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Authors

Chen, Angela Chuan-Ru
Rhoads, Robert A

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Angela Chuan-Ru Chen, Robert A. Rhoads

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Undocumented Student Allies and Transformative Resistance: An Ethnographic Case Study

Angela Chuan-Ru Chen and Robert A. Rhoads

INTRODUCTION

Everybody is kind of scared to touch this issue... Because it's the site, this political debate at the institutional level. We are the site of political debates... So, on the one hand, we have the real tragedy of students: the real precarious

Angela Chuan-Ru Chen is the Director of Pre-Health Dreamers, an advocacy organization for increased access to health careers and health care for the undocumented community. Most recently, Angela worked as the Director of the Undocumented Student Program at University of California, Los Angeles, which served over 500 undocumented students, spawned new programs, and built resources across campus departments to better serve this population. Her institutional advocacy also includes leading University of California system-wide efforts to increase awareness about policies that impact undocumented students and guiding universities across the nation to develop support programs for undocumented youth.

Robert Rhoads is Professor of Higher Education and Organizational Change in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies and University Chair Professor at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China. His work focuses on international and comparative issues in higher education, globalization and university reform, multiculturalism and student agency, and social movements and the university. His most recent authored and/or co-authored books include: "MOOCs, High Technology, and Higher Learning" (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); "China's Rising Research Universities: A New Era of Global Ambition" (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and "Global Citizenship and the University" (Stanford University Press, 2011).

existence of undocumented students, the sheer numbers, and really how little institutional support there is. On the other hand, we have this political debate that has colored the so-called “access” to scarce resources.

The above comments from a professor at Western Research University (a pseudonym) capture aspects of the institutional challenges intertwined with efforts to build support for undocumented students in higher education. These sorts of challenges help to shape the boundaries of citizenship and exclusion and impact the experiences of undocumented students. Contrary to an idealized notion of higher education as the great equalizer, universities may actually create and maintain systems of inequality, separating the “haves” and “have nots” and perpetuating oppressive “us” versus “them” distinctions (Gonzales, 2007, 2009; Hebel, 2010; Hjerm, 2001; Rhoads & Szelényi, 2011). Exclusionary practices are legitimized by laws that not only deny undocumented students financial aid but also help “sustain a climate of antipathy and suspicion toward undocumented students and immigrants of color” (Rincón, 2008, p. 62), and arguably perpetuate systems of racial inequality and racism tied to xenophobic nativism (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2009, 2010). Furthermore, laws exist that criminalize those who hire, house, aid, transport, or educate undocumented immigrants (Rincón, 2008; Vargas, 2011, 2012) and thus magnify the actual or perceived constraints associated with providing undocumented students postsecondary educational benefits.

The debate over educational access is increasingly central to preserving boundaries of citizenship—particularly as citizenship increasingly determines one’s ability to “accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena” (Ong, 1999, p.6). Although immigration is under federal jurisdiction, the debate over immigrant rights has steadily shifted from federal lawmakers to state and local actors, including the right to higher education (NFHEPG, 2012). Without clarification of existing federal provisions or congressional actions for comprehensive immigration reform, institutional leaders are left to employ local discretion when interpreting federal laws. The actions of educational leaders are often ambiguous as they juggle compliance with legal mandates, contradictory pressures from diverse constituencies, and attempts to meet the needs of undocumented students. What typically results is rather limited support for undocumented students as they struggle to pursue their educational aspirations. Unfortunately, and in light of significant barriers, many talented undocumented young adults never matriculate at all.

At the national level, 65,000 undocumented youth graduate from high school each year, but only about 26 percent of graduates matriculate into higher education (Fortuny, Capps, & Passel, 2007). Compared to the national average of 70 percent for U.S.-born high school graduates that go on to participate in higher education, this rate is dismal (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Furthermore, those who matriculate are disproportionately enrolled in community colleges as a cost-saving strategy (Albrecht,

2007; Olivérez, 2006). For those undocumented youth who make it to higher education, research highlights serious challenges still confronting them, including higher than average levels of anxiety and stress, in part linked to the constant fear of deportation and concerns tied to financial difficulties (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Given the challenges confronting undocumented students in higher education, there is a need to know more about the role faculty and staff may play in supporting their academic endeavors.

With the preceding in mind, this study seeks to explore the efforts of WRU staff and faculty to support undocumented students in furthering their higher education ambitions. We describe these individuals as “allies,” as this was a common term employed by both undocumented students and those working to better serve them. By “allies,” we refer to particular individuals who work from a position of authority, power, or influence to impact others’ lives positively by challenging systems of oppression (Broido, 2000; Washington & Evans, 1991). The key research questions framing our study are: 1) What factors contributed to WRU staff and faculty allies getting involved in efforts to better serve undocumented students? 2) In what ways do allies address the needs of undocumented students as part of strengthening their educational opportunities? And, 3) What institutional conditions impact the nature of the work of allies? We select WRU as a site for our case study because of the activist role many staff and faculty assumed relative to the increasingly public struggle of undocumented college students.

RELEVANT LITERATURE: THE LAND OF AMBIGUITY

Debate surrounding the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, or DREAM Act as it is more commonly known, captures to some extent the level of ambiguity surrounding undocumented students and their educational opportunities; although providing K-12 public education to all children in residence is policy in the United States, regardless of immigration status and legally recognized by the Supreme Court’s 1982 *Plyer v. Doe* decision, the same cannot be said in terms of providing higher education access for undocumented young adults (Drachman, 2006). The DREAM Act is a bipartisan bill aiming to provide undocumented youths a pathway to citizenship on the condition that they entered the United States before the age of sixteen, complete two years of college or serve in the U.S. military, and maintain good moral character. Policy analysts have estimated that more than 2 million youth and young adults likely would be eligible to apply for legal status if the legislation were passed (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Although the DREAM Act has largely stalled at the federal level, a number of states have passed their own versions (Flores, 2010). However, the passage of “state-level efforts to accord resident status to undocumented college students,” as Olivás

(2009) noted, also has faced serious problems in the form of “restrictionist challenges” (p. 409), this despite many legal scholars pointing to the broad social benefits of expanding access and permitting in-state tuition for students lacking legal immigrant status (Ruge & Iza, 2004/2005). What has resulted is a patchwork of varying policies and practices prone to legal challenges, mostly from politically conservative individuals and groups seeking to maintain their own notion of what constitutes legitimate residency in the United States. What remains certain is the uncertainty of educational opportunity for undocumented students.

