expected to attend Riverdale, but was no longer planning to transfer to a four-year university. She explained, “I don't have to go to
Lincoln State University for business … he said I can go to Riverdale and take some business courses … that would be better for me.” Ana learned that a business degree was not a requirement of opening a salon. Ana was considering waiting another year before starting at the community college in order “to work and save some money for school.” “I don’t want to be struggling with moving out and the payments and dropping out of school. I don’t want to do that.” She did not want to jeopardize having to stop attending college by stopping midway for financial reasons. Being a mother was still a challenge in balancing time. Ana said, “Once you have a baby, it’s much harder. It gets harder once you go to college and you have to work at the same time.” While attending college, Ana would be working to support her family. Ana was waiting for her DACA approval so she could find employment and save money. Undocumented and DACA students are not eligible to receive federal and state financial assistance, making scholarships and employment the primary way to pay for a college education.

Prior to the intervention, Ana expected to own a salon by studying cosmetology and business. This was a blue-collar career, with an unstable economic future. After participating in the intervention, Ana altered her college expectations by expecting a lower degree of education. She still expected to own a salon, but would do so by studying cosmetology while taking just a few business courses. After gaining career knowledge, she still saw college costs as an obstacle. Thus, Ana no longer expected to transfer to a four-year university. However, if Ana were to have a bachelor’s degree, she could have more opportunities in learning about managing and running a successful business. Learning about the educational requirements for her career expectations, and facing financial uncertainties, only influenced a change in her college expectation: expecting a lower degree.
After participating in the intervention, expectations changed in three ways: a forward-moving shift, a backward-moving shift, and no shift. The one example of a forward-moving shift occurred when one student (Karelia) expected a career that required a higher educational level, more job security, and higher pay compared to her expectation prior to the intervention. A backward-moving shift occurred when prior to the intervention a student (Ana) expected to have more education than after the intervention. No shift occurred when a student (Oscar) had the same college and career expectations prior to and after the intervention.
Post-Intervention Summary

The intention of the intervention was to see a forward-moving shift in students’ expectations. This means that, after participating in the intervention, students would expect a professional, higher paying, more stable career requiring an advanced degree. For undocumented students to have a forward-moving shift in college expectations, they would need to have college knowledge where they are applying to universities with varying selectivity, greater academic resources, greater variety of financial assistance options, and higher job placement after graduation, as well as social capital within the institution as students and as alumni.

The outcome of participating in the intervention did not result in a forward-moving shift of college and career expectations for every student. Seeing no shift or a backward shift is a complication that occurs in running an intervention. When students gain college knowledge and learn about procedures, they learn the realities and complexities of their college and career expectations, complicating the outcomes of the intervention. However with more information, students are able to make more informed decisions and develop more realistic expectations. Since students met with institutional agents they knew, adding depth, they were limiting the diverse information and resources available in conversation. However, they either broadened their college and career expectations or had a better understanding of their existing ones by learning about career choices and colleges they expected to attend.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

The intention of this study is to better understand how three undocumented Latino high school students perceive the possibilities and challenges of attaining a college degree. They were asked to participate in an intervention that was designed to help them build relationships with institutional agents and gain knowledge needed for college attendance. The intervention had two goals: expand social capital, and increase college knowledge in ways that support undocumented students’ career and college expectations. By focusing on undocumented Latino high school students, I examined the college knowledge students need to have, while analyzing the potential challenges that they face as they pursue a college education. I discuss undocumented students’ changes in social capital, college knowledge, and career and college expectations in the context of existing literature.

Undocumented Latino Students’ Social Capital

The first goal of this study is to expand the social capital of undocumented Latino high school students. In this study, social capital is defined as a social network a student acquires that enhances college knowledge and information about documentation status. Social capital also included the students’ confidence and skills necessary to expand their social network. Here I learn how the intervention impacted students’ social capital. I first examine the students’ social networks. Then, we review students’ help-seeking skills and confidence. Last, I examine their change in college knowledge.
Meeting with Those You Know

In this study, the first goal is to increase the social capital of the undocumented Latino high school students (Enriquez, 2011; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In high school, having a trusting relationship with teachers and counselors is especially important to access institutional resources that the student would not otherwise have (Abrego, 2010; Gonzales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Furthermore, the policies undocumented students face are complex and continually changing (Enriquez, 2011). Therefore, assistance from high-status institutional agents is crucial in helping undocumented students learn about the legal context and navigate the college process, in order to successfully pursue a college education (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007; Garcia & Tierney, 2007).

In this study, undocumented students met with institutional agents in their existing social networks at the college and university to acquire information about their college and career options. In their existing network, students may feel more comfortable sharing private details such as legal status and financial barriers (Gonzales, 2010). Meeting with institutionally based agents undocumented students know results in adding depth to their relationships. However, depth limits the exchange of information and resources within the social network and keeps the network small.

As previously mentioned, teachers and counselors are seen as the primary institutional agents for high school students. However, the participants in this study chose to meet with college-affiliated institutional agents. These agents were known by the students to work on undocumented issues. Undocumented students require legal college knowledge, which high school teachers and counselors are often unable to provide (Enriquez, 2011). College-level
institutional agents are more likely to have this expertise in college than high school agents (Contreras, 2009). However, meeting solely with university staff restricts the breadth of social capital with institutional agents in students’ high school. Utilizing the resources of high school teachers and counselors helps students academically prepare to apply to selective and highly selective universities. The task is to have students venture outside of their comfort zone to expand their relationships to add breadth in their social networks. Therefore, students need additional guidance and support.

**Help-seeking and Asking for Help**

Help-seeking is the act of *actively* asking for assistance from an agent (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Social capital also includes the confidence and skills necessary to build students’ own social networks. For undocumented students this would mean readily communicating with institutional agents, and having in-depth conversations, about college and career plans as well as legal status. The participants in this study had only one meeting with experts about college or career expectations. In addition, students’ help-seeking was complicated by their legal status and the logistics of connecting with an expert.

Undocumented students’ help-seeking and confidence in meeting with agents is unpredictable due to the possibility of students disclosing their status. When undocumented students consider disclosing or “coming out,” there is a sense of vulnerability associated with making this decision (Abrego, 2011). Students’ comfort or discomfort in coming out complicates help-seeking because of the necessity to disclose to receive relevant college information (Abrego, 2011; 2008; Gonzales, 2010). In addition, undocumented youth face public stigma in
speaking about their status, and mixed reactions from others, influencing their decision to speak about being undocumented (Abrego, 2011, 2008, 2006).

Oscar, Karelia, and Ana explained they were careful in speaking about their status to avoid “weird looks” or “judgmental” responses. By meeting with institutional agents they knew who worked with undocumented youth, the participants already felt more comfortable indirectly discussing their legal status. However, this restricted students from seeking help from institutional agents they do not know, but are aware of the challenges and climate undocumented students face. This is important because students’ social networks lack breadth because they did not expand their relationships.

Existing studies with undocumented student participants identified the critical importance of having trusting relationships with teachers, counselors, and others to gain the resources and knowledge necessary for college attendance (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2011, 2001). Yet, these studies do not suggest how to advise students to have discussions about college, career, and their legal status. Stanton-Salazar (2001) defines network development as “knowledge of how to negotiate with various gatekeepers and agents, build supportive/cooperative ties with peers well integrated in the school, and seek out instrumental ties with informal mentors outside the school” (p. 269). This intervention helped support and prepare students to contact experts by brainstorming questions and talking through challenges that can arise. However, the intervention contributes to this literature by distinguishing areas where students get stuck and where they need additional guidance: the mechanics of network development.
College Knowledge of Undocumented Students

The second objective of the intervention was to increase college knowledge of undocumented Latino high school students. In this study, college knowledge was defined as an understanding of the procedures for applying to college, and successfully accessing the financial and informational resources necessary to obtain a college education. However, to account for the uniqueness of undocumented legal status, college knowledge has a sub-category: legal college knowledge. Legal college knowledge included the procedures that take into consideration a students’ legal status such as applying to college and seeking financial aid, and college knowledge necessary for any students to understand. In addition, existing studies on undocumented students place importance on their need for information about the college knowledge that is affected by their legal status (Abrego, 2006; Enriquez, 2011; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Gonzales, 2011).