Some of the difficulties faced by undocumented students derive from various federal acts limiting their ability to access federal financial aid and loans. For example, the 1996 Federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) made undocumented students ineligible to receive federal aid in the forms of Pell Grants and student loans, and the Patriot Act limits their chances of getting private bank loans given the difficulties in verifying their identity (Olivas, 2004). Furthermore, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) limits the ability of states to extend benefits on the basis of residency, the exception being that those same benefits must be extended to U.S. citizens regardless of their state of residence (Olivas, 2004, 2005).

In terms of the experiences of undocumented students, widespread ambiguity and contradiction have led to a consistent state of affairs: the precarious status of undocumented students in higher education (Abrego, 2006; Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Albrecht, 2007; Badger, 2002; Lopez, 2010; Perez, 2009; Perez & Cortes, 2011; Rincón, 2008; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). For example, numerous studies have shown that undocumented students have diminished opportunities for postsecondary education, both in enrollment numbers and in the quality of their experience (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Flores, 2010; Lopez, 2010; Perez, 2009; Perez & Cortes, 2011). Although most institutions do not explicitly ban undocumented students from enrollment, their lack of access to financial aid (Olivérez, 2006), psychological distress associated with their marginalized status (Perez & Cortes, 2011), and inadequate institutional resources (Albrecht, 2007) make the pursuit of a college degree overwhelmingly difficult. Given their limited financial support, Buenavista and Tran (2010) found that to finance their education, undocumented students relied on a small number of competitive private scholarships, money from friends and family, and income from unauthorized employment. In many cases, the students depended solely on their income to cover educational costs, and as a consequence needed to take frequent academic leaves or “stop out” in order to save money to pay for the next term.

Although the research literature relating to the experiences of undocumented students is helpful in contextualizing our study, the fact is that little

to no research exists that helps us to understand and decipher the complex challenges university faculty and staff face in supporting undocumented students as allies. Previous work related to the role of allies in addressing campus climate issues faced by LGBTQ students points to the need for furthering research about the work of undocumented student allies (Broido, 2000; Washington & Evans, 1991).

INSTITUTIONAL ALLIES AND TRANSFORMATIVE RESISTANCE

We found work employing critical race theory helpful in advancing our overall framing of the study (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; López & López, 2010; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009, 2010). Although this work helped to advance a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by undocumented students, often stressing the cultural wealth of the communities and families from which they come, little attention is given to the important role institutional actors might play as agents of social transformation. Accordingly, we specifically draw from the work of CRT scholars Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) and their application of the concept of transformative resistance.

For Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), transformative resistance represents an attempt to move beyond theories of social reproduction that tend to stress social actors as “simply acted on by structures” (p. 315). Instead, they offer a theoretical construct that seeks to “demonstrate how individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions” (p. 315). Building on Giroux’s (1983) earlier work on student resistance in schools, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal argue that oppositional behavior may be understood in terms of two intersecting dimensions reflecting a critique of social oppression and a commitment to social justice. The result of these two intersecting dimensions is a basic 4-quadrant typology:

reactionary behavior—no critique of oppression and no commitment to social justice

self-defeating resistance—a critique of oppression but no commitment to social justice
conformist resistance—no critique of oppression but a commitment to social justice

transformative resistance—a critique of oppression and a commitment to social justice

The latter type of oppositional behavior—transformative resistance—is most important to our study, as we observed and analyzed undocumented student allies engaging in such forms of action.

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) maintained that, “With a deeper level of understanding and a social justice orientation, transformative resistance offers the greatest possibility for social change” (p. 319). They went on to argue that one cannot easily assess the motivation for oppositional behaviors “without communicating with and learning from the student’s perspective and delving deeply into the historical and sociopolitical context that formed the behavior” (p. 321). Their thinking supports our contention that a rich ethnographic analysis may be well suited for better understanding the actions of oppositional actors engaged in forms of transformative resistance. We discuss this issue in greater detail in the methods section.

Although the concept of transformative resistance largely has been applied to students engaging in oppositional behaviors, we see it also applying to the experiences of staff and faculty allies working to enhance the conditions of undocumented students. Application of the concept in this manner makes good sense, especially when one considers Giroux’s (1988, 2001) work on teachers as transformative intellectuals and the work of Rhoads and Black (1995) on student affairs practitioners as transformative educators; this scholarly literature suggests that transformative educators engage in work within their institutions and professions in order to challenge inequitable practices, policies, and structures, while at times facing significant risks, including the possibility of alienating their employers.

Work in ethnic studies also informed our thinking about transformative resistance. Hu-DeHart (1993), for example, stressed the transformative or liberatory role of faculty members, which she discussed in terms of the ideal of the “public intellectual.” As she explained, public intellectuals apply “theory and knowledge to practice and speak out on critical issues facing U.S. society in order to educate a broad general public and also give leadership and voice to minority communities” (p. 6). A key barrier to be addressed by Hu-DeHart’s public intellectualism is Western triumphalism—a vision of U.S. history, including its political and cultural trajectory and the constitution of legitimate citizenship, that for Hu-DeHart tended to be defined in White, Eurocentric terms, typically at the exclusion of people of color. As she explained, “The fact of the matter is that the ‘our’ in ‘our national identity’ and ‘our national culture’ and the ‘we’ in ‘we the people’ historically have been exclusive” (p. 9). Versions of the American triumphalist narrative thus tend to extoll “American history as an unbroken string of successes,” treating its history of xenophobia and racism as “inconvenient inconsistencies” (p. 7).

We see the undocumented student movement and the work of allies as further challenging the American triumphalist narrative, given that activists in the movement contest exclusionary notions of citizenship linked to racism and xenophobia. Their interpretation is consistent with much of the work from critical race theorists and other critical social scientists concerned with the ways in which American society continues to reinforce deep-seated race-

and ethnic-based inequities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005; Rhoads, 1995a, 1998a, 1998b; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

METHODS

The findings presented in this paper are part of a larger project conducted over a four-year period ending in 2011 that also examined the lived experiences of undocumented students at WRU. However, in this article we select to focus entirely on the work of staff and faculty allies because we see these organizational actors as critical to improving educational conditions and opportunities for undocumented students.