Undocumented students can be considered to have college knowledge if they can describe, in detail, aspects of the process for successfully applying to college and accessing financial aid. College knowledge includes: college searching; considerations in choosing a college; and knowing how and where to register for courses and make payments. Knowledge pertaining to financial aid and the application process are important for undocumented students because these components differ by legal status (Abrego, 2006; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2011). Thus, legal college knowledge addresses the aspects of the college process where legal status can create complications, including researching colleges, applying to college, and seeking financial assistance. As a whole, there were incremental gains in college knowledge. Individually, there were micro gains of general college knowledge and legal college knowledge.
College knowledge encompasses many facets of the college process, career knowledge, and challenges students can face to attain their goals (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In addition, undocumented students have the task of understanding how their legal status plays a role in an already complex educational system (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010). Existing studies admit that undocumented students need college knowledge and an understanding of their opportunities in addition to legal college knowledge (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). In addition, this literature acknowledges that there is intensive work to add to undocumented students’ college knowledge (Chavez, 2007, Gonzales, 2011; Teranishi et al., 2015). This intervention filled some holes in students’ college knowledge, but there is a need for a more intensive intervention.

When undocumented students are not transparent about their legal status, they risk reducing the applicable information they gain and receiving inaccurate information (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010). For example, Karelia relied on the existing knowledge of the expert she met with, Samantha, and gained legal college knowledge about college searching. Ana indirectly explained her status by writing to Andres, “I applied to DACA.” Indirectly disclosing undocumented status takes different forms including “I can not travel outside of the country,” and “I am DACA-mented.” Professionals may be unaware that undocumented students disclose their status in this way, leaving undocumented students to miss relevant knowledge even when the professionals have offered it. Support in helping students understand the importance of disclosing when they feel comfortable can widen the college knowledge they gain, specifically legal college knowledge.
Career and College Expectations of Undocumented Students

The final goal of the intervention was to support and change undocumented students’ career and college expectations after meeting with institutional agents and acquiring college knowledge. An expectation is defined as something a person wants to achieve that takes into consideration the perceived and actual constraints that are present in a student’s life (Carter, 2006). The goal of meeting with an institutional expert was for undocumented students to find more college and career options and learn how to navigate around obstacles.

When students have knowledge to navigate through challenges, they have expectations that reflect their aspirations (Carter, 2006). Carter (2006) asserts that aspirations describe ambitions in an ideal setting and do not account for obstacles that students could face. However, the problem with expectations is that students face academic, familial, legal, and financial challenges which complicate their ability to maneuver around these obstacles (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et. al, 2000; McWhirter, Valdez, & Caban, 2013). This is not to say that undocumented students’ expectations are not valid. Instead, the broader question was whether it was possible to intervene in students’ career and college expectations so that they look more like their aspirations and to take their obstacles into consideration.

If we think about an intervention as the way in which students regard obstacles and ways to work around their challenges, the intervention accomplished this objective to a certain extent. Undocumented students’ expectations changed in incremental ways, more with career than college. In assessing the career expectations of undocumented students there were two results: having a clearer path and having more career options. Two students, Oscar and Ana, described having a clearer understanding of how to accomplish their career expectations; however, they did
not change their expectations. Oscar and Ana’s career paths did not change, but they had more support and better understood the obstacles they could face. The third student, Karelia, described having more career choices after learning “all the options that I have that I hadn’t thought about,” and was open to exploring additional careers. In this instance, Karelia’s career expectations changed to a more professional, higher paying career.

The intervention helped firm students’ expectations so they can be more easily achieved. However, what the intervention did not accomplish was changing all students’ expectations to a more professional, higher paying career requiring an advanced degree. In addition, the intervention did not alter their expectation to attend a highly selective university where they could experience greater student, academic, and financial support.

Several studies found that financial barriers and difficulties navigating the complexities of college processes related to legal status influence undocumented students’ expectations (Abrego, 2006; Chavez et al., 2007; Enriquez, 2011; Teranishi et al., 2015). Undocumented students need to better understand ways to help financially support their college education and how their legal status influences their expectations (Chavez et al., 2007; Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2011). In addition, undocumented students’ financial constraints are influenced by their legal status, a context which is outside their control (Brofenbrenner, 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996).

Although the intervention helped students better understand obstacles they could face, they still saw challenges with their financial and legal contexts. In addition, the limited college knowledge they gained was not enough to see past these challenges. However, re-designing an
intensive intervention, including policy and social changes, needs to occur to address students’ financial and legal constraints.