To better understand the efforts of staff and faculty allies, this study required extensive field work and in-depth organizational analysis. The methods employed combined aspects of traditional ethnography (including extensive participant observation) with case study design (focused on one particular university site), reflecting what previous scholars have described as the “ethnographic case study” method (Rhoads, 1995b). Of course, our methods were also informed by empirical and theoretical work in the fields of critical race theory and ethnic studies; here we point out that there is much support in the literature for combining aspects of ethnography with critical social science perspectives, including perspectives such as critical theory and critical race theory (Anderson, 1989; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Furthermore, we see case study design informed by ethnographic methods as particularly insightful for two primary reasons, both of which were stressed by Merriam: 1) a case study can help to uncover a complex process (in the case of our study the process involves allies engaging in forms of transformative resistance); and 2) a case study is powerful for examining “uniqueness” or “atypical cases,” especially in terms of “what it can reveal about a phenomenon...[and] knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (1998, p. 33).

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews conducted with 23 staff and faculty and 21 students, informal interviews with numerous key informants, extensive participant observation, and document collection and analysis. These data collection strategies follow common recommendations for conducting ethnographic and qualitative inquiry in educational settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Maxwell, 1996).

Site Selection and Background

We selected WRU as a locale for this study because of its increasing level of institutional support for undocumented students and the related leadership position it has assumed in many of the public debates surrounding the struggle of undocumented students. As a public research university serving some 30,000 students and located in a metropolitan area of California, WRU

is at the center of debates about undocumented students and their place in higher education, largely because of the strength of the undocumented student movement on campus and within the state. The visibility of the undocumented student movement and related advocacy in California is evidenced by the 2001 passage of California Assembly Bill 540 (hereafter AB540), which allowed undocumented students meeting certain conditions to pay in-state tuition at the state's public colleges and universities. In 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed the California Dream Act composed of Assembly Bill 130 and 131 and providing private scholarships and institutional and state grants to undocumented students.

Although the overall enrollment of undocumented students at WRU constitutes less than 1 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment, the university nonetheless maintains one of the highest enrollments of such students by comparison to peer institutions. Additionally, WRU was one of the first institutions in the nation to formally establish a student support and advocacy group. The undocumented student group known as DREAMERS had roughly 50 active members during the period in which field work was conducted, although not all members were undocumented. Based on a variety of institutional documents, the racial/ethnic background of undocumented students at WRU looks something like this: 50% Latina/o, 45% Asian, 2% Caucasian, 2% unknown, and less than 1% African. WRU also maintains information about staff and faculty involved in supporting undocumented students with approximately 60 listed in the university's ally directory. The fact that WRU had a visible and active group of both staff and faculty allies made the campus an ideal site for exploring the role of transformative resistance.

Study Participants and Sampling

We selected interview participants using both a purposeful and snowball sampling approach. Staff and faculty were selected on the basis of having a demonstrated history of advocacy on behalf of undocumented students at the institutional level (this represents the purposeful sampling component). A key informant with broad and deep knowledge of the university and those engaged in service to undocumented students assisted in identifying possible interview participants. Initially, interview participants were recruited through an email announcement sent by the aforementioned key informant. Several responded and interviews eventually were scheduled with them. Additionally, interview participants, as well as other key informants, were asked to share the names and contacts of other possible interview participants (this constitutes the snowball component of the sampling strategy). The organizational location of the interview participants (a total of 23) included 10 academic/administrative staff, 6 student affairs professionals, 6 faculty members, and 1 staff member from a community-based organization (not directly affiliated with the university).

Data Collection Strategies

A key data collection tool was the semi-structured interview. All interviews with staff and faculty followed a standardized format, but with some leeway employed so as to enable participants to more deeply explore their unique knowledge and understanding of the issues. Key topical areas of the interview protocol included questions relating to the following: 1) how and why allies became involved in supporting undocumented students, 2) what key characteristics they saw as critical to being an ally, 3) what they saw as the most pressing challenges facing undocumented students at the university, 4) how the institution may or may not address the needs of undocumented students, and 5) what recommendations they might offer for enhancing the experiences of undocumented students. Numerous follow-up questions relating to these five broad areas were used to dig deeper into the perceptions of the interview participants.

Interviews typically lasted one hour and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews formed a critical component of the overall data base for the study. Also, countless informal interviews, especially those taking place between the lead author and several key informants, served to inform interpretations of the overall organizational context. Key informants tended to be recognized as leaders in the allies movement at WRU and included a couple of student affairs staff members as well as a leading faculty member.

A large number of undocumented students at WRU (21) were also formally interviewed about their experiences, and significant portions of the participant observation included student-related meetings and activities. Although data deriving from the student interviews and observations are not included as part of this paper, the general knowledge gained from such forms of data collection still contributes in significant ways to our overall thinking about faculty and staff allies and their forms of engagement. For example, the fact that student direct action precipitated and stimulated faculty and staff engagement as allies was a conclusion of both portions of the data corpus—that deriving from faculty and staff allies and that from the students.

In addition to the semi-structured and informal interviews, a significant source of data came from extended participation observation in a variety of campus settings over the duration of the four-year study. Participant observation included regularly attending ally meetings, participating in DREAMERS meetings (the students typically met once a week) and their respective events and activities, and attending a host of on- and off-campus events, including rallies, teach-ins, fundraisers, workshops, and social gatherings. Extensive field notes were kept as part of the observational component of the study and contributed to the overall data corpus. Additionally, a variety of key institutional documents were collected and examined. Such documents included

institutional policies regarding undocumented students as well as notes and/or minutes of meetings among staff and faculty working to assist students.

Data Analysis

The data base for this study is constituted by the combined interview transcripts, short-hand notes from informal interviews and meetings, recorded field notes, and key documents. Data were analyzed throughout the duration of the study, allowing for on-going adjustments to the data collection process as different themes and patterns emerged (Maxwell, 1996). In addition to interview transcriptions, informal notes, and field notes, memos were developed while conducting the data analysis in order to better facilitate analytical thinking.

Initial analytical codes were developed based on reading and re-reading the overall data. This part of the process was conducted by the lead author with the second author serving as a source of data analysis triangulation, typically affirming or challenging the lead author's decision making with the goal to strengthen the overall logic of the coding strategy (relative of course to the project's overarching goals and theoretical framing). This early stage of the process also involved separating the database by the two major categories of research participants—students versus staff and faculty. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on the coding of staff and faculty data, which resulted in several initial categories, including such themes as: motivation for engagement as allies, campus climate (both in terms of support for and opposition to undocumented students), forms of ally engagement, and institutionalization of efforts. These codes eventually were utilized in combination with data analysis software (HyperRESEARCH), which enabled a re-organization of the data based on the identified themes. A next step involved building conceptual categories and connections among the various themes. Following Maxwell, this portion of the analysis involved separating the data into “discrete elements for easy comparison within and between categories” (1996, p.78), and attempts to understand the data by identifying relationships that “connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (1996, p. 79). Eventually, more refined conceptual categories such as the “role of student activism,” “consciousness-raising activities,” “developing supportive programs,” and “community partnering” were developed; these conceptual categories form the thrust of findings reported in this paper.

Trustworthiness and Positionality

Although the rigor of social science inquiry often hinges on concepts such as validity and reliability, we instead think in terms of trustworthiness, wherein concerns about rigor shift to whether or not findings and interpretations may be “trusted” to actually reflect the lived experiences of research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, in order to strengthen the trust-

worthiness of our study, member checks were conducted by providing opportunities for participants to discuss tentative findings and interpretations and then offer alternative explanations. This took place through a variety of informal discussions with key informants, including conversations with a few of the leading faculty and staff ally organizers at WRU.

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study may also be strengthened by recognizing and accounting for the particular location or positionality of the researcher. Simply put, being conscious of one's assumptions and point of view is more useful to the research process than being clueless about where one stands on a host of political, ideological, and theoretical matters. Accordingly, we make our point of view somewhat clear in the theoretical section of this paper. But additionally, both researchers bring unique backgrounds and an array of experiences to the process of social science inquiry. More specifically, we believe it is important to note that the lead author conducted all the field work and at one time was herself an undocumented student, for both her undergraduate and portions of her graduate studies. The lead author devoted roughly four years to immersion in the WRU context, both as a researcher and then later as an engaged staff member working with undocumented students. Such engagement enabled her to develop an "insider's point of view" about a range of events and occurrences at WRU, relative to both ally organizing and the broader experiences of undocumented students, including their activism. Although one might see such engagement as a negative, in terms of potentially compromising the study's objectivity, the sensitivity of the topic necessitated this level of personal commitment and, in reality, such engagement may constitute a strength.

The second author was not involved in conducting field work but instead served as a senior-level guide to the first author, adopting a research stance somewhat more distanced from the actual field work of the lead author. A key role of the second author involved serving as a sounding board for both the overall research design and the initial data analysis and interpretations of findings. This added to the study's rigor in that the second author was able to push the first author relative to some of her early interpretations and tentative conclusions. For example, early on in the data analysis the lead author did not center the activist work of undocumented students, as the primary research questions for the study focused on faculty and staff allies. But as the analysis progressed, it became increasingly clear that student activism played a critical role as a form of catalyst for faculty and staff engagement as allies. Consequently, through deliberations among the two authors, student activism became a key area of discussion as part of the findings reported in this paper. This also reflected to some extent the second author's experience (and positionality) as a social justice-oriented scholar with a strong background in studying the important role student activism often plays in stimulating

deeper discussions and actions around race- and ethnic-based campus issues (Rhoads, 1998a, 1998b).

Limitations of the Study

As a final methodological note, we point to a major limitation of our study—that being our inability to provide a depth of descriptive data about the site and our interview participants. The fact of the matter is that issues involving undocumented populations in the United States are politically and ideologically contentious. Furthermore, institutional allies, in this study and elsewhere, often push the boundaries of institutional- and state-mandated policies and practices, in part seeking to challenge what they see as xenophobic nativist logic inconsistent with a more inclusive vision of U.S. society and culture. Thus, given the sensitivity involved with this study, and the risks interview participants took to be involved, this necessitated the highest levels of human subject protections. Consequently, we cannot offer the kind of rich description typically preferred in ethnographic case studies, and so the names of all staff and faculty used in sharing our findings are pseudonyms (as is the institution's name). Furthermore, in presenting narrative data from our research participants, we intentionally avoid providing personal identifiers such as position/title, race/ethnicity, age, and so forth; we also randomly alter the gender of some research participants and note that changing demographic characteristics is a recommended practice in qualitative studies dealing with high levels of risk (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). Again, these steps are taken to further protect our research participants' anonymity, in keeping with IRB specifications for the study and mindful of what Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, and Schwartz (2011) described in noting the ethical challenges of protecting research participants during a time of fear and surveillance for undocumented populations.

FINDINGS

Our findings focus on four key facets to the work of staff and faculty allies: 1) student activism as a catalyst for staff and faculty engagement, 2) confronting contradictions and raising consciousness, 3) developing more supportive policies and programs, and 4) collaborating with organizations and communities beyond the university. These findings help to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of transformative resistance and reveal some of the complexities involved in better serving the needs of undocumented students.

Student Activism as a Catalyst for Staff and Faculty Engagement

To a great extent, undocumented students organizing around their common social identity and struggle served as a catalyst for the emergence of a

group of committed staff and faculty allies. In other words, it was the enactment of forms of transformative resistance on the part of students that in some ways empowered staff and faculty as allies. This should not come as a huge surprise, as research literature has captured the critical role of student activism in advancing initiatives to address a variety of race- and ethnic-based campus concerns (Rhoads, 1998a, 1998b; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Vélez, Perez Huber, Lopez, de la Luz, & Solórzano, 2008).