Redesigning the Intervention

An intervention does not work in isolation. The social environments that surrounded the undocumented students who participated in the study played a role in how they approached the intervention. This study explored where in undocumented students’ social networks and in what situations they are open about their status. However, this was not the focus. Despite its limitations, the results of this study offered a deeper understanding about how undocumented students’ legal status figures into their social capital, college knowledge, and college and career expectations. I consider the design of the intervention to address the limitations.

Timing of the Intervention

Undocumented students faced institutional barriers due to not having started the college process sooner (Gonzales, 2001; McWhirter et al., 2013). Based on their schools’ resources and programs, undocumented students are not exposed to the information they need to start planning for college until their junior or senior year (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzalez, 2010).

This intervention took place during the end of the spring semester of the academic school year. For Oscar and Ana, their senior year was coming to an end; therefore, broadening and looking into other college and career possibilities may not have been an option. Therefore, it would be beneficial to have future interventions as early as middle school. Thus, the intervention would be “early awareness.” During the middle school years (6th-8th grade), an intervention can focus on teaching students study habits to maintain high grades and about careers by
interviewing professionals in that career (Federal Student Aid [FSA], 2014; National Association for College Admission Counseling [NACAC], 2015). In freshman year of high school, students would learn to take rigorous classes, volunteer or participate in various extracurricular activities, and research careers (FSA, 2014; NACAC, 2015). When the students are sophomores, an intervention can focus on meeting with a counselor to talk about college requirements, taking rigorous courses, exploring available scholarship and financial aid options, and attend summer college programs (FSA, 2014). In addition, students should speak with their parents about their college and career plans.

During junior year, students would learn about choosing a college and what is needed to apply to college, attend college fairs, and search for scholarships (FSA, 2014; NACAC, 2015). In addition, they should meet with their counselor to discuss graduation requirements. During the summer, junior students should consider visiting college campuses or programs for free transportation to the campus and financial aid requirements and deadlines (FSA, 2014; NACAC, 2015). When students are seniors, they should maintain high grades, ask about college application fee waivers, apply to between five and seven colleges, apply for scholarships throughout the year, contact colleges about financial aid, and notify a college of commitment by May 1st (FSA, 2014; NACAC, 2015). An intervention should also include the steps to meet with a college advisor to discuss college courses, registering for class, attending orientation, and making any deposits.

**Length of the Intervention**

Each student had between three and four weeks to contact and meet with two agents. This time frame provided a snapshot of what can take place with this intervention. Giving
students more time to meet with experts could also provide more time to reflect on the process and adjust subsequent meetings. In doing so, students could potentially add depth and breadth in their social capital. Students could add to their college knowledge by having more time to meet with additional agents and see a greater variety of their college options.

In addition, more interviews with each student would mean having more opportunities for students to provide additional clarification. Students can provide details about their experience in their meetings, but in much more detail. Extending the length of the intervention could also add to the coaching and guidance in developing help-seeking skills.

**Developing the Agent List**

In creating the list of agents, I lacked familiarity with agents in the students’ high school. Further, by not including agents in the students’ high school, I was limiting students’ exposure to contacts in different universities and as well as additional resources. Although I asked students to add additional people to the list, students could have been influenced to meet with someone on the list I provided. It is beneficial to be familiar with agents in the students’ high school and include them on my list of agents. School is the primary environment where students have the opportunity to engage with institutional agents, and it is beneficial for undocumented students to have relationships with school agents they trust (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Students can easily communicate with agents to help them with their goals, and learn and practice help-seeking (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

In addition, high school institutional agents could help students prepare academically to take rigorous courses, apply to college, and seek financial aid. The relationships undocumented
students develop with institutional agents are imperative in gaining information about colleges and careers. In addition, they can help students recognize that they can overcome the challenges they perceive and meet their aspirations.

**Use of College Knowledge Chart**

When I analyzed the data, I created a table to identify the college knowledge and legal college knowledge each student had prior to and after the intervention (Tables 1, 2, and 3). Although this table was not used during the intervention, it could be incorporated into future interventions. The students can identify the college knowledge and legal college knowledge they have, and the researcher can do the same, before and after the intervention. The student and researcher can discuss the similarities and differences and strategies to gain the college knowledge and legal college knowledge during meetings with institutional agents. Furthermore, this table can help inform the student and researcher the type of college knowledge and legal college knowledge to focus on during the intervention.