In past decades, undocumented students were rather voiceless at WRU. Students typically revealed their undocumented status to a limited number of institutional allies that advocated on the students' behalf in an effort to protect their privacy. An academic affairs ally and former undocumented student recounted his experience: "When I was a student...to be undocumented was to be in the shadows and to be hidden. It was something you never said out loud. You never said, 'I'm undocumented.' I knew a couple of other undocumented students and you very seldom talked about it, not in public." He noted that the position of allies back then was that the staff and faculty would "have to do it" because the students are "voiceless." In recent years, however, since the passage of AB540 and in light of growing momentum associated with the immigrant rights movement, this ally noted that a number of students stepped out from "the shadows" to serve as their own advocates and establish public identities. He pointed out that more and more undocumented students took the attitude that, "We're not just victims anymore. We can try to have an impact." Another administrator agreed, explaining that "what has happened recently is that students have begun to stand up and become the face of the issue, which has humanized the whole thing. Which I think...is much better because you're dealing with a human issue and you're dealing with a student and a face. Now we're really talking about a human being." But this administrator went on to lament that there was a "flip side to this"—"that these students are putting themselves at risk because the situation is still there. People can be deported if they're caught."

As a consequence of undocumented students coming out and organizing themselves as a collective force, essentially providing real students and real faces to the issue, numerous staff and faculty at WRU were motivated to more visibly join the struggle. For example, several allies attributed their increased support and involvement to growing student visibility and activism. One staff ally offered her thoughts on the students' increased activism: "When I see students being very public about it," organizing collectively and taking direct action, "getting mad" about their treatment, "advocating" for justice, "I think it provides courage to those who are institutionally situated. It challenges them. It makes many of them want to be more useful, more helpful." This ally went on to add that the "bottom-up organizing" of the students "coupled with some top-down action as well" is a powerful combination. A second staff ally offered similar thoughts:

I think a lot of our response comes from the fact that we have such an active student group. I mean, had they stayed undercover, had they not mobilized early, I think it would be very difficult for us to understand because there're so few of them. Until you see and hear their collective story and their collective passions and are able to meet their parents, you realize it is really quite amazing... They've done so much, not only to make politicians aware, but to get high school students and their families aware. And [the university] has become much more open.

The preceding comments call to mind the critical role student activists often play in initiating significant changes within the academy and how at times they serve as a catalyst for greater staff and faculty engagement.

Confronting Contradictions and Raising Consciousness

A key finding of this study highlights the contradictory aspects of WRU's institutional context, with certain aspects of the university offering support for allies working to serve undocumented students, while other facets tended to work against them. This is not so surprising given the broader national environment in which anti-immigration sentiment is quite strong, evident in California, for example, by passage of Proposition 187 in 1994. Several allies noted as much, pointing to what they saw as high levels of xenophobia and racism tied to the perception that the vast majority of undocumented immigrants were brown-skinned people, mostly deriving from Mexico, and somehow less deserving of opportunities to pursue a successful life in the United States. A faculty ally elaborated on the kind of critique of oppression so critical to Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) idea of transformative resistance:

I think there's no question that the development of the "illegal" has been racialized...that it is a very racialized narrative in this country...where you have the threat of the "other." And the other is the non-white...a brown person who speaks Spanish. It's a Mexican. The Mexican or Latino becomes racialized, even though Latinos and Mexicans can be of many races. That doesn't matter in this process of otherization. The other narrative coming from the Minutemen is that we have an invasion from the south and it's always the barbarians at the gate. The "undesirables." So race is used as a process of homogenizing the other—to put it simply: us vs. them. And inevitability, in the United States, there's always been this idea that the other is the non-white.

According to a staff ally, self-described as an open supporter of undocumented students, instances of public backlash have been commonplace. "This issue has always been...contentious. It's always been an issue that has caused a lot of controversy, a lot of discussion, and a lot of blaming." He went on to argue that "blaming the immigrant" was part of the passage of California Proposition 187, which made it illegal to provide public services

to undocumented people. He described an incident in which he had been interviewed for a newspaper story and had highlighted a variety of ways the university was supporting undocumented students. After the story came out he received a harassing phone call from an angry Californian. The man asked him if he was employed by WRU and then proceeded to argue that he was in “violation of federal and state laws barring undocumented students from higher education.” The ally corrected him: “No, actually I’m not. They’re not barred from education. They basically have to pay out-of-state fees. And our job is to make sure that students have information to access the educational resources.” The phone call became more heated, turning into a shouting match. The caller accused the staff member of wasting “tax payers’ money by helping those students.” “He said lots of horrible things about the people and students.” Of course, the passage of AB540 in California in 2001 served as a counter to this kind of anti-immigrant sentiment, when legislators finally recognized the need to support undocumented students. The fact that an insurgent immigration movement arose to challenge the anti-immigrant discourse added to the ambiguity and confusion about acceptable policies and practices at universities such as WRU.

The political contentiousness around the rights and educational opportunities of undocumented students was a concern for certain allies who were reaching out to donors for support. One staff member raised over \$ 100,000 through a letter writing campaign, but noted the need to be extremely careful in framing the issues. Another administrator described how cautiously she proceeded in approaching potential donors who were more conservative in their stance on immigration issues:

Well one of the challenges was just a political one because as the DREAM Act has ebbed and flowed with politics there are concerns among some faculty and some donors who I would say were more on the conservative side—who take the view “Well if they’re illegal why should they get scholarships.” And then you try to tell the students’ story. One student who came when she was three and did not know until she was in high school. When she tried to get a social security number her mother said, “You can’t get one.” So this story was told over and over. And so I keep saying, “Why should these kids pay for the sins of their parents? They’ve lived here. They have no place to return. Can’t we look at this as an opportunity?” So that’s been difficult because I had to be somewhat selective in the faculty that I talked to. And you kind of know the faculty because you know their politics pretty much. And for donors it was the same thing. I had to approach them carefully...I have to be very careful about talking about AB540 because some donors are opposed.

Although such efforts as fund raising were gaining support, allies nonetheless had to walk a fine line between, on the one hand, abiding by federal and state laws, as well as institutional policies, and, on the other hand, provid-

ing students with the means to have a meaningful educational experience at WRU. Also, conversations with wealthy donors did not always reflect the most transformative points of view of allies—such as when the preceding ally asked, “Why should these kids pay for the sins of their parents?” Although hardly a socially transformative positioning, one must understand the difficulties such staff face in dealing with conservative donors. At the same time though, opportunities for challenging attitudes and beliefs about immigrant families need to be pursued thoughtfully.

Several allies did not want to draw attention to the work they did for fear of further politicizing the issue. As one explained, “The more you raise it the more political you make it. So I think what you want to do is to keep a circle of people who are very active and helpful...I think that the circle is not as big as it could be, but it is a political thing, and you don’t want to raise too many issues unnecessarily.” The political risk many WRU allies assumed speaks to their level of commitment to social justice, a key dimension of transformative resistance.

Even though staff and faculty allies, as well as high-ranking leaders at WRU, made their support for undocumented students fairly well known, there nonetheless was significant opposition to undocumented students. When asked about the campus level of receptivity to undocumented students, several described a hostile environment, including a staff ally who described heated exchanges with colleagues who opposed undocumented students.

There are people out there who do not support this particular community. They don’t see a reason why students are going to spend so much money to come to [this campus] and they’re not going to be able to do anything with their degrees... I know very close friends who we have heated arguments about this and who are in position to help economically and at the administration level, and they just don’t see it. I wouldn’t know how to make them aware or how to illuminate them. How do I get it into their heads that it’s a human need to keep going and get better and to progress?

Ultimately, this ally felt it best to give up on some of her colleagues, given that convincing them that supporting undocumented students was the right thing to do at times seemed futile.

Despite the organizational contradictions that at times took an emotional toll on allies, they still found the energy and commitment to develop and implement a variety of consciousness raising activities and programs. Allies were aware that undocumented students consistently encountered institutional actors who were unaware of their lawful presence as students at the university. Hence, allies saw the need to raise awareness among their colleagues. One staff ally talked about how he conducted a number of professional development workshops. “Currently, and for the last 10 years or so, I’ve been doing a lot of training and presentations on how to work with

undocumented students in academic and institutional support units.” However, building awareness around this issue was not always a straightforward process at WRU. Institutional allies often encountered resistance, especially when they raised concerns about undocumented students in a more public or institutionalized manner. A faculty ally felt that the act of informing others about the benefits of AB540 became “political terrain,” because it conveyed personal and political positions in the debate over immigrant rights in the U.S. “We’re embedded in a debate about immigration and therefore it’s almost your position about AB540 that reveals your colors. Are you pro or anti?”

A big area of consciousness raising concerned the intersectionality of race and immigration status. This is an issue because, as one staff member noted, “The reality is that in most people’s mind, when you say undocumented there is just one group, Latino.” The racialization of undocumented immigrants as Latino/a (often racialized as Mexican) masks the actual diversity of the undocumented population at WRU, where approximately 45 percent of the AB540 undocumented students are Asians. Another ally noted that he encountered many people, including allies, who perpetuated the belief that undocumented essentially means Latino/a. He also noted that there was a lack of recognition of the diversity and complexity of the Asian undocumented population as well. Working to help people understand the racial and ethnic complexity of the undocumented student population was an important facet to their critique of social oppression.

Developing More Supportive Policies and Programs

As a result of institutional allies working in partnership with student activists, WRU began to institutionalize a number of policies and programs aimed at addressing the needs and experiences of undocumented students. Differing from previous sporadic efforts, these newly created resources explicitly targeted undocumented students and were transparent and accessible through the campus’s main website.

One effort pushed by allies involved the creation of a new staff position to support undocumented students and charged with offering guidance about educational strategies, financial information and opportunities, and tools to navigate the institution. The new position was housed in WRU’s student service center, an area of the campus where a wide-range of diverse student needs typically are targeted by an array of student groups and staff. A key role of the new position was to consolidate a variety of services to make it easier for undocumented students to access information and campus resources. A faculty member explained that the allies wanted “a place on campus where it’s an effective funnel, where students can come in and get referred, get assistance... on pretty much any subject. One of the things that we were finding was that a lot of students were going from place to place—not really knowing how to find the solutions to the issues.” Similarly, a staff ally added, “So

when we have an undocumented student, instead of going to the registrar and financial aid, and then residential life, and all these places that students have to go to for service within student affairs, they can start at the student services center.”

WRU also implemented supportive policies and programs in other areas of campus life. When allies learned that students could not access campus resources if their tuition was not paid in full at the beginning of the term, they pushed for a new tuition payment procedure, a form of installment plan. This allowed students to make three payments throughout the term and maintain full access to campus resources. This change is an example of how a change in policy not only served the needs to undocumented students but also helped other students who were struggling with the rising tuition costs at WRU.

Another structural change at the university related to curricula and research activities, including the development of courses about immigration issues as well as the recruitment and hiring of faculty doing research in this area. One of the most impactful ways faculty supported undocumented students was to develop courses about the immigrant rights movement with particular emphasis on undocumented students in higher education (mostly offered through ethnic studies programs). Faculty teaching this particular course invited leaders from the DREAMERS student organization to help develop the curriculum and facilitate classroom discussions. Eventually, the students helped to collect oral histories from undocumented students organizing them into a collection of narratives ultimately published as a book and serving as a guide to discussion of immigration reform. This course was repeated several times, and it increasingly developed into an organizing space for immigrant rights. One of the instructors commented on the course, “Our role as instructors has always been to provide the research and the sort of educational and leadership development that students need in order to work on fulfilling this dream that they have—of getting immigration status, paying for their education and getting in-state tuition.” The course fostered student activism and the necessary organizing skills to conduct lobbying, organize press conferences, and implement teach-ins. But the course also had its share of detractors, as another instructor explained: “We are constantly under the gun... under scrutiny” from politicians and board members “about teaching working-class issues. So you can imagine trying to teach things that have to do with immigration.” These comments evidence the nature of the deep commitment to social justice embraced by allies as part of their transformative resistance.