**Interview Protocol**

In re-designing the interview protocol, questions about how students came to their expectations need to be included. Understanding the origins of students’ expectations is helpful in providing additional information and resources about their choices in career and college. We know that expectations are impacted by the many contexts including, but not limited to, academic, social, familial, and peer factors. This study focused on guiding undocumented students to gain college knowledge and legal college knowledge to better understand and navigate through their challenges. However, knowing where students learn about different
careers and college choice can better assist in providing the information and resources students need.

Support for Disclosing Legal Status

Scholars acknowledge the importance of students disclosing their status (Enriquez, 2011; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Gonzales, 2010). They recognize some of the psychological factors associated with lack of disclosure, like fear and anxiety, but do not consider students’ relationship with agents as a factor (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010). However, existing literature does not suggest how undocumented students can approach agents about their status.

Federal and state legislation and university policies are complex. To better understand the policies and legislation affected by legal status, it is important for undocumented students to consider being open about their status to someone whom they trust (Abrego, 2006; Enriquez, 2011). Although there is great risk involved in disclosing status, disclosure can allow for undocumented students to receive accurate information about aspects of college and career that may be influenced by their undocumented legal status. A future intervention could incorporate supplemental support to help alleviate the stress and fear that can be present when addressing issues related to being undocumented (Abrego, 2011; Enriquez, 2011; Garcia & Tierney, 2011).

Role of the Family and Other Networks

This study focused on building students’ institutionally based social networks. However, family and peer networks play an integral role in students’ expectations. They can be a concern for or provide emotional support and encouragement. In addition, examining the family and peer
networks of undocumented students can help broaden our understanding of how students form their career and college expectations. In re-designing this intervention, investigating family and peer networks can help highlight some of the supports and challenges students face in choosing a career and college expectation. Furthermore, exploring the impact of family and peers can guide the focus of the intervention in broadening students’ considerations of their career and college options.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Undocumented students voiced legal and financial challenges as obstacles throughout this study. Re-designing an intervention to help students build and expand their social capital and college knowledge has the potential to help. However, it is not enough without change in policy and practice. In this section, I describe changes that can have greater impact in undocumented students’ expectations to attend selective universities and pursue professional, high-paying careers, add depth and breadth to their social networks, increase their college knowledge, and add to their help-seeking skills.

The challenges undocumented students face with their legal status can only be resolved with drastic immigration policy. Although DACA allows students a two-year work permit and deferral action, this executive order is not a pathway to citizenship. Pathway to citizenship could eliminate the uncertainty of finding employment during and after college (Abrego 2006, Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009, 2011). Immigration reform for undocumented students to be on a pathway to citizenship could also open funding though the federal and state governments.
Currently, undocumented students are not eligible to receive federal financial aid or state financial aid in Illinois (ICIRR, 2011). Federal student aid includes grants, work-study program funds, and loans. In addition, many universities use FAFSA to determine a student’s eligibility for institutional aid. Whereas currently, undocumented students can only apply for scholarships, access to federal aid would help to lessen the financial obstacle of a college education.

Undocumented students need support within their high schools; however, teachers and counselors are often unaware of the resources and relevant information they need to successfully matriculate to college (Gonzales, 2010, 2007; Enriquez, 2011; Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Therefore, teacher and counselor training programs should be established for the purpose of better understanding the issues, resources, and knowledge undocumented students need for a college education.

The incremental change in students’ college knowledge and legal knowledge points to the change of the college conversation. College knowledge is readily available, but does not consider the complexities associated with being an undocumented student. Therefore, legal college knowledge needs to be integrated into the presentation and conversation of college. Changing the narrative could help demonstrate that there are resources to help students attain a college degree. If, for example, a counselor is presenting information to a class and includes legal college knowledge, an undocumented student could feel more comfortable approaching this institutional agent for additional guidance.