Collaborating with Organizations and Communities beyond the University

A top priority for most allies was to provide students with financial resources because they believed that many of the students' most dire challenges stemmed from their ineligibility for financial aid. Fundraising was the most common way allies provided support and often was the starting point for their involvement. Early efforts to obtain private support channeled through the university proved problematic, given federal and state laws disqualifying undocumented students for institutional revenues, even when originating in the private sector. Thus, staff and faculty allies learned through trial and error that the best practice for fundraising was to partner with community-based non-profit organizations, such as a religious institution or a third-party scholarship foundation. Such outside agencies could award scholarships to undocumented students in accord with state and federal laws and in a manner acceptable to many donors. A student affairs administrator explained the benefits of this type of partnership: "We are looking to community organizations that are not tied by all the rules and regulations that a state institution has to worry about."

A few allies pursued the idea of establishing non-profit organizations as a means to channel scholarship money through the university for undocumented students. But this too proved problematic. Initially, it was assumed that undocumented students could access these private scholarships because a third-party foundation associated with but not part of the university managed the fund. The issue was raised with WRU's legal counsel, which interpreted the strategy from a conservative risk management perspective and determined the strategy likely to be illegal. Some allies did not agree: "I always thought that the general counsel might have been more aggressive in taking a risk. Because that's what it is, it's a risk of being sued. Would you be sued by someone for giving students a scholarship that had come through the foundation? What's the risk of that? So the advice of general counsel was that it was illegal. So the risk was high." The consequence was the reliance on outside non-profit organizations.

The search for outside non-profits to support the fundraising efforts of allies also had its share of problems, as the political contentiousness of the issue extended to community organizations. As one ally noted, not every agency they approached was willing to take on the charge. "I thought there would be some agencies that we'd go to that were interested in Hispanic students. But they closed the door really fast. They just didn't want to be involved in students who were undocumented, thinking that they had their own challenges. But I thought that was somewhat shortsighted."

Allies ultimately turned to organizations with a long-standing relationship with the university, such as one interfaith religious group serving the campus

through its own off-campus facilities but officially separate from the university. A staff ally explained that supporters felt the interfaith organization would be the most “valuable partner for helping undocumented students because they are a non-profit...and they have no legal responsibilities to the university.” As it turned out, the organization had the resources and autonomy from the state to provide housing, scholarships, and meals to undocumented students—all vital resources that the university could not offer because of state and institutional policies. An ally commented on the success of this effort: “That program has really turned into something special because the students are closer to the campus, which is really amazing for them. I have seen some of the students transformed because they don’t have that burden of commuting sometimes up to six hours a day, back and forth.” The one shortcoming was that only a limited number of undocumented students could be housed in the facility, six to eight in fact. Funds raised through the interfaith religious group also were used to help students with tuition and fees, especially trying to keep students from stopping out, as they had often done as a means of re-establishing needed funds.

The success of the alliance with the interfaith religious group led other allies to more aggressively pursue the establishment of a non-profit organization, but completely separate from the university. One staff ally captured the thinking at the time: “Frankly, I found that in many instances that in my official capacity as a state employee there is very little I can do. The laws and the politics have been set up specifically to exclude assistance to those students. So you say ‘Well gosh, what else can I do?’ Well we can set up a non-profit organization outside of the school. That can be my other job.” This ally went on to explain the complexities of it all and the reality of being sure to work “off the clock,” but the flexibility that is gained can be of great assistance to students. This organizational structure differed from earlier attempts that had sought to maintain some connection to the university. The key they found was to be completely separate from the university, and to engage in such activities as “individual actors” and not as university employees. These sorts of actions further reveal the level of commitment to forms of social justice consistent with the ideals of transformative resistance.

In addition to fund raising efforts for students, allies forged community partnerships to generate support for the immigrant rights movement. For example, a faculty ally noted the importance of building support with the labor movement: “We’ve been able to get a lot of incredible buy-in from national labor leaders and union leaders. So to shift their positions to come out for the DREAM Act to support students...is critical.” Facing constraints imposed by conservative interpretations of state and federal laws forced WRU allies to build support in the local community, and in so doing, develop a wider web of resources and supporters. However, these piecemeal sources of support were far from providing students with the necessary funding to pay

for tuition and cover their costs of living. Furthermore, scholarship amounts changed year to year and funds were only made available to a small number of students. Additionally, it was a tedious process for allies to work with outside organizations and for students to apply to them. Thus, most allies considered it imperative that legislation be enacted to allow institutions to offer undocumented students a complete financial aid package. Most held out hope for passage of the national-level DREAM Act or some derivation of it.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our findings speak to the challenge and success a group of staff and faculty allies experienced as part of their efforts to support undocumented students at a large research university on the west coast. Their efforts at times opposed broad anti-immigrant trends and helped to support students engaged in forms of activism to promote a more inclusive vision of U.S. immigration policy and practice. Given their critique of oppression and their commitment to social justice, their actions were consistent with Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) model of transformative resistance.

The fact that strenuous public objections emerge in the face of undocumented college students and their educational quest is at times difficult to accept. After all, undocumented college students mostly come to the U.S. as children, through no decision of their own. That so much energy and opposition would arise against such a population is hard to explain without turning to the dark side of American culture—that being its steadfast racism and xenophobia. Several of the allies interviewed as part of this project stated as much.

When it comes to making sense of the opposition to undocumented students, we find the arguments advanced by ethnic studies scholar Hu-DeHart (1993) helpful. In writing about American and Western triumphalism, she delineated a host of egregious attacks directed at people of color throughout the history of the nation, including past anti-immigrant sentiment directed mostly at people of color. Accordingly, should it come as a surprise that when pro-immigrant protests arose in California in which a handful of demonstrators waved the Mexican flag that some observers labeled them as anti-American? This indeed is somewhat striking in light of the reality that undocumented students and residents typically look with great passion and verve to become part of the American dream. The flag wavers marching in the pro-immigrant reform protests were simply expressing pride in their ethnic identity, in the face of widespread anti-brown sentiment that so framed the immigration debate in the media. Does it matter that Mexican immigrants only constitute a portion of the undocumented student population, or that throughout the United States, as part of annual St. Patrick's Day parades, many White Americans, Irish-Americans, waive the green, white, and orange

striped Irish flag as a demonstration of ethnic pride? No one, not the most causal of observers, would dare to claim that parade marchers adorned in the Irish tricolor are trying to claim U.S. land in the name of Ireland. The reality is that there is an obvious racist irrationality framing the debates and discussions around undocumented students specifically and U.S. immigration reform more broadly. This was apparent at WRU, especially in the way allies had to dance around conservative donors in order to continue fund raising for the university, while also trying to address the needs of undocumented students.