The role of institutional agents affiliated with Lincoln State University was a crucial component of this study because these are the primary agents with whom students met. Therefore, there are implications for higher education institutions. Colleges and universities are
often located in close proximity to a city or town, where they can serve the community. This was the case for Lincoln State. The university itself can play a role in providing programming and opportunities for students to connect with professors, faculty, and staff to practice their help-seeking skills. In addition, students can learn about the different undergraduate programs and how the university system works. Not only is this a benefit to the students, it can also be a benefit to the university in the sense that students could choose the university to apply to and attend. The big picture is that the university can increase their applications and enrollment because of their presence in the community and provision of assistance to students.

This intervention focused on the face-to-face interactions with institutionally based agents. However, the sensitivity of legal status created challenges in the depth and breadth of students’ social networks. The experiences students had in contemplating disclosing their status leads to teaching students to research information online through social media, websites, and texts. Therefore, the use of social media, websites, and texts can help undocumented students add to their college knowledge and legal college knowledge without disclosing their legal status. The Illinois Association for College Admissions Counseling (IACAC) has guides and information for undocumented students and counselors about the college process. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) has scholarship and information about financial aid for undocumented students. The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights has contacts for legal counsel. Furthermore, blogs like My (Un)documented Life can help students learn about from other undocumented students around the nation. However, there are crucial skills undocumented students learn and practice when meeting with institutional agents face-to-face. Therefore, these resources should be considered as supplementary to interacting with agents.
A culturally appropriate conversation about students’ career and college choices does not mean talking about culture as a deficit. Instead it means respecting familial opinions but respecting parents’ culture and opinions. Families immigrate to the United States in hope of new opportunities and better education for their children. However, as institutional agents, we need to acknowledge students’ expectations but provide guidance for them to think about broader options. This means that we ask students to push beyond their comfort level in exploring colleges outside of their local area or state, and careers that can provide higher pay and transferable skills. There is also an intervention piece for their parents to help them understand the college system in the United States.

Lastly, undocumented students need a safe environment where they can access resources and inquire about the challenges in the college process. This does not mean that undocumented students are segregated to have an “undocumented student after-school program.” Instead, this means that after-school programs also focus on issues pertaining to legal status when applicable. For instance, all three of the students participated in a Latino student group after school where the facilitators were known to be experienced in working with undocumented students. If needed, topics about legal status and immigration were discussed without judgment. This group can be a source of social capital to speak about legal college knowledge if nowhere else is available.

Furthermore, teachers and counselors can display a sign to identify they are “allies” to undocumented students. The Illinois DREAM Fund has their own magnet for display; however, students can design their own to provide. This type of display can assure undocumented students that the agents are receptive to speaking about undocumented issues. When undocumented
students have a safe space, they could potentially practice their help-seeking skills and lessen the stigma of being undocumented. This would mean educating school faculty and staff, students, and community members about issues that undocumented students face.

Concluding Remarks

This study provides an understanding of the challenges undocumented students face in attending college. Undocumented students require assistance from high-status institutional agents to develop college knowledge. The legal contexts undocumented youth face give them limited access, but do not provide adequate financial support. Undocumented students turn to institutional agents they already know and those in the community of undocumented students attending college for assistance. Furthermore, undocumented students’ skills and help-seeking are complicated because of their legal status and the way in which they perceive people of influence whom they approach.

Social capital theory (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) provides a theoretical framework for considering the breadth and depth of undocumented students’ social networks, and their help-seeking skills. Undocumented Latino students approach high-status institutional agents they perceive as having information and resources and as being open and receptive to legal issues. In this study, this means that undocumented students added depth, strengthening their existing relationships instead of breadth, to discuss college knowledge.

The college process is complex for any student pursuing higher education. Undocumented students have the added complexity of their legal status in navigating the knowledge and resources necessary to matriculate to college. Although the participants’ college
and career expectations were not changed, this study provides insight in knowing from whom they seek help, the college knowledge that is crucial to comprehend, and the challenges undocumented students face that can influence their college and career expectations.
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Appendix A

Interview #1 Protocol

1. If you could be or do anything you wanted as a career, what would you do?
   Why?

2. Now let’s talk about in the real world; what do you want to do when you grow up?

3. What you worrying about between the two questions? Why is there a difference, if there is one?
   a. What are challenges that you might face?
   b. What is your plan for reaching them?

4. What do you need to do in order to reach this goal?

5. Tell me a little bit about what you know about how the college application process works? What steps do you need to take to apply to college?

6. What colleges are you interested in?

7. Where can you find colleges admission requirements?

8. Tell me a little about how getting financial aid works? What steps so you need to take to apply for financial aid?

9. Tell me a bit about what you know about scholarships. Where can you get information about scholarships?

10. Do you have a relationship with anyone you can talk to about college? Who?
    What about at school?

11. Do you have a relationship with someone you can talk to about your legal status?
    Who?
12. What information about your legal or educational goals would you like to know more about?

Why?

13. How would this information help you achieve your goals?

14. Is there anyone who you want to talk to about your educational goals and have not?

15. How do you usually approach people (in school) you don’t know when you need help?

At the end of the interview, I will compile a personalized list of institutional agents and organizations for each student. These resources are trusted people in the school district and community who have experience working with undocumented students and are familiar with the college experience.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INSTITUTIONAL AGENT LIST
Appendix B

Sample Institutional Agent List

Latino Studies Center
Sandy: Assistant to the Director

University student advisor:
Samantha

Financial Aid Counselor
Jessica

Community Organization
Family Focus- Aurora: 630-844-2550

Undocumented Student Organization
Evelyn: President

Latino student group: Afterschool program facilitators
Andres
Evelyn
Appendix C

Interview #2 Protocol

During the beginning of this interview I will present the list of resources that the students can reference on navigating college or obtaining legal help. The people and organizations on the list have worked with undocumented students and will be able to assist, or suggest other people for the students to contact. Each student will receive a personalized list of institutional agents. There may be some overlap such as resources related to legal status and resources in their school. I will explain the background and characteristics of each institutional agent.

1. Looking over the list of contacts, who do you most want to contact about college?
2. Who do you most want to contact about legal assistance?
3. Tell me about what you would want to learn from this person.
4. What are some questions that you would want to ask?
5. Are there any questions that you want to ask but do not know if you should?
   a. What are they?
   b. Why do you feel like you should not?
6. How would you contact this person to make an appointment? What would you say?

Together with the student, we will write a script on what they should say when making an appointment via phone call or email.

Next, we will talk through a plan so that the student can be prepared to meet with their contact person and go through a mock conversation. A plan may look like this:
1. Call Mrs. A to make an appointment about the classes I need to meet the requirements for UIC. Use the script as a guide.

2. Write the day and time in a place where you will remember.

3. Take a pen, notebook, and questions to the meeting.

4. Ask the questions and write the answers in my notebook.

5. Write any questions that come up and make sure to ask them.

6. Ask Mrs. A if she can recommend someone else to speak to.

7. Thank Mrs. A for meeting with me and ask if I can keep her updated with any other questions that I might have in the future.

After developing a script and plan, I will ask:

14. Are these steps do-able? Do you feel comfortable with this plan?

15. What will you do to ensure that you follow through with this plan?

16. What can I do to help you follow through with this plan?

If the student is not comfortable going alone, I will offer to go with them. I will ask each student to print any searchers, save brochures, and information they find in a folder I will provide for them.

Each plan will be different and devised by the student and me. A realistic action plan will be drafted with steps that the participant feels comfortable taking. The student and I will talk about a timeframe that would allow the student to complete their plan, roughly two to three weeks. The students will be able to contact me with any questions or challenges they encounter, and we will about how to move forward with their plan.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW #3 PROTOCOL
Appendix D

Interview #3

1. How did the plan work for you?
   What were the successes?
   What were the challenges?

2. Who did you speak with?
   Tell me about each interaction that you experienced.

3. Did they answer your questions? How?

4. What materials did you collect?

5. Did they help open up more opportunities? What kind?

6. Were you surprised with any information or resource? Why or why not?

7. Was the information you received useful? How?

8. Have you done any more searching? Where?

9. Did you speak with anyone you were not planning to? Who? How did you start talking with them?
   Tell me about that interaction.

10. How would you try to ask for help from people that could help you with your goals in the future?

11. What did you learn about the college application process?

12. What did you learn about financial aid?

13. What did you learn about scholarships?

14. If you could do or be anything you wanted as a career, what would you do?
15. Given your real-world circumstances, what do you want to be when you grow up?

16. Are you looking at the challenges differently than before? How?

17. Do you have any questions? What are they?

   How can I help answer these questions?

I will make note of the students’ questions and will follow up with additional resources or contact persons that would be helpful to address their concerns.