We see the transformative efforts of staff and faculty allies, although largely localized to the WRU campus and surrounding communities, as contributing to a grassroots form of social change strategy that has great potential (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Their social critique of oppression—a key dimension of transformative resistance—takes place not so much through teaching and research, but through organizational activities, including fund raising, letter writing, public speaking, organizing and facilitating workshops, developing training programs, and engaging in collegial exchanges, all with the goal of challenging people to think more deeply and compassionately about undocumented students and the conditions shaping their lives. In this regard, their actions also reflect a deep commitment to social justice, a second key dimension of transformative resistance.

Staff and faculty allies at WRU recognized the critically important role undocumented student activists played in bringing issues to light, and especially, in adding real flesh-and-blood students to the conversation and struggle. In choosing to become publicly engaged, the students took serious risks, such as the risk of being deported, along with their “outed” families; this is part of the equation not often talked about—that when undocumented students make the critical decision to come out, it is not just about themselves. This is why the work of staff and faculty allies often involved partnering with the parents and family members of undocumented students. Their work was, at times, a family and community enterprise. In this regard, the transformative work of allies embodied the sort of commitment to social change at the heart of the ethnic studies movement, including fields such as Chicano/a studies, whose motto is seemingly taken to heart by WRU allies: *Of the community, for the community.*

The increased visibility and direct action by today’s undocumented students harkens back to the role Black and Chicano/a students of the late 1960s played as catalysts to advance a more diverse, multicultural curriculum by pushing universities to develop ethnic studies programs (Biondi, 2012; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Rhoads, 1998a; Rogers, 2012; Rojas, 2007). Just as students of color of the 1960s challenged triumphalist conceptions of higher education curricula, today’s undocumented students resist triumphalist definitions of

citizenship and help to facilitate the conditions for staff and faculty allies to more aggressively challenge campus inequities.

The findings from our study suggest several recommendations helpful to consider when developing a strategy of increased support for undocumented students. For one, institutional leaders and practitioners need to recognize the multi-racial, multi-ethnic nature of undocumented student populations and develop appropriate services accordingly. Another consideration is that universities should develop and adequately fund a support center, or at the very minimum, appoint a qualified staff member to better serve undocumented students.

Given the financial challenges faced by undocumented students, institutions also need to develop and implement fund raising strategies in support of their financial aid needs. Further, academic leaders, especially faculty allies, should encourage faculty to incorporate undocumented student issues into courses relating to immigration and inequality. Relatedly, universities should offer greater support for research and scholarship relating to undocumented populations and the need for progressive immigration reform. Finally, although legal concerns about risk management may come up in the context of institutional debates about how best to support undocumented students, especially at public universities, more liberal and progressive legal interpretations should be encouraged by institutional leaders; university leaders should act courageously and err on the side of service to undocumented students.

There also are some strategies that perhaps should be avoided. For example, history tells us that the potential exists for university leaders to define student activism as something to avoid or discourage. However, we see such an avoidance strategy as having the potential to deter real institutional change. Activism by undocumented students and allies should instead be seen as a potential opportunity for institutional transformation with increased educational equity as the driving goal. Another potential strategy to avoid involves ignoring the moral imperative at play in debates about undocumented students and educational opportunity. Too often institutional leaders operate on the basis of fear of backlash, often placing great emphasis on the reactions of potential wealthy donors. We believe that placing fundraising priorities ahead of the needs of undocumented students is inconsistent with the kind of transformational leadership needed when difficult issues arise.

Another strategy to avoid is placing too much emphasis on the hope of immigration reform. Instead, we encourage the development of a sustainable plan that aims to address the needs of undocumented students over an extended period of time. Oftentimes, undocumented student services operate in a precarious state. A common question is whether such services will be relevant after the passage of immigration reform. Although programs and services for undocumented students should have the capacity to adapt to

the flux of state and federal policies, they also require a long-term strategic plan. We have come to realize that many undocumented students experience trauma associated with their status and that the effects of such circumstances can last long after adjusting their status. Hence, support services are likely to be needed even if progressive immigration reform policies are adopted. Furthermore, a lack of long-term commitment to undocumented student services only serves to reinforce the students' precarious status as well.

In terms of research implications, several come to mind. First, theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) should be employed to further unravel the complex identities undocumented students bring to U.S. campuses; such analysis needs to examine the ways in which undocumented status, combined with other identity influences such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, may result in multiple forms of oppression, and hence require more complex considerations when developing strategies and solutions. Also, additional research is needed to measure and/or evaluate the impact of particular strategies and solutions implemented to enhance the college experiences of undocumented students. Additionally, research is needed to better understand the ways in which universities can successfully intervene in assisting undocumented students and alumni into the labor force, thus further supporting their efforts to lead meaningful and productive lives.

CONCLUSION

Allies at WRU worked in a variety of ways, both in terms of the more formalized university settings but also through informal and sometimes non-university avenues, such as when they collaborated with off-campus non-profits to fund raise in support of undocumented students. They also worked through formal channels when possible, such as pushing the university to revise tuition payment schedules so students could pay through installments and thus maintain their official status as students throughout the academic year. And, of course, raising the consciousness of the campus community and their colleagues was a key part of the overall challenge WRU allies faced. Through a wide array of activities and commitments, some of which involved significant political risks, they embraced the ideals of transformative resistance, while seeking to enhance the educational opportunities of undocumented students.

For the allies highlighted in this article, service to all the nation's children is as basic of an American value as any. That these children may someday grow up and wind up at our colleges and universities should not imply that they no longer ought to be eligible for the benefits of education. We repeat a compelling comment from one of our interview participants, who discussed the debates she had with some of her friends opposed to supporting

undocumented students: “How do I get it into their heads that it’s a human need to keep going and get better and to progress?” The staff and faculty allies discussed in this paper see good reasons to develop supportive policies, practices, and structures offering undocumented students a chance at educational success. From their perspective, it is a basic American ideal, not radical at all, but perhaps transformative.

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